

Teaching and Learning Phonological Awareness: Hearing and Manipulating the Separate Sounds within Words

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Workshop Abstract

The ability to hear and manipulate sounds within words is a key feature of emergent literacy and links directly to later reading skill. This workshop aims to help educators understand techniques important to phonological awareness instruction as well as methods to provide preschoolers with exciting ways to manipulate sounds in activities that are fun and developmentally appropriate. The workshop will address the importance of professional development for building preschooler competence in the skills of phonological awareness. Participants will consider instruction in phonological awareness alone, as well as in the context of alphabet knowledge or in the context of phonics. Strategies for appropriate instruction at the preschool level will be explored and methods of employing phonological awareness instruction in a variety of classroom activities will be reviewed. The manipulation of sound units in words can be introduced to children in a variety of ways, keeping learning extraordinarily enjoyable. Participants will both contribute to the development of phonological awareness activities appropriate to the preschool classroom, and categorize and critique proposed language activities for their relevance and instructional value.

Several Key Terms

Phoneme

A phoneme is the smallest part of spoken language that makes a difference in the meaning of words. The word **at** has two phonemes (/a/ /t/). The word **stop** has four phonemes (/s/ /t/ /o/ /p/). We can blend phonemes (synthesis) to make words (/m/ + /a/ + /p/) for **map**, or (/ch/ /e/ /k/) for **check**. (We also blend syllables to make words, as in /bas/ + /ket/ for **basket**.)

Grapheme

A grapheme is the smallest part of written language that represents a phoneme in the spelling of a word. Some graphemes are just one letter (**b, d, f, p, s**) and others are several letters (**ch, th, igh**)

Phonics

Our understanding that there is a predicable relationship between phonemes (the sounds of spoken language) and graphemes (the letters and spelling representing sounds in written language).

Phonemic Awareness

Our ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds or individual phonemes, in *spoken* words.

Phonological Awareness

Our ability to hear, identify, and manipulate both phonemes and larger units of “separate” sounds within words. Phonological awareness recognition might include recognizing that two words rhyme, breaking compound words apart “bath-tub without the bath is _____”, or combining two small words to make a compound word (**bath + tub is _____**), or breaking apart syllables in a word, or identifying the onset or rime of a word (**cat = /c/ for onset and /at/ for rime**).

Syllable

A unit of sound that has one vowel sound included. **Pat** has one syllable, **candy** has two: (/can/ + /dy/). Sometimes a clapping game helps children to identify how many syllables are in a word (**car** needs only one clap, while **ti-ger** needs two claps).

Onset and Rime

Onset is the beginning consonant sound in a syllable and rime is the vowel and all that follows in that syllable. The onset /c/ comes first in **cat**, and the rime /at/ follows. If we look at words like **pat, bat, mat, fat, or hat**, the onset changes and the rime remains constant with /at/. Our typical overlap of several phonemes into one “packet” of sound is sometimes referred to as “coarticulation.”

Code Focused Skills

Employing the abilities of phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and early decoding or phonics in order to “crack” the code or “break the code” or translate printed symbols into their representative sounds and ultimately, into words. Word identification is the decoding part of reading; understanding meaning is the comprehension part of reading.

The Alphabet Principle

Letters in written words represent the sounds in spoken words. While extremely useful to understand the grapheme (letter)-phoneme connection, and while many words in English “follow the grapheme-phoneme rules” quite well, there certainly are some graphemes that do not align so well with their phonemes in English.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. The reading aloud of a fluent reader sounds ‘natural’ and without much halting or choppiness. Fluent readers probably include a number of component skills and processes in that ability, such as understanding the context and concepts in the text (from “outside knowledge”) and competency in phoneme manipulation for sound units and words (skills that required teaching, or from the inside- out). Poor fluency puts a burden on memory and thus can impact understanding or comprehension of the text.

Automaticity

The fast and seemingly effortless word recognition that comes with much experience in reading.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is a broad term for the words we must know to communicate successfully. A great deal of a child’s vocabulary is thought to be learned indirectly while some vocabulary must be taught directly. **Listening vocabulary** refers to words we need to know to understand what we hear. **Speaking vocabulary** refers to words we use when we speak. **Reading vocabulary** means the words we need to know to understand what we are reading. **Writing vocabulary** refers to the words we use in writing.

Comprehension of Text

Understanding what is read, making sense of what is read. Successful readers are aware of what they do understand and also aware of what they do not understand so that they might bring other methods to bear on text they do not understand to enhance clarify and comprehension.

Shared Reading

A strategy for adult-child reading which usually involves encouragement of interaction. This usually includes a small group of children or a single child with the adult in reading a book, usually with discussion or prompts about new vocabulary, questions about what’s going on in the story, encouragement of predictions, discussion of pictures, distancing questions (*Have you ever played in the snow like Joey in this book?*)

Speaking vs. Reading

We seem well “prepared” to learn to talk. “*Speaking is natural and reading is not.* Herein lies the difficulty. Reading is an acquired act, an invention of man that must be learned at a

conscious level. And it is the very naturalness of speaking that makes reading so hard.” (Shaywitz, pp. 49-50). On the other hand, we should also be alert to children with delays in the onset of talking or with very limited expressive vocabulary in the 2 and 3 year old range, as their restricted vocabulary may impact the development of emergent literacy skills or be reflective of other important developmental concerns.

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