



Literacy Links

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Monthly E-Newsletter of Maine Reading First

Previous issues of Literacy Links have spotlighted each of the five essential elements of reading. The next five issues will take a deeper look at each of these elements, beginning with Phonemic Awareness.

Spotlight on...

A Deeper Look at Phonemic Awareness



The September, 2005 edition of Literacy Links (<http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/newsletters/0905newsletter.htm>) provided an introduction to phonemic awareness and its relationship to phonological awareness and phonics. In this issue we will revisit phonemic awareness in respect to explicit, systematic instruction in order to achieve independence in learning.

What is phonemic awareness?

Phonemic awareness is a subset of the larger concept of phonological awareness. Phonological awareness is the broad term referring to awareness of the sounds in oral language, from larger units like sentences to the small units of sound within words known as phonemes. According to Yopp (1992), phonemic awareness is the:

1. understanding that spoken words and syllables are made up of sequences of speech sounds, and
2. the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words.

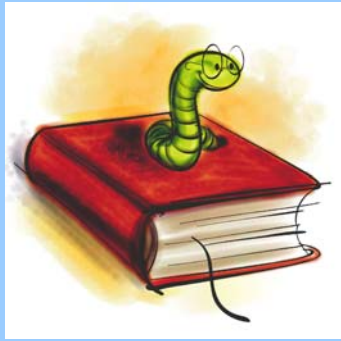
A hierarchy of skills exists within phonemic awareness. Janet Spector (1992) describes this hierarchy in the following way:

Hierarchy of Key Phonemic Awareness Skills

- **Recognition:** Rhyme, beginning sounds, ending sounds, medial sounds
- **Production:** Rhyme, beginning sounds, ending sounds, medial sounds
- **Blending:** Syllables, onset-rime, phonemes
- **Segmenting:** Syllables, onset-rime, phonemes

MINDSHIFT: The link between knowing and understanding is "handmade".

-- Anonymous



Empowerment is embodied in the act of standing on our own ground, discovering our own voice, making our own choices. Regardless of the level of power and privilege we hold.

--- Peter Block

Why is phonemic awareness critical to beginning reading and writing instruction?

Phonemic awareness provides the foundation for phonics, but is not the same as phonics. Phonemic awareness primes readers for print. Students who are phonemically aware can more easily make the connection between sounds and the letters that represent those sounds. In fact, one of the best predictors of how well students will learn to read during their first two years of school is their level of phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness directly impacts students understanding of the alphabetic principle (the mapping of sound on letters and letter combinations), and a solid working knowledge of the alphabetical principle supports children's ability to decode words in their reading and encode (spell) words in their writing. Furthermore, since phonemic awareness can be taught in a relatively brief amount of time (15 minutes) throughout the school day in Kindergarten and grade 1, time should not be a constraint. Research suggests 20 hours of phonemic awareness instruction throughout the school year is sufficient for most children to develop phonemic awareness.

When and how should phonemic awareness be taught?

Many children will develop some level of phonemic awareness concepts between the ages of 3 and 8 while being read to, or as they read and write; some will not. Phonemic awareness is typically taught in Kindergarten and grade 1, so students master this connection early in their reading development. Systematic and explicit phonemic awareness instruction that follows the hierarchy of skills described previously helps all children improve their reading and spelling. However, first grade students who lack phonemic awareness, or who read fewer than 20 words per minute, should receive additional direct instruction in these skills.

Segmenting words into phonemes and blending phonemes into words contributes more to learning to read and spell well than any of the other phonological awareness skills. Therefore, phonemic awareness instruction should highlight the process of segmenting and blending phonemes in words. (Links Sept. 2005). Research supports teaching the phonemic awareness skills of segmenting and blending simultaneously in conjunction with phonics using magnetic letters, letter tiles, or writing the letters to spell words. In this way phonemic awareness is specifically folded into teaching of letter-sound correspondences (Beck, 2006).

Recognizing that students' levels of phonemic awareness follows a hierarchy, using assessments to inform instruction is essential. Moore and Lyon (2003) suggest beginning with assessment to target students' needs and "keeping good records" of student's progress as an additional way to approach "explicit, systematic instruction". For further assessment with students struggling with blending and segmenting, they like using Janet Spector's **Dynamic Assessment of Phonemic Awareness** (1992) as the measure "clearly distinguishes between children who are simply unfamiliar with the (segmenting) task from children who really lack phoneme segmentation ability". The complete assessment activity with instructions is available in appendix C of Moore and Lyon's text **Sound Systems: Explicit, Systematic Phonics in Early Literacy Contexts**. (2003): Stenhouse. ISBN: 1-57110-346-5.

Based on the assessment of each student's level of development, identify which tasks need to be mastered. Vaughn and Thompson (2004)

Upcoming Events

**April 2, 2008~
Fluency Assessment and
Instruction Workshop
with Marcia Davidson.
Sponsored by Maine
Reading First and
MDOE. More details to
follow in upcoming
Literacy Links editions.**

Save the dates:

**September
27,2008 ~
2nd Annual
Nonfiction
Institute,**
Featuring Susan
Kirch, science
education scholar
and associate
professor at NYU.
Sponsored by the
University of Maine
College of Education
and Human
Development—
Literacy Unit;
Contact Amy Cates
at 581-2438 for
registration
information

explain that explicit phonemic awareness instruction (p.14):

- ✚ Begins with modeling and demonstrating tasks and skills you want students to know and do.
- ✚ Uses manipulatives, body movements or fingers to make auditory or oral tasks more visible.
- ✚ Proceeds from less to more difficult tasks considering the hierarchy of skills.
- ✚ Provides positive and corrective feedback and many opportunities for practice and review, in both large and small groups and individually.

Finally, keep in mind that **phonemic awareness is one of five essential elements within a balanced literacy program**. Explicit and systematic teaching of phonemic awareness skills includes integrating the use of these skills in the context of reading and writing. "By helping children connect these concepts to reading and writing, teachers are encouraging children to maximize their use (of phonemic awareness skills). Phonemic awareness concepts are valuable only as they are used by children to support reading and writing authentic text" (Lyon and Moore, 2003: 72).

Description of Instructional Idea...

Teaching Phonemic Awareness

The University of Oregon's website, Big Ideas in Reading:

http://reading.uoregon.edu/pa/pa_teach.php references Smith, Simmons, & Kame'enuei, (1998), and gives the following guidance for selecting materials and designing programs:

1. **Progress from easier phonemic awareness activities to more difficult (rhyming, sound matching to blending, segmentation, and manipulation).**
2. **Focus on segmentation or the combination of blending and segmenting.**
3. **Start with larger linguistic units (i.e., words and syllables) and proceed to smaller linguistic units (i.e., phonemes).**
4. **Begin instruction that focuses on the phonemic level of phonological units with short words (2-3 phonemes: at, mud, run).**
5. **Focus first on initial (sat), then final (sat), and lastly the medial sound (sat) in word).**
6. **Introduce continuous sounds (e.g., m, r, s) before stop sounds (t, b, k), as stop sounds are more difficult to elongate and isolate.**
7. **Add letter-sound correspondence instruction to phonological awareness interventions after children demonstrate early phonemic awareness.**

Provide brief instructional sessions. Significant gains in phonemic awareness are often made in 15-20 minutes of daily instruction and practice over a period of 9-12 weeks.

For more information see: Smith S. B., Simmons, D. C., & Kame'enuei, E. J. (1998). Phonological awareness: Instructional and curricular basics and implications. In D. C. Simmons & E. J. Kame'enuei (eds.), What reading research tells us about children with diverse learning needs: Bases and basics. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Summary of Professional Literacy Texts...

There are many resources now available that provide activities which correlate with the hierarchy of phonemic awareness development. The following list of professional texts provide a variety of tools for teaching phonemic awareness:

**August 5,6,7,
2008 ~**

Annual Seamless
Transitions
Conference:
Celebrating Literacy
and the Arts, for Pre
K-Grades 12.
University of Maine,
Orono.
Organizers of this
conference are
excited to announce
J. Patrick Lewis,
children's poet
extraordinaire a
keynote.
Contact Amy Cates
at 581-2438 for
more information.



**Where interest appears,
achievement follows.**

–Alfie Kohn

Phonemic Awareness in Young Children, (7th ed. 2000), by Marilyn Jager Adams, Barbara Foorman, Ingvar Lundberg, and Terri Beeler, was highlighted in the October 2005, Literacy Links and is available from Brookes Publishing. ISBN 1-55766-321-1.

Phonemic Awareness for Early Reading Success (Gr. K-2), (1997), by Wiley Blevins is available from Scholastic the ISBN is 0-590-37231-9. This text includes assessments and activities for all eight elements of phonemic awareness including oddity tasks, where the child discriminates which sounds are the same.

Poems for Teaching in the Content Areas: 75 Powerful Poems to Enhance Your History, Geography, Science and Math Lessons, (Paperback- Dec. 1-2007). This text has poems by J. Patrick Lewis and teaching ideas by Laura Robb. It is written for teachers of older students and is available from Scholastic, the ISBN is NTS 989603.

Children's Literature Title...

Wing Nuts and Screwy Haiku

Written by J. Patrick Lewis and Paul B. Janeczko
and illustrated by Tricia Tusa

J. Patrick Lewis and Paul B. Janeczko each have written over twenty five children's picture books and poetry books. In their first collaboration, Wing Nuts and Screwy Haiku, they take imaginable everyday subjects and make the reader look at life through a circus mirror. Using the poetic structure of senryu, the cousin of haiku, their poems will leave children rolling with laughter as they untangle the riddles and enjoy the wordplay.

This book would fit well in any text set of poetry structure, or integrate with a variety of themes by using poems individually with the subjects of family, pets, animals, games, circus, and others.

Wing Nuts and Screwy Haiku, was published in 2006 by Little Brown and Company the ISBN number 0-316-60731-2.

Additional newer texts by J. Patrick Lewis include:

Tulip at the Bat, illustrated by Amiko Hirao. (2007) ISBN-10: 0-316-61280-4.

Once Upon a Tomb: Gravely Humorous Verses, illustrated by Simon Bartram. (2006) by Candlewick. ISBN-10: 0763618373.

For a complete list of the work of J. Patrick Lewis visit:
www.jpatricklewis.com/books.shtml .

News from Maine Reading First...

The Maine Department of Education's Maine Reading First Initiative is pleased to report the first round of 2007-2008 Literacy Leaders' Network *Dine and Discuss* meetings were very well attended by about 80 Literacy Leaders statewide. If you would like more information about this group please contact: Leeann.Larsen@maine.gov. The Spring 2008 Dine and Discuss evenings will be April 3 in Portland and April 10 in Bangor.

Maine Reading First is also sponsoring a workshop entitled *Fluency Assessment and Instruction* featuring Marcia Davidson on April 2, 2008. Marcia Davidson is a professor from the University of Maine, and a national expert on fluency instruction and assessment. More details concerning this session will follow in upcoming *Literacy Links* editions.

Check it out...

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

The University of Oregon's Big Ideas in Reading website is useful for information about phonemic awareness instruction and assessment. In addition to a clear description of the research that supports phonemic awareness, this site includes specific information about the critical features of phonemic awareness instruction and assessment, including a sequence of instruction, appropriate benchmarks for kindergarten and grade one students, and guidance for selecting instructional materials and programs.

Curriculum maps from this site give clear guidance to follow when considering the hierarchy of phonemic awareness skills and determining benchmarks. The numbers in the top row of the curriculum map correspond to the months of the school year. For example, if your school year begins in September, then September would be month 1 on the map. If your school year begins in August, then August would be month one.

Mapping of Instruction to Achieve Instructional Priorities Kindergarten

Instructional Priority: Phonemic Awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Focus 1: Sound and Word Discrimination									
1a: Tells whether words and sounds are the same or different	X	X							
1b: Identifies which word is different		X	X						
1c: Identifies different speech sound			X	X					
Focus 2: Rhyming b									
2a: Identifies whether words rhyme	X								
2b: Produces a word that rhymes		X	X						
Focus 3: Blending									
3a: Orally blends syllables or onset-rimes			X	X					
3b: Orally blends separate phonemes					X	X	X		
Focus 4: Segmentation									
4a: Claps words in sentences	X								
4b: Claps syllables in words		X	X						
4c: Says syllables				X	X				
* 4d: Identifies first sound in 1-syllable words		X	X	X	25				
* 4e: Segments individual sounds in words					X	X	X	X	35 ^a

* High priority skill
a. Sounds per minute
b. Optimal time for rhyme instruction not established

It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself.

---Ralph Waldo Emerson



"The greatest gift is a passion for reading."

~Elizabeth Hardwick,
author

“The most powerful way to improve education is to collect the right data and keep them in front of the right people.”

---Lynn Fielding



Mapping of Instruction to Achieve Instructional Priorities First Grade

Instructional Priority: Phonemic Awareness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Focus 1: Sound Isolation^a									
1a: Identifies initial sound in 1-syllable words	X	X							
1b: Identifies final sound in 1-syllable words	X	X	X						
1c: Identifies medial sound in 1-syllable words		X	X	X					
Focus 2: Sound Blending									
* 2a: Blends 3-4 phonemes into a whole word	X	X	X	X	X				
Focus 3: Sound Segmentation									
* 3a: Segments 3- and 4-phoneme, 1-syllable words	35 ^b								

* High priority skill

a. Skills in this category should be established by mid-year.

b. Number of phoneme segments per minute

Newsletter Archives

There are several earlier editions of *Literacy Links* available on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

Edition	Spotlight Topic
March, 2005	Maine Reading First
April, 2005	Maine Reading First Course
May, 2005	Reading Fluency
June, 2005	Vocabulary
September, 2005	Phonemic Awareness
October, 2005	Phonics
November, 2005	Comprehension
December, 2005/January, 2006	DIBELS
February, 2006	Literacy Centers
March, 2006	Interactive Read Aloud
April, 2006	Nonfiction
May, 2006	Word Walls
June, 2006	Classroom Design
September, 2006	Shared Reading
October, 2006	Automaticity
November, 2006	Using Assessment to Guide Instruction
December, 2006	Deepening Comprehension
January, 2007	Selecting Quality Children's Books (part 1)
February, 2007	Selecting Quality Children's Books (part 2)
March, 2007	Making Instruction Explicit
April, 2007	Motivation and Engagement
May-June 2007	Grouping for Instruction
September 2007	Making Instruction Systematic
October, 2007	Pacing Instruction
November, 2007	Managed Independent Practice



For additional information about any of the items in this newsletter or to sign up to receive this e-newsletter, please email Leeann.Larsen@maine.gov

Click here to view the Maine Reading First website
<http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

The professional development opportunities and materials are listed in *Literacy Links* for informational purposes only and are not necessarily endorsed by the Maine Department of Education's Maine Reading First Initiative.