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Understanding the importance of phonemic awareness

Kathryn Lynn Evinger

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE
OF PHONEMIC AWARENESS

__________________________________________

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

__________________________________________

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Reading Option

__________________________________________

by
Kathryn Lynn Evinger
March 2000
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE
OF PHONEMIC AWARENESS

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Approved by:

Adria Klein, Ph.D., First Reader

Sally E. Cawthon, Second Reader
ABSTRACT

With an increase need to improve our educational system, especially language arts, many districts have aligned their curriculum to the state's standards. The intent being to have every child reading at grade level by third grade and also to improve test scores. Both of these goals are difficult to meet, especially when the teachers do not understand a concept that must be taught or refuse to teach it.

One concept which is not understood by some teachers is phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness, a skill which has been linked to improved reading acquisition and has been identified as the best single predictor of reading ability, is taught in kindergarten. In fact, there are seven concepts of phonemic awareness listed in the California English-Language Arts Content Standards which must be taught in kindergarten. It is vital that teachers understand what phonemic awareness is and the importance for teaching it.

Therefore, the goal of this project will be to design a phonemic awareness handbook which will be discussed at a kindergarten staff in-service. The information in the handbook will explain the concept of phonemic awareness and its importance to successful reading acquisition. The handbook will also provide some phonemic awareness assessment inventories as well as some activities.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to those who made it possible for me to complete this project. I want to say thank you to Joseph Gray, whose own determination and strength in the face of difficult times, inspired me to continue my goal.

I want thank to Dr. Adria Klein, for her encouragement and professional advice. She provided the necessary enthusiasm for me to complete my goal.

I shall always be grateful to Sally Cawthon, for her support, respect and prayers throughout this project.

To my family, I thank you for your love and confidence in me. My sons, A.J., and John were there to encourage, love, and cheer me on. For my husband Al, a special thanks for his never-ending strength, support and most of all, his love.
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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Background Information

As a result of the state's recent adoption of the English-Language Arts Content Standards, many districts, with teacher input, have made adjustments to their curriculum as well as their report cards. The purpose for the adjustments was to help the districts align their curriculum to the state's standards. However, many concerns about the English-Language Arts curriculum have surfaced during this process.

For my district one area of concern in the English-Language Arts curriculum is phonemic awareness. Our newly adopted reading series does not address phonemic awareness adequately in kindergarten. Therefore, the kindergarten teachers have supplemented the reading program with what they think is phonemic awareness or some have not done it at all.

On several occasions this year I have had the opportunity to speak briefly with other kindergarten teachers in my district regarding a phonemic awareness workshop I attended. During these discussions they smiled and nodded their heads inferring they knew what I was talking about, but they did not. Their input into the discussions dealt with phonics, not with phonemic awareness. They assumed I was talking about phonics. According to Robinson, McKenna and
Wedman, “Phonemic awareness is not phonics. Phonemic awareness is awareness of sounds in spoken words: phonics is the relation between letters and sounds in written words” (1996).

According to the English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools (1997), there are seven concepts under phonemic awareness which must be taught in kindergarten.

1. Track (move sequentially from sound to sound) and represent the number, sameness/difference, and order of two and three isolated phonemes.
2. Track (move sequentially from sound to sound) and represent changes in simple syllables and words with two and three sounds as one sound is added, substituted, omitted, shifted, or repeated.
3. Blend vowel-consonant sounds orally to make words or syllables.
4. Identify and produce rhyming words in response to an oral prompt.
5. Distinguish orally stated one-syllable words and separate into beginning or ending sounds.
6. Track auditorily each word in a sentence and each syllable in a word.
7. Count the number of sounds in syllables and syllables in words (1997).

My district has eight kindergarten teachers that are required, by the state, to teach phonemic awareness concepts to the students. The problem is, these eight teachers are not only unaware of what phonemic awareness is, they also are unaware of its importance. They received a two day literacy training offered by the district, but the training mainly
addressed activities for grades first through fifth. It did not stress the importance for phonemic awareness instruction, especially for kindergarten students.

What makes this even a bigger problem is the fact that the kindergarten students have not received adequate direct instruction in phonemic awareness, which according to studies, "without direct instructional support, phonemic awareness eludes roughly 25% of middle-class first graders and substantially more of those who come from less literacy-rich backgrounds" (Adams, Beeler, Foorman & Lundberg, 1998).

As a consequence of the teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the importance of phonemic awareness the students are not receiving adequate instruction in phonemic awareness. Therefore, they are not acquiring the foundation they need to help them become better readers.

Theoretical Orientation

The teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding may not be the only reason the students are not receiving direct instruction in phonemic awareness. Many teachers' teaching styles are influenced from their philosophies or theories about reading. It is the placement of all the different reading philosophies and theories on a long line that has made what is know as the "continuum" (Harste and Burke, 1979). Harste and Burke went on to say, "Current views of
reading can be organized into three relatively distinct clusters and perceived as falling along a continuum" (1979). The three clusters are: Sound/Symbol Model (Decoding), Skills Model and Whole Language Model.

In the sound/symbol model, "reading is perceived as an offshoot of oral language" (Harste and Burke, 1979). The main objective is for students to develop an understanding of the relationship between the graphic symbols and their sounds. Students are also expected to manipulate the graphic symbols and their sounds. Syntax and meaning are not seen as a primary focus in this model. The overall model has the appearance of a pyramid with sound/symbol as the base and meaning as the capstone.

The second model, skills model of reading, views reading as four discrete skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Although the four skills are discrete, they are seen as having common abilities which are shared. It is believed that the key component to reading success in this model is the word. Students are introduced to new vocabulary on a weekly basis and reading sessions are followed by a series of comprehension questions. Workbook assignments are often given to provide skill practice. This model has the appearance of a circle cut into three pie slices, with letter/sound, meaning and high frequency vocabulary getting equal focus.
The third and last model, whole language based model of reading, not only views the language system as shared, as in the skills model, but also believes "they are interdependent and interactive aspects of a single process" (Harste and Burke, 1979). The focus in this model is that reading, whether it is for leisure or instructional, concentrates on comprehension. The appearance of this model is a sphere. Inside the sphere are three systems; meaning (the core), surrounded by syntax and then letter/sound (outer layer).

Many educators believed the whole language based model was the best way to teach students to read. They considered direct or skill based instruction an old teaching theory which was no longer appropriate for the classroom. But a change in beliefs was about to occur.

After the publication of Becoming a Nation of Readers, in 1984, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Delaine Eastin, realized there was a reading crisis in California, so she created the Reading Task Force. The Task Force was to develop immediate and long term recommendations to improve student reading achievement. The Task Force had 27 members which represented teachers, principals, school board members, superintendents, community members, business people, and parents. In 1995, the Reading Task Force's recommendations were published in Every Child a Reader. According to the Reading Task Force, "many language arts
programs have shifted too far away from direct skills instruction "(1995). The Task Force went on to say:

A balanced and comprehensive approach to reading must have: (1) a strong literature, language, and comprehension program that includes a balance of oral and written language; (2) an organized, explicit skills program that includes phonemic awareness (sounds in words), phonics, and decoding skills to address the needs of the emergent reader; (3) ongoing diagnosis that informs teaching and assessment that ensures accountability; and (4) a powerful early intervention program that provides individual tutoring for children at risk of reading failure (1995).

The Task Force also concluded that teacher education and in-service training must be redesigned with a greater emphasis on beginning reading.

To reiterate, the continuum is like a line where all the different views and beliefs people have about a successful reading program have been placed in three distinct clusters. After reading about the three models one would place phonemic awareness instruction in the sound/symbol model because of the relationship with oral language. But I strongly believe phonemic awareness instruction can be included in all three models. If taught correctly, phonemic awareness instruction can provide students with a balanced program.

**Project Design**

Therefore, my project will be to develop a handbook, which I will discuss at an in-service, for the kindergarten
teachers in my district. The handbook will have: (a) the
definition for both phonological awareness and phonemic
awareness and their importance to successful reading
acquisition, (b) a summary of two case studies, (c) different
phonemic awareness inventories and assessments other teachers
have used with their kindergarten students, and (d) a variety
of activities for the teachers to use in their rooms to
stimulate the development of phonemic awareness. My goal for
this in-service and handbook is to help the kindergarten
teachers in my district gain a better understanding of
phonemic awareness, acquire more information about the
importance for teaching phonemic awareness, discover the two
purposes for assessment, and provide activities they can use
in the classroom.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Seven concepts are included under phonemic awareness in the English - Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, all of which must be taught in kindergarten (1997). For some districts, including the seven phonemic awareness concepts into their kindergarten curriculum has not been difficult. They have provided adequate training for the kindergarten teachers to gain an understanding of phonemic awareness and its importance to reading acquisition. Other districts however, have not provided adequate training for their kindergarten teachers. Their kindergarten teachers are still unaware of phonemic awareness instruction and its benefits. Therefore, the objective of this chapter will be to provide research information to help teachers understand the definition of phonemic awareness, as well as to comprehend the importance of teaching phonemic awareness.

Definition of Phonemic Awareness

There are many interesting and informative articles being published about phonemic awareness. A majority of these articles however, have slightly different definitions of phonemic awareness. The assorted definitions ranged from: Phonemic awareness "is the awareness of phonemes, or sounds,
in the speech stream. It is the awareness that speech consists of a series of sounds" (Yopp, 1995); "Phonological awareness, the awareness of and the ability to manipulate the phonological structure of words" (Troia, 1999); "Phoneme awareness (sometimes called phonological awareness, phonemic analysis, or phoneme segmentation) is the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of a sequence of individual sounds" (Ball & Blachman, 1991); to, phonemic awareness is "the conscious awareness that spoken words are comprised of individual sounds" (Snider, 1997).

However, there was one article by David J. Chard and Shirley V. Dickson (1999) which gave distinct definitions for phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. According to Chard and Dickson "phonological awareness is the understanding of different ways that oral language can be divided into smaller components and manipulated" (1999). For example, sentences can be broken into words (e.g., Today is Friday., /Today/ /is/ /Friday/), words can be broken down into syllables (e.g., pencil, /pen/ and /cil/), words can be broken down into onset and rime (e.g., bread, /br/ and /ead/). In addition to breaking oral language into smaller units, Chard and Dickson felt phonological awareness included the manipulation of sounds, such as "deleting, adding, or substituting syllables or sounds" (1999).

Basically, phonological awareness means a general knowledge
of sounds of speech.

Phonemic awareness, according to Chard and Dickson, "is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds or phonemes and the ability to manipulate these phonemes either by segmenting, blending, or changing individual phonemes to create new words" (1999). Of all the different phonological awareness skills children acquire, phonemic awareness is the most complexed.

What is a phoneme? A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in our language. Changing the initial phoneme can make a different word. For example, the word fun has three phonemes, /f/-/u/-/n/. By changing the first phoneme, we can produce the word sun. The middle and last phonemes can also be changed to form other new words (Yopp, 1995; Busink, 1997).

Nearly all children learn to speak and understand the spoken phonemes and syllables, unconsciously aware of the smaller abstract units in the spoken language (Lundberg, Frost, & Peterson, 1988). In fact, many children at an early age develop primary phonological awareness, (e.g., rhyme and alliteration). This can be enhanced "by being read to from books that are based on rhyme or alliteration" (Chard and Dickson, 1999). As some children continue to grow older their phonological awareness develops into the more complex phonemic awareness. But for other children acquiring
phonemic awareness can be more difficult. One reason for this difficulty may be attributed to the fact that children are "accustomed to thinking of words in terms of their meaning, not in terms of their linguistic characteristics" (Griffith & Olson, 1992). Another reason may be that phonemes (speech sounds) are not easily pronounced in isolation. They often spill over or are "coarticulated" into other phonological units (Snider, 1995).

Research Studies

One might ask, "Why is phonemic awareness important? Is there any evidence to support it?" The answer is yes. There have been many research studies done on the effects of phonemic awareness training. In August of 1985, Lundberg, Frost and Petersen began their eight month study in Denmark. The study consisted of 235 preschool children, 101 girls and 134 boys. Of the 235 children, 155 were placed in the control group. Both the control group and the experimental group were pre-tested with a number of linguistic and metalinguistic tasks. The experimental group received a specific training which consisted of 15-20 minutes of daily metalinguistic exercises and games. The purpose of the training was to stimulate the children's phonological awareness. The control group received the regular preschool program. Neither group received formal reading instruction.
prior to or during the study. Results of the study indicated an increase in metalinguistic skills. Small, yet important, effects were noted in rhyming task as well as word and syllable manipulation. However, the most dramatic effects were observed in phoneme segmentation. The study concluded that phonological awareness training in preschool can have a positive effect on future reading and spelling acquisition which could continue into second grade (Lundberg, Frost, and Peterson, 1988).

Anne Cunningham did a study in the United States with 42 kindergarten and first grade students (1990). There were two experimental groups and one control group. Prior to the study, the kindergarten students received no formal prereading instruction. The first grade students received formal reading and spelling instruction using a basal reading series which focused on phonics, word recognition, and comprehension. Each group received 15 to 20 minutes of training time. The training was also directed by an experienced teacher.

The first group, known as the skill and drill group, only received instruction in phonemic awareness (segmentation and blending). The lessons had no direct instructions on how to apply their phonemic awareness.

The second group, known as the metalevel group, also received instruction in phonemic awareness. However, they
were encouraged to think about the usage of phonemic awareness, such as connecting something they had learned in phonemic awareness lesson to a story they had read as a class.

The third group, known as the control group, followed the same time schedule for ten weeks. The students heard stories which were then summarized by the teacher. The students were also asked to answered questions for each story.

All three groups had to complete three measures: phoneme deletion, phoneme oddity, and Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization. Comparisons between groups, as well as grade level, were made and showed significant improvement in both experimental groups. Therefore, the results of Cunningham’s study displayed that training in phonemic awareness increases students' reading ability (1990).

Many studies have shown that there is a casual link between early phonemic awareness training and improved reading acquisition (Stanovich, Cunningham, and Cramer, 1984; Lundberg, Frost, and Peterson, 1988; Cunningham, 1990; Ball & Blachman, 1991; Stanovich, 1993/94; Busink, 1997; Snider, 1997; Troia, 1999). For instance, children with phonemic awareness are not as confused when the teacher starts talking about sounds that letters stand for in a word. They understand that the spoken language acts as a map for
written language and with further instruction they are able to transfer this understanding interchangeably.

The California Task Force recommends phonemic awareness training begin in preschool and go all the way through the eighth grade (1995). Although there is a lot of information about phonemic awareness, the exact age to begin training is not definite. However, a child’s preschool linguistic environment can strongly influence his or her sensitivity to the phonological structure of words at the time of entering kindergarten. Early experience with nursery rhymes, for example, can help children become phonologically aware. Studies have shown that children who know more about nursery rhymes at age three, are those that tend to be more highly developed in simple phonemic awareness at age four, and even more phonemically aware at age six.

There is also evidence that children with backgrounds in which they have been frequently exposed to letters, their name written, and to various kinds of reading activities show more advanced phonemic awareness upon entering kindergarten than those children with very little exposure to print.

**Phonemic Awareness is Multi-leveled**

Phonemic awareness training is multi-leveled and moves through five sequential stages: Level 1, Rhythm and Rhyme; Level 2, Parts of a Word; Level 3, Sequence of Sounds; Level
4, Separation of Sounds; and Level 5, Manipulation of Sounds (Fitzpatrick, 1997). In each level there are generic type tasks that vary in difficulty. According to Stanovich, some of these task can be successfully completed before others, but all are highly correlated with each other (1993/94).

"Most importantly, they are the best predictors of the ease of early reading acquisition—better than anything else we know of, including IQ" (1993/94).

Assessing Phonemic Awareness

Assessing phonemic awareness is a crucial component. It serves two purposes: to identify students who may be or who are at risk of learning beginning reading skills and also to monitor student progress while receiving phonemic awareness instruction. It must be noted, that any assessment instrument used to identify students needing direct explicit instruction in phonemic awareness must be both reliable and valid (Yopp, 1995).

There are different assessment instruments teachers can use to determine which student has developed phonemic awareness and on which level they need to develop more. Researchers recommend that assessing instruments "must be strongly predictive of future reading ability and must separate high from low performers. This means that they must address skills that are developmentally appropriate" (Chard
and Dickson, 1999). It is also best to conduct assessment sessions in brief sittings so as to reduce student frustration.

Generally, kindergarten students are screened during the second semester. As stated earlier, the purpose for the screening is to check for students who may be at risk in learning beginning reading skills. Some screening measures teachers may want to use are: Test of Phonological Awareness-Kindergarten (Torgesen & Bryant, 1993), Nonword Spelling (Torgesen & Davis, 1996), and Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation (Yopp, 1995).

Test of Phonological Awareness-Kindergarten is an untimed screening. It can be administered to a small group of 6 to 10 students after receiving instruction in phonemic awareness. This screening focuses on segmenting skills. The students receive a raw score that is normed.

Nonword Spelling is also administered to a small group of students, but it is given after the students have received instruction in phonological awareness. This screening focuses on blending and segmenting. The students receive one point for each phoneme represented correctly.

Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation is administered individually. Students are given a word, they are required to articulate each phoneme separately. The student will receive a score if all the sounds in the word are presented
correctly. This screening focuses on segmentation.

Phonemic Awareness Activities

For many teachers unfamiliar with phonemic awareness, the challenge comes after the assessment. They are often confronted with selecting appropriate activities to get children to notice and discover how to use phonemes, to become phonemically aware. Researchers have proposed different activities as part of the phonemic awareness training. These activities include, but are not limited to, language play using nursery rhymes, rhyming games, singing songs with rhyme, reading poems and alliteration books. All of these activities emphasize oral language skills. It is best if these skills are not taught in isolation, but rather used along with a reading curriculum. They can easily be integrated into current stories or classroom themes.

English Language Learners

How effective is phonemic awareness instruction for English Language Learners? Well, phonemic awareness instruction can be very beneficial for English Language Learners (ELL). As noted by Sofia Vernon (1993), "there seems to be some similarities between early literacy development in several languages". However, "instructionally naive students" would grasp phonemic awareness better if it
were modeled by the teacher then "followed by guided practice. That is, the teacher should perform the task with the child" (Snider, 1995). When taught correctly along with a reading program, phonemic awareness can provide the English Language Learner with a "rich extralinguistic context" (Freeman & Freeman, 1994). Pocket charts, picture cards and actions (motion) provide a greater contextual support for students who are not fully proficient in English.

The Goal of Phonemic Awareness

Understanding the goal of phonemic awareness is important for student success. It can bridge the gap between deficient literacy preparation and success in reading acquisition. Phonemic awareness helps "children develop an 'ear' for language - to hear specific sounds, identify sound sequence, and understand the role phonemes play in word formation" (Fitzpatrick, 1997). Developed phonemic awareness in prereaders is a powerful predictor of future success in reading and spelling. For some early readers, the relationship between the letters on the paper, sounds, and meaning is obvious. For them, reading is easy and enjoyable. For others, with no phonemic awareness, reading is very difficult and feared.

There are many unknowns about phonemic awareness and some teachers are still confused, ignorant, or even so set in
their ways that they have not taught it. Therefore, additional training for kindergarten teachers would be most beneficial.
CHAPTER THREE  
GOALS AND LIMITATIONS

GOALS

The main goal of this project is to provide the kindergarten teachers in my district with a better understanding of phonemic awareness. This goal will be accomplished at an in-service where research evidence to support the importance for teaching phonemic awareness will be discussed. An explanation of the five sequential stages and reasons for assessing will also be included in the in-service. Each teacher will receive a handbook with sample assessment instruments as well as a variety of activities which enhance phonemic awareness.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are as follows:

1. To help the kindergarten teachers gain a better understanding of phonemic awareness.
2. To provide more information about the importance for teaching phonemic awareness.
3. To explain the two reasons for assessment.
4. Provide activities which will develop phonemic awareness.
Limitations

This project has several limitations. One limitation is the time I have to present the in-service. A full day to present the in-service would be wonderful, however, due to the limited number of professional growth workdays many schools are splitting the last day left into two three hour sessions or three two hour sessions.

Another limitation is I have no means to insure the kindergarten teachers will use the handbook. Some of the activities require some preparation and the teachers may not have the time or desire to prepare for the activities.

A final limitation for the project is the number of kindergarten students in each class. Some schools still have 28 to 29 students per class. Large class size limits how much quality time a teacher can give individual students. Screening and assessment procedures also take longer, thus taking away from instructional time.
APPENDIX A

Phonemic Awareness
In-Service Handbook
Phonemic Awareness

Developing an Ear for Language

A Kindergarten In-service
Presented by Kathy Evinger

The purple porcupine picked an Alliteration song by Albert James
1. Welcome/Introductions

2. Discuss Information in Handbook
   * What is phonological awareness?
   * What is phonemic awareness?
   * Review case studies
   * Why is phonemic awareness important?
   * Why is it difficult for some children to grasp phonemic awareness?

3. Break
   * Two purposes for assessing phonemic awareness
   * Phonemic Awareness Activities

4. Feedback/Adjournment
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WHAT IS PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS?

Phonological awareness is the understanding that oral language is composed of words. Words can be divided in different ways to form smaller parts (phonemes). The manipulation of phonemes can form new words.

Examples of Phonological Awareness Skills

* Rhyming: What word rhymes with hair? (chair)
* Sentences into words: How many words in the sentence, “Tomorrow is Monday”? (3)
* Words into syllables: Clap the number of syllables in pencil.
  (clap) (clap)
* Blending onset-rime: What word am I saying /h/ /at/? (hat)
* Blending individual phonemes: What word am I trying to say, /d///o//g/? (dog)
* Phoneme isolation: What is the first sound in monkey? (/m/)
* Counting phonemes: How many sounds do you hear in mitt? (three, /m//i//t/)
* Phoneme segmentation: What are the sounds in sack? (/s//a//k/)
* Phoneme deletion: If we delete the /s/ sound from slip what do we get? (lip)
* Phoneme substitution: If we substitute the sound /h/ for a /b/ in hand, what word do we get? (band)

According to Chard and Dickson, the above phonological awareness skills can be placed on a continuum of complexity. Rhyming skills are located at the left end of the continuum because they are easier to acquire. Blending, segmenting and phoneme manipulation (phonemic
awareness) skills are located at the right end of the continuum because they are more difficult to acquire (see figure 1).

Table 1. Continuum of complexity of phonological awareness activities (adapted from Chard & Dickson, 1999).

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WHAT IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS?

Phonemic awareness is an important skill one develops through direct instruction. It is the conscious knowledge or understanding that words can be broken into smaller units (sounds, phonemes). In order to develop phonemic awareness, children need to: (a) understand that words can be broken into a sequence of individual...
phonemes, or sounds, (b) hear the individual phonemes, and (c) be able to manipulate individual phonemes to make new words. Phonemic awareness is the most complicated level of phonological awareness.

**Phonemic Awareness**

**UNDERSTAND** - explicit instruction & activities

*HEAR - rhymes, poems, alliterations, songs

MANIPULATE - add, subtract, & delete phonemes

* Phonemic awareness activities can be done in the dark!
**Two Case Studies**

**First Case Study**

In August of 1985, Lundberg, Frost and Petersen began their eight month study in Denmark. The study consisted of 235 preschool children, 101 girls and 134 boys. Of the 235 children, 155 were placed in the control group. Both the control group and the experimental group were pretested with a number of linguistic and metalinguistic tasks.

The experimental group received a specific training which consisted of 15-20 minutes of daily metalinguistic exercises and games. The purpose of the training was to stimulate the children’s phonological awareness. The control group received the regular preschool program. Neither group received formal reading instruction prior to or during the study.

Results of the study indicated an increase in metalinguistic skills. Small, yet important, effects were noted in rhyming task as well as word and syllable manipulation. However, the most dramatic effects were observed in phoneme segmentation. The study concluded that phonological awareness training in preschool can have a positive effect on future reading and spelling acquisition which could continue into second grade (Lundberg, Frost, and Peterson, 1988).
Second Case Study

Anne Cunningham did a study in the United States with 42 kindergarten and first grade students (1990). There were two experimental groups and one control group. Prior to the study, the kindergarten students received no formal prereading instruction. The first grade students received formal reading and spelling instruction using a basal reading series which focused on phonics, word recognition, and comprehension. Each group received 15 to 20 minutes of training time. The training was also directed by an experienced teacher.

The first group, known as the skill and drill group, only received instruction in phonemic awareness (segmentation and blending). The lessons had no direct instructions on how to apply their phonemic awareness.

The second group, known as the metalevel group, also received instruction in phonemic awareness. However, they were encouraged to think about the usage of phonemic awareness, such as connecting something they had learned in phonemic awareness lesson to a story they had read as a class.

The third group, known as the control group, followed the same time schedule for ten weeks. The students heard stories which were then summarized by the teacher. The students were also asked to answered questions for each story.
All three groups had to complete three measures: phoneme deletion, phoneme oddity, and Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization. Comparisons between groups, as well as grade level, were made and showed significant improvement in both experimental groups. Therefore, the results of Cunningham’s study displayed that training in phonemic awareness increases students’ reading ability (1990).
WHY IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS IMPORTANT?

* Phonemic awareness is the best single predictor of reading ability in kindergarten.

* There is a casual link between early phonemic awareness instruction and improved reading acquisition.

* Phonemic awareness helps children connect sounds to letters.

* Phonemic awareness helps prepare children for phonics (writing & spelling).
WHY IS PHONEMIC AWARENESS DIFFICULT?

* Phonemic awareness is difficult to acquire because phonemes are abstract units which carry no meaning.

* It is difficult to articulate phonemes in isolation. They are not easily pronounced without adding another sound, such as a schwa.

* Phonemes are also strongly influenced by adjacent sounds.
WHO IS AT RISK FOR PHONEMIC AWARENESS DIFFICULTY?

* Second language learners

* Non-standard English speakers

* Children from literacy deprived environments

* Children with phonological processing problems
ASSESSING PHONEMIC AWARENESS

There are two purposes for assessing phonemic awareness:

1. To identify students who may be at risk for acquiring beginning reading skills - screening measures used must strongly predict future reading abilities and must be developmentally appropriate.

2. To regularly monitor the progress of students who are receiving phonemic awareness instruction - progress monitoring measures must be sensitive to growth and have alternate forms.

* It is best to keep assessment sessions brief so as to reduce student frustration.

* The following assessments/inventories were copied with permission from Creative Teaching Press and International Reading Association.
Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation

Student's name__________________________ Date _______________

Score (number correct)____________________

Directions: Today we're going to play a word game. I'm going to say a word and I want you to break the word apart. You are going to tell me each sound in the word in order. For example, if I say "old," you should say /o/-/l/-/d/. (Administrator: Be sure to say the sounds, not the letters, in the word.) Let's try a few together.

Practice items: (Assist the child in segmenting these items as necessary.) ride, go, man

Test items: (Circle those items that the student correctly segments; incorrect responses may be recorded on the blank line following the item.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. dog</th>
<th>12. lay</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. keep</td>
<td>13. race</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. fine</td>
<td>14. zoo</td>
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<td>4. no</td>
<td>15. three</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. she</td>
<td>16. job</td>
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<td>6. wave</td>
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<td>9. red</td>
<td>20. top</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. me</td>
<td>21. by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. sat</td>
<td>22. do</td>
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The author, Haliee Kay Yopp, California State University, Fullerton, grants permission for this test to be reproduced. The author acknowledges the contribution of the late Harry Singer to the development of this test.

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Phonemic-Awareness Inventory

Student Name __________________________ Date __________________________

Directions: Give this inventory orally to each student.

Level 1

Whole Word Discrimination
Are these words the same? (Circle words child identifies correctly.)
- fat-bat
- dip-hip
- man-man
- red-rid
- nut-nut
- mat-map
- slip-slit
- grip-grip
- flit-flip

Rhyming Words—Recognition
Do these words rhyme? (Circle words child identifies correctly.)
- happy-sappy
- sad-mad
- boy-toy
- girl-boy
- sun-fun
- play-game

Rhyming Words—Application
What word rhymes with . . . ? (Write child’s responses on the lines.)
- man ____________ old ____________ try ____________
- sun ____________ play ____________ skip ____________
- eat ____________ book ____________ scale ____________

Syllable Counting
How many syllables do you hear in the word . . . ? (Write child’s responses on the lines and circle those that are correct.)
- ball ____________ wagon ____________ umbrella ____________
- elephant ____________ hippopotamus ____________ orangutan ____________

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### Level 2

**Syllable Segmentation**

I'll say a word, then you repeat it slowly. (Give examples: cow-boy, ha-ppy, fu-nny. Circle words to which child responds correctly.)

- rainbow (rain-bow)
- doughnut (dough-nut)
- sidewalk (side-walk)
- paper (pa-per)
- basket (bas-ket)
- color (co-ior)
- scissors (sci-ssors)
- butterfly (bu-ter-fly)
- umbrella (um-bre-lla)

**Oral Synthesis—Blending Speech Sounds**

Listen and tell me the word I said. (Say each sound slowly. Circle words child identifies correctly.)

- n-o
- s-ay
- m-e
- r-u-n
- t-e-n
- f-a-t
- m-o-p
- w-a-s
- c-u-t
- c-ak-e
- h-a-ve
- s-a-i-d
- w-e-n-t
- s-t-o-r-y
- c-a-k-e
- w-e-n-t
- s-t-o-r-y

### Level 3

**Approximation**

Do you hear the /b/ sound at the beginning, middle, or end of ______? (Circle words child identifies correctly.)

- big
- tab
- robot
- cabbage
- banana
- crib

**Phoneme Isolation**

What sound do you hear ______? (Circle words child identifies correctly.)

- First
- sun
- foot
- yes
- red
- Last
- water
- buff
- candy
- ten
- Middle
- feet
- tub
- lake
- pan
Level 4

Segmentation
Repeat each word slowly so I can hear each separate sound, like c-a-t. (Say a word and have child repeat it slowly, separating each phoneme.)

- me
- so
- man

- you
- play
- old

- book
- skip
- scale

Level 5

Phoneme Deletion
Say the word ______ but leave off the ______. (Repeat, asking child to delete beginning or ending sounds.)

- pop
- dip
- not
- cub
- fin

- can
- ten
- tab
- mop
- set

Phoneme Substitution
Replace the first sound in ______ with ______. What is the new word? (Repeat, asking child to substitute middle and ending sounds.)

- pail
- log
- get

- cat
- tub
- pop

- pig
- dice
- jump
Phonemic Awareness Activities

Children can develop phonemic awareness in various ways. For example, visuals (i.e. pictures) may be used to help connect sounds to symbols, however the main goal of phonemic awareness is to help children hear specific sounds in language and to be able to manipulate those sounds orally. Since phonemic awareness is oral in nature, it can easily be taught to children by reading literature that plays with the sounds of language, such as alliterations and rhymes.

It is best not to teach phonemic awareness as an isolated skill, but rather incorporated into a theme or current reading program. It should also be noted, that before starting phonemic awareness instruction, a child’s phonemic awareness level should be determined through assessment.

The following activities were copied, with permission, from Phonemic Awareness; Playing with Sounds to Strengthen Beginning Reading Skills, written by Jo Fitzpatrick and published by Creative Teaching Press.
Getting to Know You

Task: sound matching

Materials
- none

Directions
1. Use this activity at the beginning of the year to help children learn classmates' names. Have children practice phoneme matching by asking a partner to name his or her favorite hobby or treat. Explain that “favorites” must begin with the same sound as the child’s name. (e.g., Patty and peanut butter).
2. Invite children to introduce partners to the class, telling what he or she likes. For example, Sam likes soccer and salamanders.
3. Extend learning by having children draw pictures of their classmates on connecting paper dolls. Write each child’s “favorite” on the bottom of his or her doll.

Silly Greetings

Task: sound matching

Materials
- student photographs

Directions
1. Collect or take student photographs.
2. Assign a letter to each day of the month (e.g., T for January 12th). Greet children by replacing the first letter of their names with the letter of the day, such as “Tally” for Sally.
3. Show student pictures one at a time and have the class greet their classmates with a “Good Morning” chant.
   - I say good morning to Tary (Mary),
   - Good morning to Drew (Drew),
   - Good morning to Tustin (Dustin) and Talice (Alice), too!

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Paper Doll Pattern
for
Getting to Know You
Activity
**Punch It Out**  
Tasks: syllable splitting, phoneme blending

**Materials**  
- none

**Directions**

1. Focus on target ending sounds by having children use hand motions as they say words. First, say the word *cat* without using hand motions.
2. Repeat the word and add hand motions. Slide your hand (palm down) from left to right as you say the word, then thrust a fist to "punch out" the last sound (/t/)
3. Have children repeat the word and hand motions. Repeat the activity with other words.

---

**Pop-Up People**  
Task: phoneme blending

**Materials**  
- none

**Directions**

1. Have three volunteers sit in front of the class. Secretly tell each one a beginning, middle, or ending sound of a word, such as /b/, /m/, or /t/.
2. Sitting in sequence, have volunteers "pop up" one at a time, saying their sounds.
3. Ask the rest of the class to blend the sounds and guess the word.
4. Repeat with other words and volunteers.
5. Extend this activity into written language by having volunteers hold up alphabet cards (pages 118–120) or say letter names instead of sounds.

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Alphabet Cards

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46

Alphabet Cards
**Listen Up!**

Task: phoneme isolation

**Materials**
- list of words containing target sound
- overhead marker, transparency, and projector
- graph paper
- crayons

**Directions**
1. In advance, generate a list of words containing a target sound. For example, words for the target sound /t/ could include cat, tap, and stop. Use graph paper to make bar graphs, labeling three columns B, M, and E. Make photocopies for children and a transparency to use for instruction.
2. Have children listen for the target sound in words you say aloud, then color a space on their graph paper to indicate whether it is heard at the beginning (B), middle (M), or end (E) of the word. Show examples using the overhead transparency before having children work independently.

**Color-Coded Sounds**

Task: phoneme isolation

**Materials**
- index cards
- pencil
- crayons
- counters

**Directions**
1. In advance, draw three horizontal fill-in-the-blank lines on each index card to designate beginning, middle, and ending sound positions of a word. Give a card to each child and have him or her color the first line green, the middle line blue, and the last line red.
2. Designate a target sound. Ask children to listen to a word containing the target sound, then place a counter on the index card to indicate where they hear the sound—on the green line if it's a beginning sound, the blue line if it's a middle sound, or the red line if it's an ending sound. Repeat with other words.
**Put It Together, Take It Apart**

Tasks: phoneme segmentation, phoneme counting, phoneme blending

### Materials
- linking cubes

### Directions
1. Distribute several linking cubes to each child.
2. Say a simple word such as *duck*. Have children repeat the word slowly, taking a cube for each sound they hear and linking cubes together.
3. Ask children to touch each linked cube from left to right, saying the corresponding sounds with each movement. Have them sweep their hand across the cubes as they blend the sounds to form the word.
4. Have children take the linking cubes apart, “breaking” the word as they say the corresponding phonemes for the last time. Repeat with other words.

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**I Spy**

Tasks: phoneme counting, phoneme isolation

### Materials
- none

### Directions
1. Have children identify “spied” objects by listening to your phoneme clues. Invite them to guess after each clue is given. For example:
   - *I spy an object with three sounds in its name.*
   - *I spy an object with three sounds in its name and the first is /b/.*
   - *I spy an object with three sounds in its name. The first sound is /b/, the last is /k/.*
   - *I spy an object with three sounds in its name. The first sound is /b/, the last is /k/, and it rhymes with look.*
2. Repeat with different objects. Invite volunteers to provide “I Spy” clues for their classmates.
Zippity-Bippity
Task: phoneme substitution

Materials
• none

Directions
1. Teach children the following verse to the tune of "Zippity-Do-Dah."
   Bippity-bo-bah, Bippity-bay,
   My, oh my, what a wonderful day.
   Plenty of sunshine coming my way.
   Bippity-bo-bah, Bippity-bay.
2. Have children repeat the song several times, substituting the initial sounds in the verse with other sounds. For example: mippity-mo-mah, wippity-wo-wah, tippity-to-tah.

Drop Off, Add On
Tasks: phoneme deletion, phoneme substitution

Materials
• Words within Words (page 117)

Directions
1. Read words from the word list one at a time. Ask children what sound needs to be dropped to uncover the "hidden word." For example, What sound do you drop to change meat to eat?
2. Increase the difficulty by using words with blends and clusters (sweep to weep, craft to raft, glitter to litter).
3. Vary the activity by having children add letters to given words (e.g., Add /c/ to the beginning of row to make ___).

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>substitute word</th>
<th>within words list</th>
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<th>drop off, add on</th>
<th>activity</th>
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Bibliography


APPENDIX B

Permission Letters
January 24, 2000

Kathy Evinger
Central Elementary School
774 N. 12th Street
Banning, CA 92220

Dear Ms. Evinger,

Thank you for your request to use Creative Teaching Press materials in your Phonemic Awareness workshop handbook.

Permission is granted to reproduce the following activities from *Phonemic Awareness* (CTP 2332) for your workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Page(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting to Know You</td>
<td>p. 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punch It Out</td>
<td>p. 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen Up!</td>
<td>p. 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Spy</td>
<td>p. 45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zippy-Bippy</td>
<td>p. 52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonemic-Awareness Inventory</td>
<td>p. 87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silly Greetings</td>
<td>p. 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop-Up People</td>
<td>p. 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color-Coded Sounds</td>
<td>p. 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put It Together, Take It Apart</td>
<td>p. 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop Off, Add On</td>
<td>p. 54</td>
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We thank you for your interest in Creative Teaching Press and hope your workshop is a success.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Cleland
Permissions Coordinator
Dear Permissions Editor,

My name is Kathy Evinger. I am a graduate student at Cal State University, San Bernardino. I am currently working towards earning a Master of Arts degree in education with an option in reading. To complete my program, I have elected to do a project. My project is to provide an in-service on phonemic awareness for the kindergarten teachers in my district (approximately 13 teachers).

At the beginning of the in-service I will give each teacher, in attendance, a handbook. The handbook will provide: (a) a definition of phonemic awareness (b) summaries from different research studies which support the importance for teaching phonemic awareness (c) different types of assessment (d) an assortment of activities the teachers can use in their classroom to stimulate development of phonemic awareness.

The reason for my letter is to ask for permission to place the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation from The Reading Teacher, Vol. 49, No.1 September 1995, page 22. The name of the article is, A test for assessing phonemic awareness in young children, written by Halie Kay Yopp.

Thank you for your assistance with this matter.

Sincerely,

Kathy Evinger
Kindergarten Teacher
Central Elementary School
IRA membership #498582
REFERENCES


Busink, R. (1997). Reading and phonological awareness: What we have learned and how we can use it. Reading Research and Instruction, 36 (3), 199-215.


