

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month



Rationale:

As young students enter school they already have had a wide variety of experiences with print and oral language. Many students have been read to since they were born, provided with rhymes and riddles, and even taught basic sight words like "dog", "cat", "mom", and "dad". Yet, students may not have been instructed about the identification of sounds within words. They may have not been shown how to break down words into individual sounds, known as phonemes, and manipulate those specific sounds. The skills to do this, known as phonemic awareness, are vital to successful reading acquisition.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to detect and manipulate the individual sounds--phonemes--in spoken words (Florida Online Reading Professional Development, 2003). "Phonemes are the smallest units comprising *spoken* language" (National Reading Panel, 2000). Although sometimes confused with phonics, it is important to understand that phonics deals with the actual phoneme/grapheme relationship and not just the sounds we hear in words. Phonemic awareness is a separate component of reading instruction and is sometimes considered a prerequisite to phonics. Yet, it is important to note that students who are instructed in phonics and phonemic awareness will have both skills enhanced.

As literacy teachers we recognize that phonemic awareness is one of the five essential instructional components of reading. Along with phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, it makes up an important part of beginning reading instruction. Early on, researchers did not often address phonemic awareness. It was not until the early 1990s that some research emphasis was put on how to help our emergent readers become successful readers with early literacy instruction. It was then that a focus on the importance of phonemic awareness came about. (International Reading Association, 1998).

Being able to complete phoneme awareness tasks such as segmenting, blending, substituting, categorizing, isolating, and identifying phonemes is not always the easiest for our young learners (Yopp, 1992). Yet, research has shown that the "acquisition of phonemic awareness is highly predictive of success in learning to read-in particular in predicting success in learning to decode" (International Reading Association , 1998).

How to Use the Strategy:

It is important for parents and teachers to realize that phonemic awareness does not happen naturally. (Johns & Lenski, 2001). Direct instruction and practice should be provided to students in the form of mini-lessons and word play. Oral readings, listening activities, and modeling will also help young learners grasp the concept of phonemic awareness. But, it is important to realize that helping young learners understand that words are composed of sounds and that those sounds correspond to letters or letter combinations, is an explicit instruction activity.

As we look at the role of phonemic awareness, it is important to note that it cannot be the entire

reading program, even for young students. A balance is desired with emphasis being put upon each component of reading. Teachers and parents should allow approximately 15-20 minutes daily practice in phonemic awareness development.

There are many activities that can be used to enhance phonemic awareness abilities in students. Activities involving segmentation, blending, isolation, categorization, and identification are extremely helpful.

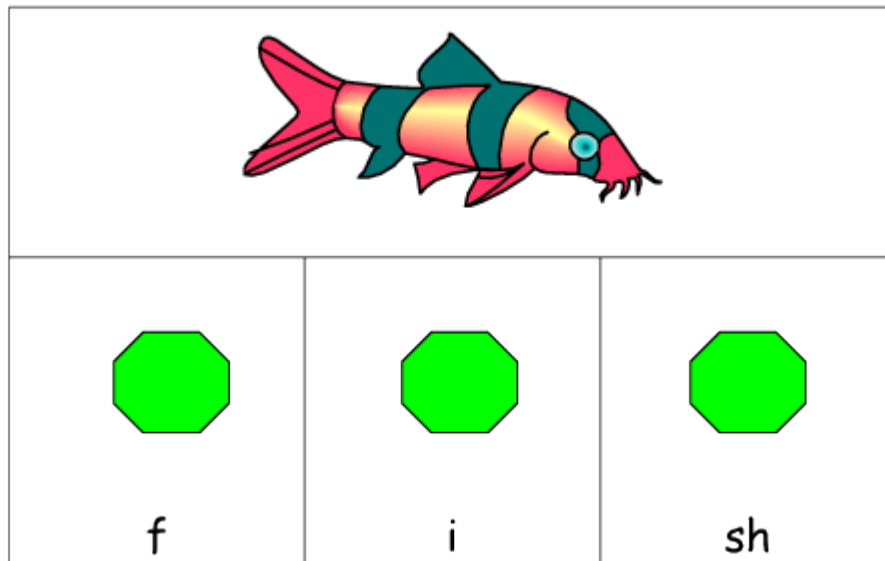
Segmentation

Segmenting a word into phonemes allows the child to understand that words and speech are made up of individual sounds (Johns and Lenski). It provides the child with practice on how a word can be broken into parts.

Oral segmentation, where a teacher or parents provides a word to a student and models how to break down the word into phonemes, is a good start to gaining phonemic awareness. Given a word such as "man", the teacher would demonstrate the three sounds heard in the word, /m/, /a/, /n/. The teacher may reflect that the word "man" has three sounds. Using fingers to count the phonemes is also acceptable. Please note this process will need to be repeated and practiced.

Another good activity for this would be the use of Elkonin boxes. Elkonin boxes provide a manipulative a child can use to develop the concept of sounds in words. Three-to-four simple squares are provided to the child and a word is identified orally. The student will move a coin, plastic token, or even building block into each square as they segment the word into its given sounds. A picture can be used, if desired, along with letters, as the child progresses. It is important to note that the use of manipulatives are geared toward providing a kinesthetic response that reinforces the concept and allows the teacher to check for skill master during the exercise.

Example for the word "fish":



Blending

Segmenting words into phonemes helps children recognize the sounds of words that are already created for them by a teacher or parent. Blending phonemes provides children with the ability to

create a word by putting together the individual sounds in words. It is important to remember that providing instruction in blending at the same time as providing it in segmenting will allow for enhancement of phonemic and phonological awareness (Johns & Lenski, 2001).

Modeling how to blend words together is an important first step. Begin with saying each sound in a word. An example could be /r/, /a/, /t/. Model counting the sounds on your fingers. Let students replicate you by counting the sounds with you. Blend the sounds together by pronouncing each sound just long enough to create the word "rat". At the end of the blending, ask students what word they just created. Practice and model this many times using other words. Have students create their own words using letters or sound tokens.

One way to allow students to understand the objectives of blending is to use a picture of a large slide. Using letters or even tokens, the "sounds" will be lined up at the top of the slide. Pronounce each sound as you slide the letter or token to the bottom of the slide as one group. After each sound has made it to the bottom of the slide, let students say the word together. (Johns & Lenski, 2001).

Deletion, Isolation, and Categorization

While phoneme segmenting and blending is considered the two most critical skills to be taught during phonemic awareness, some time should also be spent deleting, isolating, and categorizing phonemes. Manipulation of phonemes is said to be highly predictive of success in reading (Yopp, 1992).

Each of the following activities can often be incorporated in segmenting and blending activities, or can be done independently. It is important to note that research shows us that the instruction is best when it focuses on only one or two phonemic awareness activities per lesson.

Deletion

Deleting sounds from words is a good way to engage children in the manipulation of phonemes. Present children with a word such as hat. Ask them what would be left if you took the /h/ sound away. Using a manipulative such as circular tokens is a great way to demonstrate the "take away" part.

Isolation

When segmenting a word, you may want to consider asking the children to identify and say one of the sounds. By isolating this one sound you are providing the child with the concept that each word has a series of sounds that can be segmented. An example of this would be to ask the child, when they are given the word dog, to identify the first sound, which is /d/. You could also modify it to focus on ending sounds such as the /g/ in dog.

Categorize

Categorizing phonemes can begin by providing children with words beginning with different phoneme sounds. This can be done completely orally or pictures can be used. Students will be asked to put each picture/word in a group based upon beginning sounds or ending sounds. The following example discussion will provide you with a way to help young learners understand the differences among the sounds in words. Although seen more as auditory discrimination, this type of manipulation can still be beneficial.

Example Discussion

Teacher: Here are seven animal pictures. Can you tell me what they are?

Student: dog, cat, bird, mouse, moose, bat, canary.

Teacher: Great job! Each word starts with a different sounds. Let's say all of the first sounds.

Student: /d/, /c/, /b/, /m/, /m/, /b/, /c/

Teacher: Wonderful, now we're going to put them into groups by their first sound. Let's start with bird. What sound does bird start with?

Student: /b/

Teacher: Yes, it starts with the /b/ sound. Let's put this card over here. OK, let's go to cat. What does cat start with?

Student: /c/

Teacher: Yes, it does. Are there any other pictures here that start with /c/?

Student: Canary starts with /c/. We could put the two /c/ words together.

Teacher: Yes, that's a wonderful idea! How about moose? What sound do you hear first in moose?

Student: /n/?

Teacher: Let's say that again together. Moose. Look at my lips when I say moose. What sound is the first sound?

Student: /m/!

Teacher: Right! What other word would go with /m/ sound?

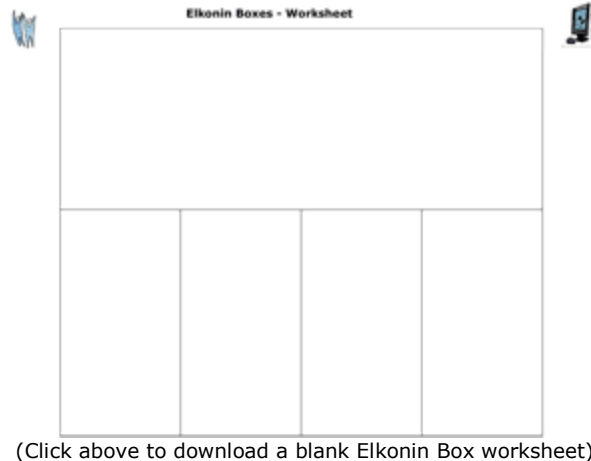
Student: mouse?

Teacher: Yes, that's the right one. Let's say the word together. Mouse.

Assessment:

Within the classroom setting, teachers are provided with many ways to assess student's abilities with phonemic awareness. Recently a progress monitoring assessment known as Dynamic Indicators for Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was introduced out of the University of Oregon. This assessment includes components on how to measure phonological awareness, alphabetic principles, and fluency. This assessment can be done three-to-four times a year and will help identify students who need support in phonemic awareness.

Hallie Kay Yopp, well-known reading researcher, also created a user-friendly test to help evaluate students on their phoneme segmentation abilities. Known as the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation, students are asked to segment a certain set of words. This test is geared for children ages four-to-six and was first published in the International Reading Association journal, *The Reading Teacher*. You can now access it at TEAMS Educational Resource page located at <http://teams.lacoe.edu/reading/assessments/yopp.html>.



Resources:

Phoneme Isolation: Building Phonemic Awareness

Sarah Dennis-Shaw, the author of this lesson, suggests ways that first graders can engage in games and chants to identify beginning and ending phonemes.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=120

Generating Rhymes: Developing Phonemic Awareness

The author of this lesson plan offers ways that young students can learn to recognize and generate rhymes through songs, poems, and games.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=121

Build A Word: Teaching the Blending of Phonemes to Form Words

This site offers teachers and parents a song to help their young children learn to blend phonemes together to make words.

<http://www.songsforteaching.com/jennyfixmanetunes/buildaword.htm>

Phonemic Awareness in Beginning Reading

The University of Oregon offers this site on why phonemic awareness is important, how to teach it, and how to assess it.

<http://reading.uoregon.edu/pa/index.php>

Between the Lions Gawain's Word

Based off the PBS show, *Between the Lions*, this interactive site offers children a way to learn how to blend sounds together to make words.

<http://pbskids.org/lions/games/gawain.html>

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