Phonemic Awareness

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What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that spoken words and syllables are themselves made up of sequences of elementary speech sounds, or phonemes, and the ability to manipulate them. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound in the English language that make a difference in a word’s meaning. Phonemic awareness is the link between spoken and written language. It is the conscious awareness of the sounds in spoken words.

Research has shown that phonemic awareness is a powerful predictor of success in learning to read (Stanovich, 1986; 1993; Share & Stanovich, 1995). Although phonemic awareness is not easy for many children, it can be fostered through language activities that encourage active exploration and manipulation of sounds, which in turn can aid in the development of reading and writing in children.

To learn how to read successfully, children need to understand the purposes and conventions of reading and writing, the unique features of the alphabet, and the relationship of spoken to written language. Knowledge about letters, sounds, words, and print in general, varies from child to child.

Support for phonemic awareness development should occur in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. Yopp (1992), suggested that such support will help in the development of the following abilities:

- Attend to the separate words in sentences.
- Break up words into syllables.
- Detect and generate rhymes.
- Engage in alliterative language play.
- Blend phonemes to make words.
- Make new words by substituting one phoneme for another.
- Identify the middle and final phonemes of words.
- Segment words into phonemes.

We, at The FLaRE Center, view phonemic awareness as the ability to identify, to consciously think about, and to manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in words.

Phonemic awareness is a form of metalinguistic knowledge that develops gradually (Stahl & Murray, 1994); it indicates that children understand the nature of the spoken language, which is necessary for skilled reading of the alphabetic code. Phonemic awareness is metalinguistic because it includes the ability to reflect on, and talk about, language concepts.
Phonemic awareness is not the same thing as phonics. Phonics refers to using letter-sound relationships and other rules to identify words. Students with limited phonemic awareness will have trouble acquiring the alphabetic principle, which in turn will limit their ability to decode words (Blachman, 1991) and will not benefit from phonics (Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986).

Through early experiences with print children develop an understanding of what print is, how it functions, how it relates to speech, the directionality of written language, the relationship between speech and writing, and how language works. This knowledge is a result of experiences with reading and writing activities and other interactions with language and adults that are part of early childhood environments (Savage, 2001). Adams (1990) concluded that the best two predictors of beginning reading success are the alphabetic principle and phonemic awareness.

Lapp and Flood (1997) stated, “Learning to read is made much easier when children have acquired three prerequisite understandings about print: print carries messages, printed words are composed of letters, and letters correspond to the sounds in spoken words” (p. 698).

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the role of phonemic awareness in successful reading development. The conclusion from these studies seems to be that although phonemic awareness is an important factor, it is not sufficient in and of itself to guarantee reading success (Lyon, 1997). Phonemic awareness should be seen as an important component of a balanced reading program in the early elementary grades.

Adams (1990) identified six essential phonemic awareness tasks for students to acquire and teachers to assess during the early elementary grades. These elements are:

- **Phonemic Segmentation Tasks:** Can the child decompose a syllable into its component phonemes? “What sounds do you hear in the word hat? “ (Three--/h/ /a/ /t/).

- **Phonemic Manipulation Tasks:** Can the child pronounce a word after its first, middle, or last phoneme has been removed? “Replace the beginning sound in the word make with /c/. What is the new word?” (cake).

- **Syllable-Splitting Tasks:** Can the student break off the first phoneme of a word or a syllable? ”I’ll say the word and you’ll break off the first phoneme of the word.” (Teacher says “dog” and the student says “d-d-d”). Or, “I’ll say the first phoneme and you’ll say what’s left.” (The teacher says “sink” and the student says “ink”).
• **Blending Tasks:** “I’ll say the first part of the word and then the rest of the word; I want you to put it all together. /hl/….at. What is the word?” (*hat*).

• **Oddity Tasks:** When the student is presented with a set of three or four words can he identify which of the words is different when asked to? (*pill, mill, hop*).

• **Knowledge of Nursery Rhymes:** Early knowledge of nursery rhymes—and especially, the ability to hear rhymes (Blevins, 1997)—is related to the development of phonological awareness skills and emergent reading development.

Yopp (1992) suggested that students who have developed phonemic awareness can manipulate the spoken language in the following ways:

- Match words with sounds.
- Isolate a sound in a word.
- Blend individual sounds to form a word.
- Substitute sounds in a word.
- Segment a word into its constituent sounds.

Phonemic awareness does not develop automatically or naturally in the early years. Young children do not consciously break individual sounds apart as part of their normal life; they mainly concentrate on the meanings of the spoken language (Adams, 1990). If children do not understand that words are made up of individual sounds, it is very difficult for them to benefit from phonics instruction or to understand the alphabetic principle and benefit from phonics instruction.

Phonemic awareness can be acquired through direct instruction—mini-lessons—and through exposure to print and initial word play. Explicit instruction followed by guided reading can be especially beneficial to students with limited phonemic awareness (Snider, 1995). Implicit instruction (i.e., songs, invented spelling, literature that includes word play) can also assist in phonemic awareness development (Griffith & Olson, 1992; Yopp, 1992).

Creating a literate, language-rich and print-rich environment, creating opportunities for singing songs, playing with words, chanting rhymes, listening to parents and teachers read wordplay books (Griffin & Olson, 1992), integrating reading across subjects, and helping children see the meaningfulness and purpose of reading can help their overall literacy development. Yopp (1995) recommended that teachers read books with wordplay aloud and encourage students to talk about the way the author manipulated words.
Adams (1990) proposed that we should teach children about what good readers do. The following is a list of skillful readers’ characteristics:

- Have and use a good knowledge about word patterns, orthographic redundancy, and complete spellings.
- Recognize letters accurately and quickly.
- Produce spelling-sound translations.
- Pay attention to the semantic and syntactic constraints of text.

Adams (1990) stated that teachers can help children develop and refine their recognition of letters by teaching synthetic phonics, practicing writing, and exercises with blends and digraphs, and frequent practice with word families, or phonograms. Teachers can encourage students to not skip words that are unknown but rather to look carefully at its spelling and sound out its pronunciation. Selecting materials and text that will enable struggling readers to experience success is another important suggestion. Repeated readings of difficult words and text can bring about improvements in reading fluency, comprehension, and expression during oral reading.

Phonemic awareness develops gradually through reading instruction. Blevins (1997) has estimated that approximately 20% of young children lack phonemic awareness. Below is a list of many recommendations that have been suggested (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986; Yopp, 1992) for the selection of phonemic awareness activities:

- Create positive, playful, and fun learning activities to reinforce and develop children’s awareness of sounds in words (e.g., nursery rhymes, riddles, songs, chants, poems, read-alouds books, and other games.).
- Create opportunities for children to interact.
- Create opportunities for children to write.
- Encourage experimentation with language.
- Continue to read to your child.
- Discuss books with your child.
- Encourage story writing by listening to the stories children tell.

Research has shown that phonemic awareness can be a stronger predictor of reading progress that IQ (Adams, 1990; Hurford, et al., 1993) and kindergarten children’s phonemic awareness can affect their reading success in grades 1, 2, and even in high school (MacDonald & Cornwall, 1995). Adams (1990) stated that children who fail to acquire phonemic awareness “are severely handicapped in their ability to master print” (p. 412). Adams’s (1990) work has showed that after phonemic awareness, the strongest predictor of first grade reading is the child’s ability to recognize letters.
Stanovich (1986) concluded that phonemic awareness is a more powerful predictor than non-verbal intelligence, vocabulary, and listening comprehension, and it often correlates more highly with reading acquisition than tests of general intelligence or reading readiness. Stanovich (1994) restated: “Most importantly, [phonemic awareness tasks] are the best predictors of the ease of early reading acquisition—better than anything else that we know of, including IQ” (p. 284). Instruction in phonemic awareness skills has a positive impact on later reading development (Crowder & Wagner, 1991; Cunningham, 1990; Ehri, 1984, 1985; Torgesen, 1993). Children with high phonemic awareness outperformed those with low phonemic awareness on all literacy measures, whether they were taught using a traditional basal instruction or whole language (Griffith, Klesius, & Kromrey, 1992).

Many studies have demonstrated that when children with weak phonemic awareness skills receive a short but consistent instruction in letter-sound and word learning (i.e., 15-20 minutes daily) they improve rapidly (e.g., Blachman, 1994; Hatcher, Hulme, & Ellis, 1994; Hurford et al., 1994; Tangel & Blachman, 1992, 1995; Vandervelden & Siegel, 1997). Phonemic awareness helps children focus on the exact order of the individual sounds they hear in words.

Phonics instruction can benefit phonemic awareness development, phonemic awareness can help phonics instruction, and both can be enriched by whole word learning as well (Adams, 1990; Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). We do not have to separate these activities; actually, we shouldn’t if we want children to become skilled readers. The importance of phonemic awareness is not “owned” by phonics instruction or whole language approach; instead, it is an important variable both in traditional and whole language classrooms (Griffith, Klesius, & Kromrey, 1992).

Because whole language deals with word analysis skills only when they occur incidentally in the context of reading connected text (Goodman, Hood, & Goodman, 1991), some teachers and many kindergarten programs do not incorporate systematic phonemic awareness activities into their reading programs. In addition, the children who truly need phonemic awareness instruction do not receive it in regular education classrooms. The goal of phonics instruction is to help readers identify unknown words on their own. Phonics is best learned in the context of reading and writing and is best taught by well-informed teachers in reading instruction and children’s development.

A balanced approach to teaching reading delivered by knowledgeable teachers can help teach students based on their individual needs and interest. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) concluded that this balance can be provided only by teachers who have expertise in: (a) systematically assess children’s reading development, (b) thoughtfully plan instruction that falls within the student’s zone of proximal development, and (c) offer best-teaching practices.
Torgesen and Davis (1996) presented a number of phonemic awareness activities that can be used on an individual basis and can be adapted for older struggling readers. Teachers should be knowledgeable of the developmental requirements of phonemic awareness activities and blend phonemic awareness in the language arts curriculum in Kindergarten and first grade. Phonemic awareness activities should be treated as a natural extension of shared reading activities.

Phonemic awareness activities will not be helpful to a child unless they are used in a meaningful context of reading and writing (Griffith & Olson, 1992). The following instructional activities take only 15-20 minutes to play with the sounds of language and can be incorporated in the regular curriculum (Blevins, 1998; Edelen-Smith, 1997; Yopp, 1995):

- Select words from the child’s immediate environment (e.g., a class field trip, a book read by the teacher in class, words from a thematic unit).
- Break compound words into its parts and ask “What two words do you hear in motor-car?”
- Expose children to word play.
- Expose children to literature that uses rhyme and alliteration.
- Read and reread stories.
- Comment on language use in stories.
- Encourage children to predict sounds, words, and sentence patterns.
- Encourage children to create another version of the story.
- Model initial rhyme recognition.
- Help children develop sound recognition by associating phonemes with objects that is familiar to them.
- Use clapping or tapping to count syllables.
- Play games that invite children to synthesize sounds (e.g., “It starts with /d/ and it ends with og; put it together and it says dog.”).
- Ask children to identify the beginning, medial, and final sound of a word.
- Encourage children to practice invented spelling.
- Use word-to-word matching activities.
- Use sound deletion activities.

Wagstaff (1997/1998) stated that through shared reading of simple predictable books, teachers can model what readers do. She modeled the following skills to her kindergarten students and used read-alouds to encourage independent storybook reading:

- Where to begin reading.
What Teachers Can Do

Various researchers have examined the instructional practices of teachers who have had success in teaching children to read (e.g., Pressley & Rankin, 1994; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996). Effective teachers of reading used an approach that combined a variety of language-based and literature-based activities with comprehensive, explicit instruction (Honig, 2001). These teachers provided direct instruction to teach the following skills and meaningful contexts in which students applied the skills:

- Alphabet recognition.
- Phonemic awareness.
- The alphabetic principle.
- Phonics.
- Decoding.
- Other word recognition skills (Honig, 2001).

The authors of the International Reading Association’s position statement, *Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading* (1998), emphasized the importance of phonemic awareness in learning to read and spell. They suggested that teachers need to become aware of the importance of phonemic awareness and knowledgeable of the existing research on phonemic awareness and reading development. The following is a list of their suggestions:

- There are wide differences in the amounts, forms, acquisition, and forms of phonemic awareness instruction and experiences children will need.
- Offer systematic instruction and interactions with language in children’s home, preschool, and kindergarten experiences.
- Provide intensive reading instruction to students with display limited phonemic awareness development.
- Offer print-rich environment.
- Engage students with print as readers and writers.
- Engage children in spoken and written language activities.
• Support students’ development of the alphabetic principle through explicit explanations.
• Provide opportunities for students to practice reading and writing in real-life applications.

Blevins (1997) has summarized key information teachers in kindergarten through grade 2 need to keep in mind as they plan for instruction in phonemic awareness:

• *Phonemic awareness is not related to print.* Phonemic awareness is about oral and listening activities. Once children can name and identify the letters of the alphabet, they are ready to move into learning the alphabetic principle.

• *Many poor readers in the early grades have weak phonemic skills.* Issues and training in phonemic awareness may well be a concern of K-12 teachers and students considered “remedial” readers.

• *Model, model, model.* Children need to see phonemic activities modeled by teachers and other peers. (pp. 7-8)

Snider (1995) stated that it is very important that teachers provide sufficient instruction before providing phonemic practice activities. She suggested that activities proceed from easy to hard in the following order:

• Larger units before smaller units.
• Onsets and rimes.
• Continuous before stop sounds.
• Fewer sounds before more sounds.
• Auditory blending before segmenting.
• Multi-sensory activities.
• Blending and segmenting before manipulation.
• Oral before written language.

Wagstaff (1997/1998) also reinforced letter-sound knowledge through word play activities, oral discussions and “morning messages,” rhymes, chants, riddles, poems, alphabet word walls, and word walls with common digraphs and rimes. These activities advanced students’ phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and helped discover and apply purpose in reading and writing.
Richgels, Poremba, and McGee (1996) presented a promising, authentic, and interactive activity--used with shared reading--called “What can you show us?” to help children look carefully at print as they develop phonemic awareness. This activity involves three parts:

- **Preparation**—refers to the selection of appropriate literature and the ways the teacher will highlight the elements of print she wants the students to notice (e.g., capital letters, or words).

- **Previewing**—the teacher creates opportunities for student to discuss the text or what they see.

- **Applications**—the teacher invites the students to demonstrate their knowledge either by identifying a word, sound-letter correspondence, or punctuation.

They proposed that teachers need to go beyond direct instruction in analyzing words by sounds, beyond the traditional manipulation of sounds in words and associating letters with sounds; in addition, teachers need to invite children to take initiative to look at print and to show what they already know. The teacher also involves the children in predictions about the text, discussions about illustrations and characters, and in taking other students’ perspectives.

Teachers should help children focus on the sounds and uses of language through stories—read aloud, shared reading--, songs, riddles, rhymes, chants, and games. Yopp (1995) recommended the use of games such as “What am I thinking of?” to encourage children to blend orally spoken sounds together. For example, the teacher says the following three sounds: “/p/-/i/-/n/.” Children then blend the sounds together and say “pin.” The teacher can play this game with students or students can play it with other students.

Other activities that can help children become aware of sounds of words and sounds within words include:

- Acting out stories—children become the words (Cunningham, 1995).
- Clapping out syllables.
- Read and play with rhymes.
- Include pocket charts as a basis for children to find words and build sentences from books they’ve read.
- Sort words by length and letters (Cunningham, 1995).
- Guess-the-Word Game.
• Change the Letter or Change the Word game.
• Do the Names Activity—focus on each child’s name and ask him/her to look carefully at every letter within the word (Cunningham, 1995).
• Encourage invented spelling.

Teachers also need to be knowledgeable about tests for assessing phonemic awareness and use instruments (e.g., Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation (Yopp, 1995)) to identify children who are likely to experience difficulty in phonemic awareness tasks, identify children’s strengths and weaknesses, and provide them with appropriate instruction (Yopp, 1995).

Dorothy Strickland (1998) called for common ground in the phonics and whole language debate. She asserted that educators have to agree on the following issues:

• Skills and meaning should not be taught separately.
• Instruction is systematic when is planned, deliberate in application, and proceeds in a mannerly manner.
• Intensive instruction on any particular skill or strategy should be based on individual student need.
• The monitoring of student learning should be done on an ongoing basis in order for teachers to determine the intensity of instruction required to help a child succeed.
• Teachers need to be knowledgeable of their district’s objectives at the grade levels above and below theirs.

Strickland (1998) also stated that effective teachers recognize both phonics and phonemic awareness as useful tools for successful reading and writing and are aware of the dangers of over-reliance of either method on reading. Finally, she called for teachers to take advantage of effective research and practice.

Yopp (2000) presented an array of fun activities that can help phonemic awareness development in children. She highlighted that phonemic awareness instruction needs to be developmentally appropriate and purposeful. Phonemic awareness instruction also needs to viewed by educators as a part (emphasis added) of a comprehensive literacy program. Teachers need to assess children’s growth and provide additional instruction when needed, provide a language-rich environment in which both the content and structure of language are examined. Phonemic awareness instruction should not (emphasis added) replace vocabulary development, reading and writing, comprehension, and other important literacy aspects.
What Principals/Schools Can Do

Juel (1994) stated:

A lack of phonemic awareness severely limits children’s growth in cipher knowledge, which in turn limits their ability to recognize words and to spell, which ultimately acts to constrain growth in listening comprehension and ideas that will in turn limit reading comprehension and writing. (p.121)

Without planned intervention during these early critical years, the reading development and reading success of students can be severed. Principals play an equally important role in children’s early literacy development. They can help by creating and maintaining a school-wide focus on reading, using standards to design the curriculum, become knowledgeable about up-to-date research on literacy, emphasize early assessment of reading difficulties, help develop programs that provide early intervention, encourage teachers to use research-based strategies, enlarge the school’s resources, provide professional development for teachers, build partnerships with parents and community, and create a supportive academic environment (Harris, 1996; United States Department of Education, America Reads Challenge, 1998).

School administrators need to be knowledgeable about literacy acquisition and effective instructional practices. They also need to help create quality early childhood programs and programs that provide additional expert assistance to students with severe reading difficulties. Principals can also ensure adequate school resources, locate funds for school libraries, and create partnerships with the community and parents.

Creating a supportive school environment for teachers, students, and parents is necessary for the development of effective reading programs. School administrators can play an instrumental role in the development of family literacy programs, school-wide reading programs, in providing ongoing staff development, and ongoing assessment of students’ needs.

Allington and Walmsley (1995) concluded that ongoing reading intervention efforts are needed in schools in order to meet the unique needs of struggling readers. According to Allington and Walmsley (1995), research-based interventions should include the following characteristics:

- improving classroom instruction
- providing intensive, expert instruction
- increasing available instructional time
- availability of resources to all children
Duffy-Hester (1999) conducted an extensive review of classroom reading programs that have been proven to enhance the reading performance of struggling readers. The following is a summary of the key elements of these programs:

- An effective reading program needs to be balanced.
- There should be theoretical and methodological explanations for the components and structure of the program.
- Explicit teaching of word identification, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies needs to take place in combination with authentic reading and writing activities.
- Teachers should read aloud to students daily.
- Teachers should create opportunities for students to read instructional and independent level texts.
- Students should be exposed to a variety of texts.
- Reading assessments should inform reading instruction.
- Teachers need to be informed about reading instruction and use their instructional, personal, and experiential knowledge to make decisions about reading instruction.
- Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their practice.
- Reading programs can be multi-leveled to meet the various needs of students.
- Reading programs should be designed to meet the needs of all students.

Allington (2001) called for an increase in the amount of time teachers and schools allocate for students to read and write. He also suggested that reading and writing should be integrated across the curriculum. Allington (2001) declared that for children to become fluent readers, they need the following:

- learn a variety of reading strategies;
- have lots of time to read;
- expert reading instruction from well-informed teachers;
- have a variety of books they can read;
- be immersed in quality literature; and
- develop their comprehension.

What Parents Can Do

All of the current recommendations for increasing success in reading point to an early start and a strong finish by preparing young children to read and providing excellent instruction and community support in the primary grades. What parents do, or do not do, has a tremendous impact on children’s attitudes toward reading and reading success.
The following are sample ideas for parents to help develop children’s phonemic awareness (Opitz, 1998):

- Read daily to your child for fun and enjoyment.
- Talk with your child a lot.
- Play with rhyming words.
- Discuss with your child words that begin with the same sound as the rhyming word you identified.
- Invite your child to act out the story, to create a similar story, to write or illustrate favorite parts of the story, to create a song or rhyme about the story.
- Focus on what your child can do.
- Surround your child with things to read.

Summary

Phonemic awareness is the knowledge that words are made up of a sequence of spoken sounds. Research shows that when early reading instruction ignores many important strategies and practices by abstracting discrete skills from the total act of reading, it excludes other essential practices. As with teaching the alphabet, attention needs to be placed in the instructional strategies, time allocation, and performance expectations we bring in to sound-symbol relationships in the early childhood classroom. Like the letters of the alphabet, sound-symbol relationships are abstract and lack intrinsic meaning for children (Morrow, 1997).

Only a child who has assimilated concepts about books and print and has acquired a sight vocabulary begins to show an interest in trying to decode unknown words independently. Studies have demonstrated that children who are taught phonics as part of initial reading instruction do achieve better in the early grades than children who have not. We must remember that the goal of teaching phonics is not to memorize rules, but to help children understand that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds (Morrow, 1997).

Phonemic awareness is a precursor to phonics because phonics instruction presupposes the ability to hear and manipulate sound values in decoding unfamiliar words. For phonics instruction to be successful, it needs to:

- Build on a foundation of phonemic awareness.
- Be integrated into the total reading program (Stahl, 1992).
• Include the teaching of onsets and rimes.
• Encourage the use of invented spelling and spelling-based strategies.

Poindexter (1998) concluded that phonemic awareness:

• Helps children understand how words work through oral language, word play, rhyming, and signing.
• *Is a necessary but not sufficient* (emphasis added) condition for learning to read.
• Can be stimulated and taught.
• Is a strong determinant of reading success or failure.
• Includes instruction in syllables, rhymes, segmentation, blending, and manipulation.

There is a plethora of research showing what we need to do to help children to become skilled readers. We know that successful reading programs have the following characteristics:

• Are designed by well-informed practitioners.
• Include reading instruction that is based on research.
• Include reading instruction that is based on accurate diagnosis.
• Help children develop print concepts.
• Help children develop knowledge of names and shapes.
• Help children develop phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence.
• Provide rich language experiences that encourage active exploration and manipulation of sounds.
• Provide meaningful systematic and explicit instruction in sound/symbol relationships.
• Provide a variety of quality literature.
• Include regular reading to children.
• Provide opportunities for children to practice reading and writing.
• Use group settings that encourage interaction among children.
• Help children discover the relationship between reading and writing.
• Create language-and print-rich classrooms.

Phonemic awareness is not an end to itself—it is only one significant aspect of literacy development. It should not be taught as a set of discrete skills; it needs to be woven into a meaningful framework. Phonemic awareness activities should not become “drill and kill” activities; rather, they should be incorporated into the daily literacy activities and integrated throughout the day.
Attention needs to be given to the teaching of specific skills as well as to the “meta-level” instruction—instruction as to how to use this knowledge (Cunningham, 1990). The teacher is the informed practitioner who will make educated decisions about the type and amount of instruction each student needs. Phonemic awareness should be taught to the extent dictated by each child’s unique needs.
References


**Alliteration** — The repetition of the initial phoneme in a word or group of words (e.g., Sam says Sally skates at Seaside Shore).

**Alphabetic Principle** — The understanding that letters in words represent the phonemes in spoken words and that spoken words are represented by text.

**Basal Instruction** — Instruction that uses a pre-formated, compilation of materials such as student texts, workbooks, writing folders, teacher’s manuals used for developing reading skills.

**Blending Tasks** — Tasks involving uniting phonemes together to form words.

**Comprehension** — The process of constructing meaning from text.

**Directionality** — A visual skill where students have the ability to read from left to right.

**Digraphs** — Two letters that act as one speech sound when pronounced (sh, ch, wh).

**Direct/Explicit Instruction** — Teaching involving systematic modeling and demonstrating of material with emphasis on the student’s understanding and taking responsibility for their learning.

**Fluency** — The ability to read smoothly and automatically while still focusing attention on comprehending the text.

**Knowledge of Nursery Rhyme** — Early knowledge of nursery rhymes—and especially, the ability to hear rhymes.

**Language Rich Environment (Print Rich)** — An environment which contains print in all shapes and forms.
Oddity Tasks — Tasks involving the child to identify which word is different when the student is presented with a set of three or four words (e.g., pill, mill, hop, bill).

Onsets — The letters in a word located before the first syllable.

Phonemes — The smallest units of sound in the English language that make a difference in a word’s meaning.

Phonemic Awareness — The understanding that spoken words and syllables are themselves made up of sequences of elementary speech sounds, or phonemes, and the ability to manipulate them.

Phonemic Manipulation Tasks — Tasks involving the child being able to pronounce a word after its first, middle, or last phoneme has been removed.

Phonemic Segmentation Tasks — Tasks involving the decomposition of a syllable into its component phonemes.

Phonological Awareness — An awareness of all levels of the speech sound system, including word boundaries, stress patterns, syllables, onset-rime units, and phonemes.

Phonics or Phonics Instruction — Refers to using letter-sound relationships and other rules to identify words.

Rhyming — Words whose final phonemes that sharing identical or similar sounds in the final syllable.

Rime — The letters in a word located after the onset.

Syllable-Splitting Tasks — Tasks involving the child to split words into syllables and sounds.

Segment — To break into parts.

Word Families — Words that have the same letter patterns in them, especially located in the rime. The words fat, cat, and hat all belong to the same word family.

Zone of Proximal Development — The area between where students will need help to achieve a goal and where they can achieve the goal independently.