

Differences in Phonics, Phonemic Awareness, Whole Language And 3-D Mastery of Whole Words

Bill Allen

Phonemic Awareness (PA)

PA provides an entry to Phonics and is different than phonics in that it never involves analyzing print other than perhaps the letters of the alphabet being sounded. PA is usually the introduction to letters and reading made in pre-school and kindergarten, and... is all about the sounds of our language.

In easy-to-understand terms, phonemic awareness is the ability to identify, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken speech. This is NOT the same as phonics. Phonemic awareness is actually a critical skill that is a precursor to reading letters. That's why phonemic awareness instruction should NEVER involve print. If you find yourself working with letters or printed words, then you have skipped a step and crossed the line into phonics. This is a very important point. Research tells us that it's essential to focus on phonemic awareness in the classroom before reading can begin. We want to ensure that children have a solid understanding of the sounds of speech before we start phonics instruction."

<https://www.earlychildhoodteacher.org/blog/5-quick-easy-and-fun-phonemic-awareness-activities/>

Phonics

In phonics, the sounds (phonemes) of spoken English are matched with individual letters or groups of letters (graphemes) to learn to read. Phonics provides an abstract language, a symbolic representation of words, that is used to learn to recognize written letters, groups of letters, and words by following rules for sounding them out and grouping them. For example, the sound k can be spelled as c, k, ck or ch... how do you read: "church," "check," "hook," "cat"?

Four Kinds of Reading Programs

(Wikipedia.com ... Phonics; Phonemic Awareness, Whole Language)

1] Phonemic Awareness (PA)

Phonemic Awareness, a derivative of phonics, is about the sound system of language, independent of text —attention is paid to the sounds of spoken words as distinct from their meanings. PA is a subset of [phonological awareness](#) and phonics in which listeners are able to hear, identify and

manipulate [phonemes](#), the smallest mental units of [sound](#) that helps to differentiate units of meaning ([morphemes](#)).

Separating the spoken word "cat" into three distinct phonemes, [/k/](#), [/æ/](#), and [/t/](#), requires phonemic awareness. However, phonemes cannot be separated like notes in a song nor can they be identified in isolation. The [National Reading Panel](#) has found that phonemic awareness improves children's word [reading](#) and [reading comprehension](#), as well as helping children learn to spell.^[1] Phonemic awareness is often used as the basis for learning [phonics](#).^[2]

Phonemic awareness and Phonological awareness are often confused since they are interdependent. Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate individual phonemes, the smallest mental units of [sound](#) that helps to differentiate units of meaning ([morphemes](#)). Phonological awareness includes this ability, but it also includes the ability to hear and manipulate larger units of sound, such as [onsets](#) and [rimes](#) and [syllables](#). (Wikipedia)

Oral language and Phonemic Awareness skills must be in place before phonics or reading training are begun.

"I can ask people all the time how many sounds they hear in "big" or "cat" and they say three. But they don't. You don't hear three sounds in cat, I don't hear three sounds in cat, and our kids never get any practice with the sounds in cat because nature has given us an oral language that allows us to communicate rapidly so that when I say "cat," I don't say /c/ /a/ /t/. What the hell is a /c/ /a/ /t/? What I say is "cat," and the minute I start to say "cat" the /a/ and the /t/ sound co-articulate or bundle together and come by the ear as one pulse of sound."

Phoneme awareness is much more difficult than most people are aware of because you don't hear the sounds. The brain has to pull and recognize from one burble or acoustic bundle the three sounds of "cat," because the ear won't. The ear never hears the individual sounds unless we spell them out."

G. Reid Lyon, Past- Chief of the Child Development and Behavior Branch of the [National Institute of Child Health & Human Development](#), [National Institutes of Health](#), Current senior vice president for research and evaluation with Best Associates. Source: COTC Interview – <https://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/lyon.htm#Whatwewknow>

It turns out that children who have difficulty with written language as a group, not all of them but the large majority of them, have difficulty in becoming phonologically aware and playing little word games, like being able to know that the word "plate" without the /p/ is the word "late." Now, people who have coded the whole word can say the word "plate" perfectly well. If they are not phonologically aware, they don't know they can get inside the word; and they have very great difficulty in knowing that /plate/ without the /p/ would make the word "late." Or "plate" without the /t/ would make the word "plae."

Paula Tallal, Board of Governor's Chair of Neuroscience and Co-Director of the Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience at Rutgers University. Source: COTC (children of the code) <https://childrenofthecode.org/library/refs/phonemicawareness.htm>

The Phonemic Awareness schools expect an expensive 3-yr parental commitment to teach a child to read. The PA learning-to-read methodology is multi-sensory at times, and yet it is incomplete because of the program's lack of successfully teaching children to learn to read two-dimensional abstract learning of letters, sounds and words. Based on a fatal flaw in this methodology - its claim that only 75% of the words in the English language are decodable - PA uses memorization as a key component to learn to read. Unfortunately, the benefits of memorization are short-lived and limited in scope, so that memorization is an ineffective tool for actually learning to read.

2] Phonics

Synthetic phonics

The most widely used approach associated with the teaching of reading in which phonemes (sounds) associated with particular graphemes (letters) are pronounced in isolation and blended together (synthesized). For example, children are taught to take a single-syllable word such as cat apart into its three letters, pronounce a phoneme for each letter in turn /k, æ, t/, and blend the phonemes together to form a word.

Analytical phonics

A popular approach in Scotland, this method is associated with the teaching of reading in which the phonemes associated with particular graphemes are not pronounced in isolation. Children identify (analyze) the common phoneme in a set of words in which each word contains the phoneme under study. For example, teachers and pupils discuss how the following words are alike: pat, park, push and pen.

Analogy phonics

A type of analytic phonics in which children analyze phonic elements according to the phonograms in the word. A phonogram, known in linguistics as a rhyme, is composed of the vowel and all the sounds that follow it, such as -ake in the word cake. Children use these phonograms to learn about "word families" for example cake, make, bake, fake.

Embedded phonics, or Incidental phonics

Embedded phonics is a type of phonics used within whole language programs. Embedded phonics differs from other methods in that the instruction is always in the context of literature rather than in separate lessons or examples, and the skills to be taught are identified opportunistically rather than systematically. Some teachers may give mini lessons in phonics when students run into words difficult phonic patterns in their reading material. The focus on meaning is always maintained.

Growth in Vocabulary is Enhanced by Phonics Skills.

Once all of the foundational abstract sounds, letters, words, rules and exceptions are learned through phonics and phonemic awareness training, a reader's vocabulary can begin to expand by combining known words (e.g., work and sheet become worksheet; birth and mark become

birthmark; cat and tail become cattail; night and time become nighttime) (and adding prefixes (e.g., replay; undress; dislike) and suffixes (e.g., emailer; hopeful; endless) to known words.

The Orton-Gillingham (OG) Approach was first developed in the 1930's.

Today, OG's methodology evolved into a phonemic awareness-based phonics approach that dominates the style of phonics taught in all OG schools. Visual, auditory, tactile and movement senses are used to teach the rules of phonics, and the sounds of letters, groups of letters, and words.

Samuel T. Orton was a pathologist studying brain damaged adults. He was asked to work with a group of students who referred to him and discovered:

The students referred only had difficulties in reading and had near average, average or above average IQ scores. He found this peculiar and eventually chalked it up to the left and right brains not working together properly." (The History of Orton-Gillingham; <https://www.lexercise.com/blog/the-history-of-the-orton-gillingham-method>)

This observation led him to develop OG's "multi-sensory" teaching approach to help these children learn to read. Kinesthetic learning strategies were used to teach visual and auditory concepts. With the addition of the expertise of Anna Gillingham, their work became *The Orton-Gillingham Learning to Read Methodology*.

Although widely used today, OG methodology still recognizes that only 75% of the 170,000 words in the English language are decodable. This means that 25% of English words (OG calls them "red words") have to be memorized. Unfortunately, these "red words" include the abstract words that make up over 50% of the text read by children in K-5.

OG was the first to recognize the need to teach in the style of the child's thinking to access the brain pathways needed to maintain brain integration and learning by a young child; and they recognized that not all children think with the same style. During this time, science started to light up what is different about the brains of people who struggle with reading, writing, and spelling, and the need for instructional routines that promote more efficient brain patterns for a child's way of thinking.

What OG seems to have missed in their studies is the role of Abstract Words (those non-phonetic words and symbols) as the usual trigger for reading disability symptoms; and the need to provide 3-dimensionally the three parts of whole abstract words to teach masterful reading of them.

The private schools based on OG learning to read methodology seek a desired parental commitment of 3-years with an average tuition of \$25,000 a year or \$75,000 for three years to teach a child to read.

3] Whole Language

Whole Language Programs emphasize meaning gained by recognition of whole words, instead of focusing on their letter groups and letter sounds. A child learns to picture and experience what is read to them, and later they picture and experience what they can read. Ideally, this form of learning follows each child's experience and interests, rather than following a packaged program of drills and lessons. The whole language approach integrates reading literature and writing skills and promotes language development. The focus is the use of a variety of literature - picture books, folk tales, fables, myths, fantasy, science fiction, fiction, and nonfiction – to teach children to read. The reader is encouraged to focus on the meaning of what they read, and to be able to talk about and remember what they have read.

The fatal flaw of Whole Language Learning to Read programs is that they encourage the beginning reader to “guess” at a word from the pictures associated with the storyline. Guessing while learning to read promotes confusion and disrupts fluidity.

4] 3-D Mastery of Whole Words

When young 3-D thinking children confidently master the upper- and lower-case alphabets so that they can recognize every letter in print without error or confusion, written letters become easier for them to read because the child has a picture and sound of each letter in their brain. Being able to repeat (out loud) the alphabet (via the alphabet song) is different from having every letter (both upper- and lower-case versions of it) clearly pictured (recognized with all senses) in their brain. Learning has been mastered in the brain when the child correctly identifies a letter everywhere it occurs on a page of print.

When mastered, the letters that make up a concrete word is recognized by the pictures of them created in the child's brain and the sounds (names) of the letters cognized in their brain. The child connects the mastered letters of a concrete word with a physical world picture or object that represents the word. For example, the mastered letters of the word “cat” can be said and shown to the child while they look at a picture of a cat (or they touch an actual act). In this way, the picture of the cat in the child's brain is connected with the look and sound of the letters of the word “cat”.

However, when an abstract word like “what” is seen on a page, the brain's mastery of the sight and sound of the letters of the word cannot be related to any sensory experience of an object called “what” -- there is no “what-object”! Therefore, some words and symbols are called “abstract”. The result is that 3-D thinking young readers cannot effectively learn to read abstract words well using the tools of phonics, phonemic awareness, or whole language learning.

3-D Mastery programs are the only programs that teach how to master reading all the most used abstract words and symbols. Once mastery of 300 abstract words and symbols is achieved, the child's reading is fluid, and with fluidity comes comprehension.

The Davis® Program

The Davis® Program (DP) was created by Ron Davis in 1995, along with the Davis Dyslexia Association International.

DP focuses on supporting the thinking style of the dyslexic and promotes how to master abstract words to overcome dyslexia - He uses a minimal phonics program, no rote drilling, no color over-lays and large print books, no medications. The focus is on eliminating the mental disorientation that occurs during common learning to read efforts. It provides multi-sensory training in mastering the 3 parts of a word so that they become experienced by the brain of the student, rather than being temporarily stored in short-term memory. "As with everything that has no meaning, [like abstract words and symbols], the intelligent brain quickly forgets it!"

The Difference of Developing Mastery in place of Memorizing:

"The client who masters a concept is wonderfully comfortable explaining it to me. In this case, the case is closed, and we can continue." This is mastery.

"But the child [who says he] "knows" [a concept] is usually not able to explain it to me. And yet he is sincerely convinced that he knows and can use his knowledge; but it is possible that more or less quickly he will have lost the little he knew."

https://blog.dyslexia.com/to-know-or-to-master/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=to-know-or-to-master

Sky Village – Trail of Spells™

An edutainment app created by Bill Allen and **Magical I Am, Inc**, released in 2023.

In 2007 Bill Allen released "**The Learning to Read Program™**" as a series of pop-up graphics books with an audio panel that taught children how to read 270 abstract words and numbers, the letters of the alphabet, punctuation symbols, and to slow down when reading left to right so they could see every word. The methodology was successfully used by children having difficulty learning to read. All of these children who mastered the 270 abstract words and symbols were able to go to college or trade school.

Allen's desire to make learning to read very affordable for families of dyslexics stimulated the development of the digital games of Magical I Am. Sky Village – Trail of Spells is an edutainment app in which an adventure game teaches children in K-5 to read 300 abstract words, numbers, and punctuation marks; clearly identify the form and use of all alphabet letters, upper- and lower-case; and how to stabilize their Mind's Eye on The Spot, an imaginary point used for stabilizing consistent perception of what a word looks like.

Sky Village – Trail of Spells™ provides the multi-sensory experiences required by the brain of the 3-D thinking child to learn to master recognizing and comprehending abstract words and symbols in text. These children become successful in reading when they are initially taught through sensory experiences that encourage them to imagine in their brain

all three parts of each word:

- The LOOK of the word
- The SOUND of the word
- The MEANING of the word.

This approach helps young readers to learn to recognize and comprehend words every time they meet them in literature. When they can do this, we say they have mastered the words.

What sets Sky Village – Trail of Spells app apart from other dyslexia reading programs is:

- It is an adventure game where learning to read happens along the way of having fun exploring the clues of the adventures.
- The very minimal cost of the app; the first part of the game is *free* to play and learn to master some of the Spells (abstract words) that open new adventures; subsequent games in Sky Village – Trail of Spells will be very affordable.
- The app works on a mobile phone or tablet device, and it needs little to no parental supervision; no tutor is necessary.
- Learning how to Manage the Mind's Eye Perception on The Spot with the Bindu M.E. Tech™; so that consistent perception of words and letters can occur.
- Mastery of the Three Parts of Each Abstract Word until you can picture each word's meaning and read fluidly. Mastery is usually more obvious to the observer than to the one reading aloud.

In Bill Allen's words:

"Sky Village – Trail of Spells is designed to teach the child to recognize what causes the confusion associated with reading, and how to process that confusion and learn to read. The result is that the student can learn to read, spell, and comprehend what is being read with greater ease and success."

(Bill Allen, June 2020).

**There Actually is No One Reading Program
That Fits All Young Minds**

Judgment and blame pile up on the children who cannot learn to read well enough to keep up with their peers. With increasing frustration, confusion, and failure to read, these children come to believe they are the problem. They are not! The problem is the tools used – particularly, the Phonics and PA programs that can be outstandingly difficult for 3-D learning children who are intelligent young children eager to learn to read. There is nothing wrong with them or their brain, they just do not learn well with the tools offered to them.

There has been uncertainty and lack of agreement for nearly 500 years about the “right” reading program to use to teach all children. Every parent and teacher know that not all young children learn in the same way. However, American schools have decided to use one program, phonics, as the core of their learning to read programs, partly because there is government funding for teaching phonics! Our schools appear to be satisfied with 80% of their children learning to read and having no tools for helping the other 20%. So, it is up to the parent to be sure their child has the teaching methodology that fits their style of learning.

Learn to Read, so you can Read to Learn.™