



Phonics

The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000a; 2000b; 2001) identified five essential components of reading instruction. One of those components was phonics instruction. Attention is given to this component in every Reading Recovery lesson.

Phonics Instruction from the National Reading Panel Reports and *Put Reading First*

Definition: “Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.” These relationships are referred to using a variety of labels: graphophonemic relationships, letter-sound associations, letter-sound correspondences, sound-symbol correspondences, and sound spellings. (NICHD, 2001, p. 12)

- Because phonics is not a total reading program, phonics instruction “should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached.” (NICHD, 2000b, p. 2-97)
- “Systematic phonics instruction should be integrated with other reading instruction in phonemic awareness, fluency, and comprehension strategies to create a complete reading program.” (NICHD, 2000a, p. 11)
- “Programs should acknowledge that systematic phonics instruction is a means to an end...Although children need to be taught the major consonant and vowel letter-sound relationships, they also need ample reading and writing activities that allow them to practice using this knowledge.” (NICHD, 2001, p. 17)
- “Phonics instruction is not an entire reading program for beginning readers...[It] is most effective when introduced early.” (NICHD, 2001, p. 15)
- Effective programs ...
 - teach children how to relate letters and sounds, how to break spoken words into sounds, and how to blend sounds to form words.
 - help children understand why they are learning about letter-sound relationships.
 - help children apply this knowledge as they read and write words, sentences, and texts/messages.
 - include alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and the reading of text.
 - can be adapted to the needs of individual students (based on assessment). (NICHD, 2001, p. 16)

Phonics in Reading Recovery Lessons

“Recent research has made it clear that we must pay attention to four aspects of how the sounds of English are represented in print.

1. Children have to learn to hear the sounds buried within words, and this is not an easy task.
2. Children have to learn to visually discriminate the symbols we use in print, and this is a large set of symbols.
3. Children have to learn to link single symbols and clusters of symbols with the sounds they represent.
4. Children have to learn that there are many alternatives and exceptions in our system of putting sounds into print.” (Clay, 2002, p. 112)

Assessment

In Reading Recovery, individual assessments reveal

- upper and lower case letters the child can identify by naming the letter, giving the letter sound, or naming a word beginning with the letter or sound.
- phonemes the child can connect to letters.
- specific phonemes the child can represent with letters in writing.
- the degree to which children use letter-sound knowledge and word patterns to read and write words.
- the degree to which the child can locate words in a text after hearing them.
- the child's ability to use letter-sound knowledge while reading continuous text.

Examples of Instructional Procedures

- Using magnetic letters, children learn quick and flexible recognition of letters; they also learn how to take words apart using phonological and orthographic knowledge.
- When reading continuous text, children learn to take words apart 'on the run.'
- In writing, children learn to hear the sounds in words and represent them with letters or letter clusters.
- Children work with letters and related sounds (e.g., making personalized alphabet books to link sounds and letters).
- Reassembling a cut-up sentence requires children to think about sounds in words as they place the words in order; the teacher segments words to focus on what a child needs to learn next.
- During oral reading of texts, children learn to use phonological and orthographic information to monitor their reading and to decode unfamiliar words; they learn to 'take words apart' on the run while reading texts.

References

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- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000a). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
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