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Reading: Phonemic Awareness

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According to many literacy-focused organizations “it is never too late to learn how to read”. Reading skills are crucial to success in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools, in the workplace, and in becoming productive members of society. Reading skills are also very important for successful and well-informed parenting of children and teens. According to the United States Department of Education, 20% or one in five adults -native and nonnative English speakers - struggle with the acquisition and use of reading skills. Many of these adults are enrolled and attending adult literacy programs with goals such as improving literacy skills, obtaining a diploma or GED, or preparing for post-secondary education. Attainment of these goals requires the development of reading skills.

But reading, unlike listening, speaking, walking, or eating, is not innate, biologically programmed, or a natural behavior. It is a myth that the brain is wired for reading.

Reading must be taught using best practice and instructional strategies from scientific research...

Reading must be taught by using best practice assessment and instructional strategies from scientific research involving a variety of learners across a variety of settings.

Unfortunately, there are limited scientific reading research studies of adult learners. Most of the research and findings are from the K-12 population. The publication *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education READING INSTRUCTION*¹ reviews both K-12 and adult research and represents the best information about how adults learn to read. It is an initiative from The Reading Research Working Group, a panel of experts on reading research and practice convened by the National Institute for Literacy and the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. It is similar to the work done by the National Reading Panel whose findings were published in *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*².

According to this publication, research has indicated that adults often have less developed phonemic awareness and phonics skills than children learning to read, but are better at sight word identification.

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¹This publication will be a major reference in the 2003-2004 NetNews. A free copy is available by request by emailing edpuborders@edpubs.org

²*Report of the National Reading Panel - Teaching Children to Read*, 2000 can be found at <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm>



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Phonemic awareness is the awareness and understanding that language is composed of separate sounds and the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds in spoken language. It is often developed through listening, rhyming, and oral reading activities at the preschool and kindergarten levels.

Phonics skills include understanding the “code” or system of written symbols or letters that correspond with spoken sounds. It is acquired through systematic, direct, and multi-sensory instruction of sounds and letters typically occurring in the early elementary years.

Therefore the topic of this issue is **phonemic awareness** and the topic of the next issue (to be disseminated in mid-December) will be **phonics skills and sight words**. Both topics are also essential components of a beginning reading program for adult learners.



Assessing for Phonemic Awareness

Assessment for instruction should be one of the first tasks an instructor performs. Research in adult literacy suggests that assessing each component of reading (phonemic awareness, word analysis or phonics and decoding skills, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) gives much more instructionally relevant information than a grade equivalent or broad reading level (such as from CASAS or TABE).

Phonemic awareness assessment may include checking the following skills with the emphasis on the *sounds of language*:

1. Phoneme isolation- “Tell me the first sound in cat.” /k/
2. Phoneme identity- “Tell me the sound that is the same as in boy, bit, and ball.” /b/
3. Phoneme categorization- “Which word does not belong? Sag, tag, map” (map)
4. Phoneme blending- “What does /l/+/e/+/g/ say?” (leg)
5. Phoneme segmenting- “How many sounds are there in book?” three – /b/ /u/ /k/
6. Phoneme deletion- “What is clay without the c?” (lay)

7. Phoneme addition- “What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of park?” (spark)
8. Phoneme substitution- “The word is bug. Change the /g/ to /r/. What’s the new word? (rug)

LDA of Minnesota uses several **formal standardized assessments** to measure phonemic awareness. **The Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing**³ includes individual subtests and composite scores resulting in a profile of Phonological Awareness, Phonological Memory, and Rapid Naming. The CTOPP is normed from ages 5-24. Selected subtests from the **Woodcock Johnson III Tests of Achievement**⁴ are used to assess sound awareness and phoneme/grapheme knowledge. The WJ III is normed from ages 2-95.

³ Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP) by Wagner, Torgerson & Rahotte, 1999

⁴ Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement-Third Edition (WJ III) by Woodcock, McGrew, and Mather, 2001

LDA provides assessments at our Learning Center in Minneapolis and throughout Minnesota for ABE learners, children, youth and adults.

Please call us for more information on assessment at 952-922-8374.

Phonemic Awareness Assessment

Informal assessments to measure phonemic awareness can also be used by classroom instructors or tutors. These assessments can be completed as a group or individually. Below is an informal assessment for use in adult literacy programs that includes items for each of the eight phonemic awareness skills. *It should be presented orally to the learner(s) with the first item as an example with guidance and feedback.*

Name _____ Date _____

Program _____ Level _____

1. Tell me the first sound in:

bed /b/___ hat /h/___ leg /l/ ___ yes /y/ ___ ship /sh/___ quick /kw/___ ___ 5

2. Tell me the same first sound in:

rag, run, rot___(r) tab, tell, tub___(t) sat, sun, sip___(s)
peach, pair, pile___(p) vine, veil, vat___(v) ___/5

3. Tell me which word does not fit:

cab, gab, mad___(mad) bet, hen, get, ___(hen) pin, big, dig ___(pin)
bind, wind, line___(line) lone, fool, school___(lone) ___/5

4. Tell me the word for:

/s/+/p/+/e/+/l/___(spell) /k/+/l/+/o/+/k/___(clock) /p/+/u/+/l/ ___(pull)
/g/+/r/+/o/+/n/___(groan) /t/+/ee/+/m/___(team) ___/5

5. Tell me the number of sounds in:

/f/+/l/+/a/+/g/___(4) /b/+/o/+/s/___(3) /s/+/t/+/r/+/ee/+/t/___(5)
/k/+/l/+/a/+/s/-___(4) /k/+/i/+/k/___(3) ___/5

6. What is gold without the sound /g/? ___(old)
What is snap without the sound /s/? ___(nap)
What is price without the sound /p/? ___(rice)
What is bloom without the sound /b/? ___(loom)
What is drug without the sound /d/? ___(rug) ___/5

7. What would you have if you added the sound /b/ to ring? ___(bring)
What would you have if you added the sound /s/ to cream? ___(scream)
What would you have if you added the sound /f/ to lash? ___(flash)
What would you have if you added sound /k/ to oat? ___(coat)
What would you have if you added the sound /s/ to truck? ___(struck) ___/5

8. The word is kind. Change the /k/ sound to the /m/ sound. ___(mind)
The word is pair. Change the /p/ sound to the /h/ sound. ___(hair)
The word is hush. Change the /h/ sound to the /r/ sound ___(rush)
The word is meet. Change to /m/ sound to the /f/ sound ___(feet)
The word is fun. Change the /f/ sound to the /b/ sound ___(bun) ___/5

Scoring: Count each correct answer as 1. Record how many correct out of 5. The learner should be able to get 4 out of 5 correct. If not, consider including phonemic awareness practice during reading instruction – *especially if weaknesses are identified from numbers and categories 1-5.*

Instruction Ideas

The purpose of instruction is to teach specific skills and provide adequate practice for the level and age of the learner. According to *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education*, READING INSTRUCTION, the following ideas are “most effective” for teaching phonemic awareness to adult non-readers or beginning readers:

1. Provide small group instruction rather than individual or classroom instruction.
2. Provide phonemic awareness training for 10-15 minutes of a reading lesson for a total of 5-18 hours.
3. Focus on the phonemic skills of blending and segmenting.
4. When teaching blending and segmenting, use *sounds and letters* rather than just oral practice.

Activities

The following activities focused on blending and segmenting are examples of how to implement phonemic awareness instruction in the adult literacy classroom or tutoring session. One-syllable word family lists can be found at www.literacyconnections.com

Slow and Fast

The instructor says a one-syllable word slowly, sound by sound. Learner(s) blend the whole word and the instructor writes the word down for the learner(s) to see.

The instructor says a compound word slowly, part by part. Learner(s) blend the word and the instructor writes the word down for the learner(s) to see.

Whole to Part

The instructor says and writes a one-syllable word. Then asks what is the word sound by sound? Learner(s) segment the word into individual phonemes.

The instructor says and writes familiar multi-syllable words and asks what are the parts? Learner(s) segment the words into syllables or parts.

Sound or Syllable Count

The instructor says a one-syllable word slowly, sound by sound. Learner(s) count the sounds with their fingers or by tapping. The instructor writes the word down after the count.

The instructor says a multi-syllable word at a slower pace. Learner(s) repeat the word and count or tap the syllables. The instructor writes down the word after the count.

Materials

Beginning Sounds Booklet

Give each learner a small spiral bound notebook or create a book of stapled pages for each consonant. Provide lined paper for those that require it. At the top of each page, write a consonant letter. Each day is designated as a certain letter day. For example, the first day could be “B” Word Day. For the next 24 hours, the learner is to write down on his/her “b” page, any word that begins with the letter b. Discuss the words in class: Where did they see the words? Are there duplicates? Who can read the words?

Things You Can Purchase

- *Reading/Writing Simple Rhymes* (Rhymes with One Spelling Pattern)
 - *Reading/Writing Complex Rhymes* (Rhymes with More Than One Spelling Pattern)
- Both books come with reproducible worksheets and corresponding overheads. Each book is \$29.99. These materials are teacher or volunteer tutor ready. Both of these books are written by Patricia Cunningham and published by Carson Dellosa Publishing Co., Inc. at www.carsondellosa.com
- *Ultimate Phonics Reading Program*
This interactive software program provides blending and segmenting practice by word families. It is available from Spencer Learning at www.spencerlearning.com (Also available for loan by contacting Linda at 763-512-1699 or Lstrand@aol.com)

Materials list provided by Linda Strand, Physical Disabilities Supplemental Services Provider