

Research Précis

EARLY CHILDHOOD LITERACY: Teaching Children to Read

The area that most references preschool-age children is phonemic awareness (PA) instruction. PA assessment and practice are generally done using one of the following tasks:

Phoneme isolation – recognizing individual sounds in words. “Tell me the first (middle, last) sound in bed.”

Phoneme identity – recognizing the common sound in different words. “Tell me the sound that is the same in these words: run, rabbit, rail.” (/r/)

Phoneme categorization – recognizing the word with the odd sound in a sequence of three or four words. “Which word does not belong? Hat, cat, doll.” (doll)

Phoneme blending – listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them to form a word. “What word is /p/, /A/, /s/, /t/? (paste)

Phoneme segmentation – breaking a word into its sounds by tapping out or counting the sounds or by pronouncing and positioning a marker for each sound. “How many phonemes are there in tooth?” (3)

Phoneme deletion – recognizing what word remains when a phoneme is removed. “What is thread without the /th/?” (read or red)

The National Reading Panel (NRP) was convened in 1997 to assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read. They provided a report that presented the NRP’s conclusions in December 2000, the *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read*. They settled on the following topics of research for study:

1. Alphabetics
 - Phonemic Awareness Instruction
 - Phonics Instruction
2. Fluency
3. Comprehension
 - Vocabulary Instruction
 - Text Comprehension Instruction
 - Teacher Preparation and Comprehension Strategies Instruction
4. Teacher Education and Reading Instruction
5. Computer Technology and Reading Instruction

The results found by the NRP showed that preschoolers exhibited greater benefit to their reading skills and phonemic awareness than did the older students. They also found that children benefited most from small group instruction as opposed to individual and classroom instruction. The amount of time spent teaching children was influential, with those receiving less than 20 hours but more than 5 hours in the groups studied showing the greatest benefit. Those students that were taught using one or two phoneme strategies also benefited more than those receiving three or more.