

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Funnix Reading Programs

### What are Funnix Reading programs?

*Funnix Reading* is comprised of two programs, *Funnix Beginning Reading* and *Funnix 2*. *Funnix Beginning Reading (FBR)* is designed for beginning readers in kindergarten or first grade and can also be used as remediation for older students. *Funnix 2* is designed for students who have completed *FBR* or children reading at approximately the second grade level. The program is designed for parents to use with their children, but *Funnix Reading* can also be used for many program needs in school environments: as an intervention program, as a supplemental program, as a summer-school or after-school program perhaps with peer tutors, and as a program for children with learning challenges. Comprehensive reading lessons using the Direct Instruction approach are delivered on CD discs and are completed with readers, workbooks, and paper activities. Lessons presented on the CD are meant for one-on-one presentations, however, adaptations for small group implementations are provided in the Teacher's Guide. *Funnix Reading* programs are not designed for independent student use. They require an instructor (teacher, paraprofessional, or parent) to sit at the computer with the child and guide the mouse to control the presentation of instruction. The narrator on the CD presents the lesson and waits for the student to respond. The instructor then confirms correct responses, provides corrections for mistakes, and determines mastery.

Siegfried Engelmann, the creator of Reading Mastery and other Direct Instruction programs, is also the senior author of the *Funnix* programs. The goal of this teaching methodology is to teach the precise content needed to master a subject or skill efficiently, avoiding introduction of extraneous subject matter. The narrator on the *Funnix* CDs provides expert instruction controlling for these learning variables: time spent introducing new materials, adequate practice applying concepts, teacher feedback, and sequencing of skills. Lessons in Direct Instruction programs do not focus on an individual skill, instead each lesson works on five or more skills that are practiced and applied in more than one lesson. In both *Funnix* programs, skills are taught sequentially and reviewed several times to help students develop all the skills they need for upcoming tasks. For instance, sounds are taught and practiced in several lessons before they appear in words, words are taught and practiced in several lessons before they appear in stories.

*FBR* components include two CDs that present the 120 lessons (60 hours of onscreen instruction), a workbook with activities for each lesson, and the Parent CD. *Funnix 2* includes two CDs- one presents the 100 lessons (50 hours of on screen instruction) and the Parent Guide and the other contains the testing and placement procedures, transition exercises, and the final 20 lessons of *FBR*. Both Parent Guides provide an explicit presentation modeling best practices for the instructor: introducing the program to the child, setting expectations, eliciting a commitment from the child, a brief overview of the lesson presentations, appropriate responses from the instructor, and how to navigate through the program.



Each of the lessons in *Funnix* programs include 20 minutes of on-screen activities and 10 minutes of workbook activities. The Teacher's Guide offers details explaining the accommodations necessary for the various program presentations. Regardless of the presentation, instructors are advised to schedule daily, 30 minute sessions, at the same time each day, five days a week. Consistently scheduled daily sessions are intended to incorporate reading into a child's daily routine and help ensure retention of the previous day's lesson.

The Teacher's Guide contains the individualized placement tests, including a set of reading passages, and record sheets for beginning readers and students with varying reading skills. Beginning readers are required to correctly identify five letters (e, f, m, o, r) before beginning *FBR*. If unsuccessful, the instructor can click on a game for letter identification practice then re-test the following day. Placement passages with explicit criteria detailing scoring and exact placement are described in the Teacher's Guide.

Four types of assessments are used to monitor student progress in *Funnix*. Projections are anticipated rates for completion of the program intended to help ensure that students are moving through the program at a reasonable rate (i.e., for average-performing children who start in K, *FBR* should take 160 school days, in grade 1, average-performing children complete *Funnix 2* in 125 days). Show-Off lessons allow students to work through previously presented lessons independently while the instructor keeps data on each child's errors during the lesson. Placement passages are to be used as individual measures of progress. Explicit passing criteria are set for each passage and students are required to achieve mastery before they progress to the next lesson in the program. Finally, ongoing fluency assessments are included in the program.

### How are Funnix Reading programs aligned with Reading First?

Instruction is well organized and systematically presented in the *Funnix Reading* programs. Skills are also explicitly taught; each task is explained then modeled by the narrator before the child is asked to perform. *FBR* includes instruction and practice in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. *Funnix 2* instruction and practice activities are focused on reading fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Phonemic awareness activities are introduced as follows: saying sounds in isolation, blending phonemes in words, segmenting words into syllables, segmenting words into phonemes, adding phonemes at the end of words, blending words with 3 or more phonemes, segmenting words with 3 or more phonemes, rhyming and manipulation. The oral blending skills that children will be expected to apply when decoding words are taught in the phonemic awareness activities. At mastery, the intensity of phonemic awareness instruction decreases as phonics and decoding instruction is introduced. Though not as intense, phonemic awareness instruction is continued throughout the *FBR* program for instance, when phonemic tasks are presented in the introductory spelling lessons.

Engelmann uses a novel approach to introduce 16 consonant sounds in *FBR*; all are derived from the names of letters. Students are guided to listen closely to the letter name to hear the sound the letter makes. Sounds from the last part of letter names can be heard in these letters: f, l, m, n, r, s, x, y (e.g., the last part of the letter name f makes the sound of the letter f /eeefff/.) Sounds from the first part of

letter names can be heard in these letters: b, d, j, k, p, t, v, z (e.g., for the letter name b, say /beeee/ the first part of the letter name makes the sound /b/.)

Engelmann's theory is that this derivation of letter sounds from letter names makes the relationships highly explicit and will avoid confusion for children. *Funnix* introduces some of the letter combinations as blue-letter combinations. In the beginning, both letters in the combination are underlined, one is blue and makes no sound the other letter is not blue and says its name. The underlining and the blue letter prompts are gradually faded out.

For word reading, skills are introduced sequentially and taught until fluency is achieved: two and three phoneme words, consonant blends, words that end with the letter s then, multi-syllabic words. In the beginning word reading exercises, children are directed to say the sound for each letter or combination of letters, then say the word fast. Next, words appear in lists for children to read and practice. After this, words in sentences are introduced and practiced. Finally, words are used in story reading, story extension, spelling, and workbook activities. Before children are asked to read whole words they practice word finding during their story-reading activities. The finding words exercise is to acquaint children with the idea that words can be viewed as whole units. Spelling is used to reinforce word analysis by providing explicit instruction in how to map the sounds of letters in printed form. Word families and patterns are used extensively in *Funnix 2*. Sounding out longer words, spelling words, and reading word parts or syllables, then whole words are the tools used to teach advanced phonic analysis for reading multi-syllabic words.

From the onset of the program the narrator controls the rate of fluency using visual prompting and a clicking sound that mimics a metronome. In *Funnix* programs, students read each story twice focusing on decoding in the first reading and focusing on decoding plus comprehension in the second reading. The second reading is presented in an animated version, often with the characters' speech in balloons, encouraging some students to read the passage more than twice. Students are given timed fluency passages regularly and are encouraged to re-read stories to build fluency. Fluency rates start out very slowly for word lists and progress to 60 words per minute by the end of *FBR*. In *Funnix 2* the fluency goal is 90 words per minute by the end of the program.

Learning word meanings is incorporated in the instructional design of *Funnix* programs with oral and written vocabulary practice. On-screen activities and practice in the workbook and lined paper activities include: writing words for picture identification, matching words or descriptions with pictures, identifying hidden pictures, completing sentences with the correct vocabulary word, writing phrases describing the activity in the picture, and matching words with statements.

*FBR* instruction for oral comprehension is found in lessons 1-16. Reading comprehension activities are in each of the remaining lessons in *FBR*. Most of the workbook pages contain five parts with one of these parts relating to comprehension of the story. *Funnix 2* includes reading comprehension questions in all 100 lessons and are included in the lined paper activities. The second readings, in both programs, focus on decoding and comprehension mastery.

The Parent CDs that are included in the *Funnix* programs are professional development training tutorials that provide specific instructions necessary for the parent/instructor to guide the child through the programs.

## Research Support for Funnix Reading Programs



The authors of the *Funnix* programs field-tested and revised all components of both programs based on student performance before the programs were published. A study was conducted at Eastern Washington University to evaluate the effectiveness of *FBR* in a preschool class. Ten children from one preschool class were identified and tutored in small groups using *FBR*. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used to examine the scores of these ten students using the Basic Reading, Letter-Word Identification, Story Recall, Passage Comprehension, and Word Attack from the Woodcock Johnson III and the Mullen Scales of Early Learning (MSEL). Although the results demonstrated increased scores in all areas except Passage Comprehension on the WJIII, these improvements in performance cannot necessarily be attributed to the children's experience with the *Funnix* program. Without the presence of a comparison or control group from the same population of students that did not experience the *Funnix* program, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that the gains may have resulted from other instruction occurring in the children's home or preschool environment. The author of the study stated that the results of this study provide reason for future research on a larger scale and with a control group.

We conclude that the content and instructional activities included in both *Funnix Reading Programs* are aligned with current research. Because of limitations in the experimental design of the one research evaluation of *Funnix Beginning Reading*, we conclude that there is currently available no experimental research support for the effectiveness of this program.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Funnix Reading Programs*:

- *Funnix* programs include modeling, scaffolding, ample support, guided repetitions, and continuous monitoring and assessment of student progress.
- *Funnix* programs are explicit and systematic.

Weaknesses of *Funnix Reading Programs*:

- None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement Funnix Beginning Reading?

Okaloosa County

850-833-3109

## For More Information

<http://www.funnix.com>

## References

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- Woodcock, R. W., McGrew, K. S., and Mather, N. (2001). *Woodcock-Johnson III Battery*. Itasca, IL: Riverside Publishing Company.
- Parlange, L. A. The Effects of Funnix Beginning Reading Program on the Beginning Reading Skills of Preschoolers. Eastern Washington University.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)