

THE 5 BIG IDEAS OF Reading Instruction

I. Phonemic Awareness

Overview

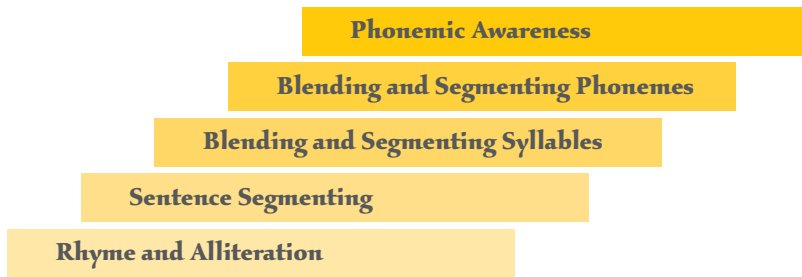
Phonemic Awareness is the understanding that spoken language is made up of a series of small sounds, or phonemes. It is fundamental to making the connection between the sounds of spoken language and the letters of written language. Research indicates that a child's level of phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors of success in learning to read. A child's phonemic awareness should be evaluated so intervention can be provided to support the development of phonemic awareness. This may be done through oral language activities that involve rhyming, alliteration, segmenting, blending, and manipulating sounds.

Children have a predisposition to acquire language; they do not have a predisposition to develop phonemic awareness. Without instructional support, phonemic awareness eludes about 25% of middle class first graders and significantly more children who come from less literacy rich backgrounds.

Effective Instruction

Research offers ample evidence that explicit instruction in blending and segmenting sounds can increase students' phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness should be a regular component of reading instruction in kindergarten and first grade.

A program of explicit instruction in phonological skills is critical for students whose phonemic awareness is weak. The following diagram will help you to understand the continuum of skills for developing phonological awareness.



The **Reading Academy Phonemic Awareness Module** offers some suggested techniques of effective phonemic awareness instruction.

> II. Phonics

Overview

Understanding phonics through the alphabetic principle involves recognizing that the letters from left to right in a printed word represent the sounds from beginning to end in the spoken word. It also involves knowing the relationships between letters and sounds (letter-sound correspondences) and using this knowledge to identify and pronounce words, as well as to spell them. The alphabetic principle is a critical part of learning to read. Children who acquire and learn to apply the alphabetic principle early in their reading experience enjoy long-term benefits in word recognition, reading comprehension, and spelling. Instruction and practice with sounding out words and manipulating letters and sounds help students develop this essential understanding.

Effective Instruction

Decoding skills play an early and critical role in word recognition. As children develop as readers and their knowledge of words and spelling patterns grows, they begin to employ a variety of word recognition strategies. Children who cannot name the letters easily need more practice with letter forms and letter names. Children who cannot read nonsense words fluently need more practice using common letter-sound correspondences to sound out words.

The **Reading Academy Phonics and Word Study Module** offers some effective instructional strategies for teaching phonics and word study.

III. Fluency

Overview

Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. The ability to recognize words quickly and accurately is essential for reading with fluency. When children no longer have to concentrate on decoding words, their attention is freed to focus on the meaning of the text. However, automaticity alone is not sufficient for fluency. To be fluent readers, children must also be able to read aloud with expression, changing tone and emphasis and pausing appropriately within and at the end of sentences.

Effective Instruction

Reading fluency is part of what has been identified as the second stage of reading development. In the first stage, children develop an understanding of the alphabetic principle and begin to use their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to decode words. In the second stage, children strengthen their decoding skills and develop other strategies to recognize words and make meaning from text. Reading fluency develops at the end of this second stage, when children are able to recognize many words by sight and are skilled at decoding words they don't know by sight.

Reading research has identified six ways to help children develop reading fluency. **The Reading Academy Fluency Module** provides more information on effective fluency strategies.

IV. Vocabulary

Overview

We equate vocabulary knowledge with education. In everyday life, we usually assume that a person with a large vocabulary who uses words correctly and effectively is well educated. This assumption is supported by educational research. A number of studies in the past quarter century have demonstrated the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and both reading comprehension and overall academic achievement. The connection is logical. On the most basic level, to comprehend what is read, readers must know what the words mean. Readers also must comprehend what they are reading to learn from reading. Because vocabulary knowledge is critical to reading comprehension and learning, developing children's knowledge of words should be an important part of reading instruction.

Effective Instruction

Researchers often refer to four types of vocabulary:

- **Listening vocabulary**—the words we need to know to understand what we hear
- **Speaking vocabulary**—the words we use when we speak
- **Reading vocabulary**—the words we need to know to understand what we read
- **Writing vocabulary**—the words we use in writing

It is important to make distinctions among the four types of vocabulary, because in the primary grades, vocabulary development should be about building students’ oral vocabulary. These are words students understand when they hear them and can use in speech. These will include many words that, because of the number of syllables or unfamiliar letter-sound correspondences, students cannot read or spell. Vocabulary development should not be constrained by students’ knowledge of letter-sound correspondences or readability formulas.

The complex task of developing students’ vocabulary has three elements:

1. Building a word-rich environment that supports indirect and direct word learning
2. Using instructional strategies that teach vocabulary effectively and model good word-learning behaviors
3. Helping students develop as independent word learners

The Reading Academy Vocabulary Development Module provides strategies to use for vocabulary development.

V. Comprehension

Overview

Technically speaking, comprehension is the complex cognitive process involving the intentional interaction between reader and text to extract meaning. Practically speaking, comprehension is what reading is all about. It is the reason for reading. All of the other big ideas of reading—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary knowledge have comprehension as their ultimate goal. When children are able to comprehend text, they understand what they read, remember what they read, and are able to communicate with others about what they read.

The critical role of reading in learning, for the most part, is reading informational text. The structure of informational text is quite different from the structure of fiction. Fiction is written in narrative mode; informational text is typically expository, presenting new and different challenges for the reader. Children who are fluent readers and comprehenders of narrative text often face challenges reading informational text. Particular attention needs to be paid to the challenges of reading informational text to ensure children's future success as readers and learners.

Effective Instruction

The goal of comprehension instruction is to create active readers—students who engage with the text, are aware of their thoughts as they read, know when their reading makes sense and when it does not, and are able to correct problems when understanding breaks down. You can help students become active readers in many ways.

When creating a plan of instruction, the goal should be to build children's familiarity with the external and internal features of informational text and enable them to . . .

- attend to information presented visually and integrate that information with the rest of the text.
- recognize text structure and create graphic organizers.
- grapple with text and construct meaning.

Helping students with informational text involves providing experiences with different examples, modeling how good readers engage with the text, giving insight into how ideas are organized, and teaching how the text works.

The Reading Academy Comprehension Module explores ways to increase comprehension strategies in the classroom.