



Phonemic Awareness

Facts For Teachers

- Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds in words. A “phoneme” is a speech sound. The word “mop” has 3 phonemes: /m/ /o/ /p/; the word “shoe” has 2 phonemes: /sh/ /u/. The number of phonemes may not correspond to the number of letters in the word.
- Children must understand that words are comprised of separate sounds (or phonemes) before they can make sense of the alphabet.
- The term “phonological awareness refers to general appreciation of how oral language can be divided into it’s components. For example, we speak in sentences. Sentences can be broken down into words, words into syllables and onset-rime. When the word is broken down into its smallest parts- individual sounds (or phonemes), the term “phonemic awareness” is used. Phonemic awareness is a subskill of the broader category of “phonological awareness.”
- Phonemic awareness and phonics are not the same! Phonics involves how speech sounds correspond to the written letter or letter combinations. Phonemic awareness is only about hearing and manipulating the individual sounds in words. An easy way to think about the difference between phonemic awareness and phonics is that phonemic awareness “can be done in the dark.”
- There are 7 skills that comprise phonemic awareness. These skills are:
 - Phoneme Isolation– What is the first sound in the word “soup”?
 - Auditory Discrimination– Which of these words don’t belong: beg, ball, hat?
 - Phoneme Blending– What word is this /s/ /o/ /k/?
 - Phoneme Segmentation– Tell me the sounds in the word “pale”
 - Phoneme Deletion– Say “stop”. Now say it without the /s/
 - Phoneme Addition– Add /f/ to the beginning of “rail”
 - Phoneme Substitution– Say “dog”. Now change the /d/ to //
- Research has identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the best two predictors of how well a child will learn to read during the first two years of school (National Reading Panel, 2000). Children who develop strong phonemic awareness skills at an early age are more likely to become fluent readers and better spellers than children who do not.
- In studies examining the amount of instructional time devoted to phonemic awareness found that the greatest gains were achieved with between 5 to 18 hours of instruction. The recommendation from the NRP is to ensure that 14-18 hours of phonemic awareness teaching be provided to young children. This means approximately 15 minutes per day for a semester of kindergarten be devoted to phonemic awareness instruction. It should be noted that this is a guideline. Some children will require less instruction while other students will require much more.



Phonemic Awareness Facts For Teachers (Continued)

- Phonemic awareness lessons should be taught in both whole-group and small group formats. A lesson may be first introduced in a large group and then supported in small groups for those students who require more intensive instruction. Small group instruction for students who struggle in this area is necessary as the students can better see the teacher's mouth as words are spoken and have more opportunities to respond and receive feedback from the teacher.
- When teaching phonemic awareness, be sure to focus on one or two phonemic awareness skills at a time. Instruction that focuses on one or two skills have a greater impact on learning than instruction that address several skills at the same time. For example, during a small group session, teach segmentation only rather than teaching 3-5 different phonemic awareness skills.
- When teaching phonemic awareness skills, be sure your instruction takes place in a relatively quiet area and that the students can clearly see your mouth. It is important for the students to be able to hear the sounds in the words as well as watch your mouth as the sounds are made.
- Especially during the beginning lessons of teaching phonemic awareness, exaggerate or "stretch out" the sounds of the words to emphasize the sounds. For example, when teaching beginning sound isolation, you may ask, "what is the first sound in the word 'sssssssuunnnn' (sun)?"
- Segmenting and blending are the two phonemic awareness skills found to have the greatest impact in learning to read.
- Using physical representations for sounds has been found to be helpful when teaching phonemic awareness concepts. For example, the use of blocks or chips can be used during a lesson where children are asked to move a block for each sound heard in a word ("mop" /m/ *move block*, /o/ *move block*, /p/ *move block*)

