
Introduction

Phonological awareness is a language skill that involves understanding the different ways in which spoken language can be broken down and manipulated. Acquisition of phonological awareness is the single, most important factor in learning to read and spell. Research suggests that children (and adults) who possess this skill are generally better readers and spellers, and that deficits in the skill are strong predictors of reading and spelling disabilities. This remarkable discovery has been documented throughout the world over the last twenty years and has been considered a “scientific success story” (Stanovich, 1987).

Phonological awareness research has also proven the following:

- The presence or absence of phonological-awareness skills can be identified in preschoolers.
- The skill can be trained both prior to and during reading instruction.
- Training will improve reading and spelling skills.
- Intelligence and exposure to literature, though important for overall development, are less predictive of reading success than phonological awareness.

The implications of this research provide educators and parents with the power to change the course of a child’s road towards literacy.

Educators and parents are now in a position to promote literacy even before formal reading instruction has begun. For the majority of children, phonological awareness requires no direct instruction and develops naturally. However, many children, some of whom are at risk for reading disabilities or dyslexia, will not benefit from mere exposure to print because they lack this awareness. We now know that *when phonological awareness does not develop naturally, it can be trained.*

Research and instructional practice have contributed to our understanding of the series of skills that phonological awareness includes. In order to benefit from explicit reading instruction in an alphabetic language, such as English, children need to have an elementary ability to perceive *phonemes*, i.e., distinct speech sounds. For example, they need to know these kinds of things:

- The sounds /k/ and /g/ are different.
- *Tape* starts with the sound /t/ and ends in the sound of /p/.
- *Acrobat* starts with the sound of /a/.
- The word *head* has three sounds, /h/, /e/, and /d/.

Research and classroom experience have demonstrated that there are skills that usually **precede** awareness of the phoneme or “phoneme awareness”:

- Typically, children will be able to segment words into syllables before they can segment them into phonemes.

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- Rhyming, an important reading-readiness skill, usually precedes awareness of phonemes.

Approximately 60% of children learn how to read, regardless of the method we use with them, precisely because they have this natural phonological awareness capacity and sufficient verbal memory to master symbol sound rules. A significant number of the other 40% have average to above-average intelligence and otherwise good oral language skills. What they often lack is **phonological awareness**.

What are teachers in regular classrooms to do with this important data? How does one bring to life phonological awareness in the classroom?

Purpose of this Program

The Sounds Abound Program is a practical approach to applying the guiding principles of research to the regular classroom. *The Sounds Abound Program* demonstrates activities for entire classrooms, gives you the tools to decide which activities to choose, and helps meet the needs of children with varied levels of phonological awareness. *The Sounds Abound Program* does the following:

- Introduces teachers to the concepts of phonological and phonemic awareness
- Helps teachers understand why these skills are important
- Helps teachers understand what levels of phonological awareness skills are necessary for literacy in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade

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- Introduces key research findings to support the provision of direct training in phonological awareness
 - Provides a sequential series of classroom activities to develop phonological awareness
 - Uses DVD technology to demonstrate how easily these activities can be incorporated within a regular classroom
 - Suggests follow-up activities
 - Provides teachers with tools to challenge advanced students and support children experiencing difficulties within the classroom
 - Offers individual remediation activities to help children who may be in need of more intense and specific instruction

What does phonological awareness involve?

Phonological awareness is a language skill that involves understanding the different ways in which spoken language can be broken down and manipulated. Phonological awareness includes the following subskills:

1. Isolating words in a sentence
2. Rhyming
3. Segmenting words into syllables and sounds
4. Blending syllables and sounds together
5. Manipulating sounds within words