CHAPTER 3

Phonemic Awareness

CASE STUDY

Gary Bensen is a kindergarten teacher who knows that observing children closely can make all the difference in preventing future problems. One of his students, 6-year-old Thomas, is unusually quiet. In fact, his voice is almost inaudible. Mr. Bensen knows that being able to hear sounds in words is a critical part of learning to read, but he has no idea whether Thomas is able to do this because he seldom speaks. Today, Mr. Bensen is doing his best to find out by informally assessing Thomas's ability to identify the sounds at the beginnings of words. He says one-syllable words such as *ball* and asks Thomas to isolate and then pronounce their beginning sounds. Thomas is successful with about half the words.

Next, Mr. Bensen asks Thomas to segment, or break apart, words into separate sounds. Thomas is able to do so for two words: *mat* and *can*. We can see Thomas getting frustrated trying to do what Mr. Bensen wants him to do. In time, he begins to

just echo the words Mr. Bensen says without making any attempt to segment them. He seems close to tears.

We are pleased to see Mr. Bensen put down his list of words, give Thomas a big smile, and say, "We've done enough for now, don't you think? Let's take a break." Thomas wipes his eyes and smiles in relief.

Thomas has not yet acquired ***phonemic awareness***, a common difficulty for struggling beginning readers. In this chapter we explain the concept of phonemic awareness, why it is important, how most children acquire it, and how to help struggling readers of any age who have not acquired it. We show you how to apply the intervention framework to phonemic awareness and develop lessons that will help struggling readers.

What Is Phonemic Awareness and Why Is It Important?

As very young children begin to use language, most show a growing awareness of the sounds of our language. They enjoy songs, nursery rhymes, and stories with lots of rhyming words, such as *The Cat in the Hat*. Soon, they begin playing with language, making up their own rhymes with real words, such as *cat* and *bat*, and nonsense words, such as *lat* and *zat*. They giggle as they change the sound at the beginning of words or at the end: *kitty*, *mitty*, *fitty*, and *bat*, *bam*, *bad*. This growing understanding that language is made up of discrete sounds is ***phonological awareness*** (Liberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989).

What Is Phonemic Awareness?

The ability to hear and isolate individual sounds in words is phonemic awareness. This happens before children associate letters with sounds. Without being taught, most young children grasp that language is used to express thoughts. Eventually they learn to identify individual words and then the syllables that make up those words. They can drag out the pronunciation of a word, clapping on each syllable. Then they learn to hear ***onsets***—the initial consonant sound of a word—and ***rimes***—the vowel and ending sound. For example, in the word *pack*, the /p/ is the onset and /ack/ is the rime. But hearing onsets and rimes isn't enough for children

to become readers. They must be able to hear the individual sounds in words—the phonemes. The word *pack* is one syllable with three phonemes: the initial /p/, the vowel /a/, and the ending sound /k/ represented by two letters *ck* (Adams, 1990; Liberman, Shankweiler, Fischer, & Carter, 1974).

Frequently, phonemic awareness is confused with phonics. They are not the same, though phonemic awareness is a precursor to using phonics. Phonics involves more than being able to hear and produce phonemes in words. It involves knowing the letter or letters that stand for the phonemes, recognizing letters in print, and being able to associate the sound that those letters usually stand for. In other words, phonemic awareness is speech-based, whereas phonics is print-based. In this chapter we are concerned only with phonemic awareness. Phonics is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4.

Why Is Phonemic Awareness Important?

To become literate, the child must grasp the ***alphabetic principle***—which means that the sounds we hear in words in English can be represented by written symbols. Decoding, which is required for reading, involves looking at a print symbol and associating it with a sound. Encoding, which is required for writing, involves hearing a sound and knowing what symbol, or letter(s), to write to represent that sound.

Phonemic awareness is critical to both decoding and encoding. Here's why: Let's say a child who has acquired the alphabetic principle and phonemic awareness is reading and comes to the sentence, "The frog nabbed the fly with its long tongue." He can read almost every word in the sentence correctly, because he either recognizes it instantly or figures it out by associating sounds with the letters he sees. But the last word, *tongue*, stumps him. Sounding out each letter doesn't lead to a word that makes sense—or any word at all, for that matter. But, if the child can associate a couple of the letters with sounds (phonics), use information from the rest of the sentence to help him (context), and apply what he knows about frogs and flies (background knowledge), then he can probably figure out the last word. As he reads on, he will know whether he was correct.

When it comes to encoding or writing, children use phonemic awareness and their understanding of the alphabetic principle as they attempt to spell words. In the piece of student writing shown in Figure 3.1, many words are not spelled correctly. However, the writer is aware of the individual sounds in those words because he has used a symbol for each of those sounds; spelling attempts that are close to correct are called approximations.

Some students come to kindergarten without phonemic awareness—perhaps due to a lack of exposure to English or to standard English pronunciation, or perhaps as a result of ear infections, hearing difficulties, learning disabilities, or other factors (Shaywitz, 2003). So, when formal reading instruction begins, it may be hard for these children to associate sounds with symbols and blend sounds into words. These children need to be identified early so that steps can be taken to teach them what they have not yet learned.

When we do not identify early the children who need help, we risk delaying their learning for years. It may very well be that some children who are put into special classes might have caught on and caught up had their problems been identified early. In fact, some estimates suggest that approximately 90 percent of students identified as having learning disabilities lack phonemic awareness (Stanovich, 1986).

FIGURE 3.1 Children's early writing can help you assess their ability to hear sounds in their own vocabulary accurately.

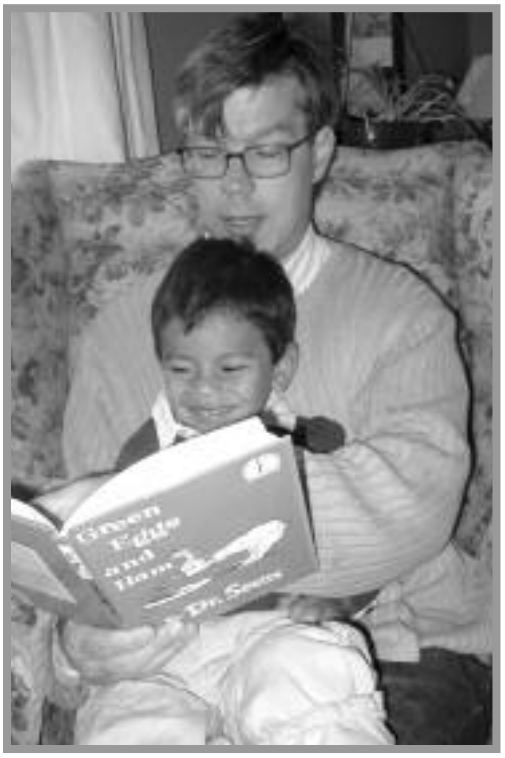
"This is a story about an alligator. It got caught in a cage and struggled to get out. But he couldn't get out of the cage and finally he got out and he swam in the lake."

—Alex, age 6

How Do Learners Develop Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness begins from the moment a child begins his or her life. An infant hears the sounds of language. At first these sounds do not represent anything meaningful. Gradually, however, the infant associates meaning with the sounds and begins recognizing words such as *up*, *bottle*, *Daddy*, *Mommy*, *bedtime*, and *doggy*. In time, the child repeats these meaningful sounds, which prompts positive responses from the adults or other children around him. Those responses encourage him to experiment further with sounds.

At first, children don't isolate individual words, largely because of the way we use language. When we speak to young children we don't pause between each word. It isn't surprising, then, that children combine common phrases into single-word utterances, such as "Onceuponatime." Children who memorize songs or the Pledge of Allegiance sing or say the sounds without realizing that they are singing or saying individual, meaningful words. Gradually, that gets sorted out. Eventually, children can tell you the individual words in the piece.



Sharing books such as the one shown here can help children develop phonemic awareness.

Similarly, as children are learning the alphabet, they may run the names of the letters together so they sound like one continuous stream of sound. Eventually children learn that each letter has a name and begin separating the stream of sound into those names, though they may not yet know the role that knowledge will soon play in their lives as they learn to read and write.

As children begin acquiring language, the adults in their lives usually pay more attention to whether a child uses the correct word than to the correct pronunciation of the word. For example, if a child sees a horse in a field and says "See cow!" a parent will undoubtedly correct him by saying something like, "No, that's not a cow. It's a horse." If the child is lucky, the parent will explain details to help the child remember how the two animals are different. If the child is very young and mispronounces the word, research shows that the parent will probably not correct him.

Later, we see phonological awareness developing as the child begins playing with the sounds of words. For example, he may say, "See cow!" The parent may say, "That's not a cow. It's a horsey." And the child may say: "horsey, morsey, dorsey, torsey!" Or "cow, now, vow, wow!" As that parent reads to the child from a rhyming book such as Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*, he or she can support this development by hesitating before saying the last word in a rhyme and giving the child time child to supply it. Moments like this are exciting because they show children are developing phonemic awareness. But not all children reach this stage before beginning school, so they need instruction.

How Do We Teach Phonemic Awareness to Struggling Readers?

Even though many children come to school with well-developed phonological and phonemic awareness, all kindergartners should receive formal instruction to ensure that they gain these essential understandings. Once your assessment reveals that students have these skills, this instruction should be discontinued. This instruction consists of a series of lessons, which should be conducted orally. Later in the chapter, we present a sample of how to teach one such lesson. Here is a possible sequence of activities, which should be incorporated into your lessons.

Activity #1:

- Segment sentences into words: *The cat has a hat. = The - cat - has - a - hat.*
- Blend words into a sentence: *The - cat - has - a - hat. = The cat has a hat.*

Activity #2:

- Segment compound words into separate words: *sidewalk = side + walk.*
- Blend words into a compound word: *side + walk = sidewalk.*

Activity #3:

- Segment two-syllable words that are not compounds: *sister* = *sis* + *ter*.
- Blend syllables into word: *sis* + *ter* = *sister*.

Activity #4:

- Segment words with more syllables: *neighborhood* = *neigh* + *bor* + *hood*.
- Blend syllables into word: *neigh* + *bor* + *hood* = *neighborhood*.

Activity #5:

- Segment words (and/or syllables) into onsets and rimes: *cat* = /k/ /at/.
- Blend segmented onsets and rimes into words: /k/ /at/ = *cat*.

Activity #6:

- Segment words into individual phonemes: *cat* = /k/ /a/ /t/.
- Blend individual phonemes into words: /k/ /a/ /t/ = *cat*.

Each of these activities must include your explicit modeling of the skill, followed by ample opportunities for your students to practice the skill with new words. Be sure to assess as you teach, so that you will know how quickly to introduce each new segmenting and blending skill. You probably notice that the activities ask for segmenting—taking a word apart—and then blending—putting it back together. This is intentional; research suggests that blending and segmenting are critical aspects of phonemic awareness that must be developed (Chard & Dickson, 1999). Depending on where your students are, you may decide to teach segmenting and blending in separate sessions or in single sessions. What's most important to remember is that lessons like these may have already been taught to your students without success. If this is the case, it's wiser to teach skills in smaller, more discrete steps in order to give students a chance to catch up.

Phonemic awareness lessons like these will help prevent later trouble in reading for some students. If the children do not respond to the lessons or seem frustrated by them, slow down or repeat. Most children have acquired phonemic awareness by the middle of first grade. With older struggling readers, you will teach such lessons only to those who are still struggling with it. However, do continue them with children who need them. Keep in mind, though, that it probably will not be necessary to start at the beginning again. Instead, begin at the point that will help the older struggling reader most, based on your assessments on segmenting and blending phonemes in words. Be sure to assess as you teach so that you will know how quickly to introduce each new segmenting and blending skill.

By the beginning of first grade, most children have learned the sounds that are commonly associated with each letter of the alphabet. As they make these text (or print)-to-speech connections, and begin to use them to read and build words, they become more phonemically aware (Shaywitz, 2003). This reciprocal relationship is important; however, don't delay phonics instruction for students who have not yet acquired phonemic awareness. Teaching letter-sound correspondences along with phonemic awareness gives students opportunities to develop in both areas (Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987).

Seven Ways to Provide Practice in Segmenting and Blending Words

To prevent problems, sometimes all that is needed is additional practice. Troia, Roth, and Graham (1998) suggest the following activities, which increase in difficulty.

- **matching** (e.g., "Show me which picture rhymes with *mouse*. Which of these words begins with the same sound as *car*: *tooth*, *sock*, *coat*?")
- **oddity detection** (e.g., "Show me which picture does not begin with /p/. Point to the picture that does not end with the same sound as *sun*. Which of these words does not begin with the same sound as *sun*: *Sunday*, *sunshine*, *cowboy*, *sunglasses*?")
- **same/different judgment** (e.g., "Does *coat* start with the /k/ sound? When you put them together, do these sounds make the word *race*: r-a-s?")
- **segment isolation** (e.g., "What is the first sound of *chalk*? What is the first part of *sidewalk*? What is the sound at the end of *husk*?")
- **production** (e.g., "Tell me a word that begins with /s/. Tell me a word that ends with the same sound as *tap*. Tell me each sound in the word *shock*.")
- **counting** (e.g., "Count the number of parts you hear in *cage*. How many sounds are in the word *ride*?)
- **compound production** (e.g., "Tell me the word you get when you change the /p/ in *map* to /n/. Say *feel*. Now say *eel*. What sound did you leave out?")

Even with the most well-designed early instruction, evidence suggests that many learners, like Thomas, will still experience difficulties with delays in phonemic awareness development (Torgesen, Wagner, & Rashotte, 1994). For these students, more carefully designed instruction is required. The following section describes how to apply the intervention framework, introduced in Chapter 1, to phonemic awareness instruction. It includes specific strategies for developing phonemic awareness for students who are experiencing early reading difficulties, followed by a sample phonemic awareness lesson.

Applying the Intervention Framework to Phonemic Awareness

If you teach grade one or higher and your students have not acquired phonemic awareness, you need to apply the intervention framework. In this section we discuss in general terms how the framework works with phonemic awareness instruction. Later in this chapter, we present a sample lesson.

Assess and Diagnose

There are three types of tools needed to assess and diagnose phonemic awareness. ***Screening tools*** and ***diagnostic tools*** are used in Assess and Diagnose. ***Progress monitoring tools*** are used in Reassess.

Screening Tools

Screening tools help you decide which students need extra attention and monitoring. One kind of screening tool is observation of students, based on your understanding of how phonemic awareness develops. For example, you probably know that by midyear a typical kindergartner can segment the initial sound in a word from the remainder of a word. A first grader who can still do only that probably needs extra help.

Several formal tools are widely used to screen phonemic awareness. Your local system or state department may be able to supply you with one or even require the use of one. Figure 3.2 lists three published tools, which yield very specific information about a student's phonemic awareness.

Screening Tool	Publication Information
Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP)	Pro-Ed, Austin, TX
Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills: Initial Sound Fluency (6th Edition) (2003)	http://dibels.uoregon.edu University of Oregon, Eugene; SoprisWest, Longmont, CO
Texas Primary Reading Inventory	Texas Education Agency, Austin

FIGURE 3.2 Tools for screening phonemic awareness

Diagnostic Tools

While a screening tool is designed to tell you if a student is struggling or likely to struggle, a diagnostic tool is designed to tell you specifically what a student can and cannot do. When we know specific things a child can and cannot do, we can plan better, more targeted intervention. The range of tasks the test-taker is asked to do should reflect the developmental stage that a reader has achieved. For example, we know that as children develop phonological awareness, they typically understand the sound structure of words starting with larger word parts (e.g., onsets and rimes such as /th/ and /ing/ make *thing*) and then move to smaller word parts such as individual phonemes. Likewise, beginning readers are usually able to detect and segment the beginning sound of a word before the final sound or medial sounds.

The Comprehensive Test of Phonemic Processing (CTOPP; Pro-Ed), which is listed as a screening tool in Figure 3.2, provides several supplemental assessments that allow a teacher to identify a student's specific strengths and weaknesses in phonemic awareness.

You may also be able to diagnose student needs by using an informal checklist, such as the one in Figure 3.3. Figure 3.4 shows a filled-in version for Thomas, the struggling 6-year-old student described at the beginning of this chapter. Note that there are places to observe the same student on different dates, to monitor growth over time.

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Phonemic Awareness

+ SKILL PERFORMED CORRECTLY
- SKILL NOT PERFORMED
/ SKILL PERFORMED INACCURATELY

Name_____ Grade _____ Age _____

Phonemic Awareness Skill	Dates Observed						Comments
Rhyming/Alliteration							
Completes simple rhymes started by teacher							
Repeats alliterations with model							
Onset-Rime Blending and Segmentation							
Identifies initial sounds in spoken words							
Blends onset and rime to make a single-syllable word							
Segments a single-syllable word into its onset and rime							
Phoneme Blending and Segmentation							
Blends 3–4 phonemes to make a single-syllable word							
Segments a single-syllable word into its component phonemes							

Additional Comments:

FIGURE 3.3 Observation checklist to assess phonemic awareness

Most likely, you will notice evidence of phonemic awareness in your students on a day-to-day basis during instructional activities, even when you are not using a checklist. Be sure to record these observations promptly because they will help you focus interventions and prevent difficulties from growing worse. If you use a checklist like the one in Figure 3.3, you may want to confirm your observations with a formal instrument.

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Phonemic Awareness

+ SKILL PERFORMED CORRECTLY
- SKILL NOT PERFORMED
/ SKILL PERFORMED INACCURATELY

Name Thomas Guthrie Grade K Age 5

Phonemic Awareness Skill	Dates Observed						Comments
	2/4	3/10	4/13				
Rhyming/Alliteration							
Completes simple rhymes started by teacher	+						2/4: Stopped testing this area after Feb.
Repeats alliterations with model	+						
Onset-Rime Blending and Segmentation							
Identifies initial sounds in spoken words	-	/	/				3/10: Inconsistently identifies initial sounds.
Blends onset and rime to make a single-syllable word	-	-					
Segments a single-syllable word into its onset and rime	-	-					
Phoneme Blending and Segmentation							
Blends 3–4 phonemes to make a single-syllable word	na	na	/				
Segments a single-syllable word into its component phonemes	na	na	/				3/10: Showing some ability here; success with "mat" and "can"

Additional Comments:

FIGURE 3.4 Sample phonemic awareness checklist filled in for Thomas

Designing Phonemic Awareness Instruction: General Guidelines

- Start with ***continuous sounds*** (speech sounds with uninterrupted flow of sound, such as /a/, /s/, /e/, /f/, /i/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /o/, /r/, /u/, /v/, /z/), which are easier to pronounce than ***stop sounds*** (speech sounds in which the air flow is stopped, such as /b/, /d/, /g/, /h/, /j/, /k/, /p/, /q/, /t/, /w/, /x/, /y/.
- Carefully model each activity as you introduce it.
- Model slow and exaggerated pronunciations of continuous sounds (e.g., "mmmmap") and ***iteration*** (brief, repeated pronunciations) of stop sounds (e.g., "t-t-t-top") to emphasize the individual sounds.
- Move from larger units such as syllables (/side/ /walk/) and onset-rime (/p/ /at/) to smaller units such as individual phonemes (/t/ /r/ /ee/).
- Move from easier tasks such as rhyming ("Raise your hand when I say a word that ends the same as the word *top*") to more complex tasks such as blending and segmenting ("Tell me the sounds you hear in the word *mast*").
- Use pictures or concrete objects such as building blocks or bingo chips to represent the number of segments in a word.

Teach/Reteach

Studies over the past several decades have demonstrated that phonemic awareness can be taught through brief, engaging activities that focus children's attention on manipulating sounds in words, like the ones described earlier in this chapter. However, for students who have been identified as at-risk for reading difficulties because they lack phonemic awareness, intensive, explicit instruction is required (Torgesen et al., 1994). The list on the left provides general guidelines to consider when designing or selecting activities to teach phonemic awareness skills (Chard & Dickson, 1999; Troia et al., 1998).

The steps in teaching phonemic awareness are the same as for teaching any other skill.

1. Tell students what they will learn.
2. Model the task. For example, if you are teaching how to blend an onset and rime, show students how to do it before asking them to do it themselves.
3. Gradually have students model the task. For example, have them model with you.
4. Have students model, or demonstrate, the task alone.
5. Repeat steps 2–4 with several examples of the same task.

The sample lesson in the next section shows you how to help a child who is having difficulty segmenting and blending medial and final sounds.

Practice

Students should be given the opportunity to practice a skill almost immediately after it has been taught. To monitor accuracy and provide assistance as needed, practice should always be carried out under your careful guidance. If a student makes an error, stop and model the process again and have him repeat it. Unless he is successful almost 100 percent of the time, either you need to reteach or the student needs to further develop a prior skill. For example, if a student is unable to blend onsets and rimes after you've taught him how to, reassess whether the student can segment them. That will help you determine whether to reteach blending or to go back one step and reteach segmenting.

Apply

Application takes place when a student uses a skill independently. For students who have not begun to read and write, success in practice activities is sufficient to indicate readiness for the next lessons.

If struggling readers are receiving phonemic awareness instruction along with phonics instruction, look for evidence of skill application during reading and writing activities. Students should be blending sounds as they attempt to decode unfamiliar words. They should be segmenting sounds as they attempt to spell.

Reassess

Phonemic awareness should be monitored frequently. You can do this by observing students as they read easily decodable texts to see whether they are independently using phonemic awareness skills. You may also monitor student progress periodically during a school year by using a checklist you devise or one your school recommends.

You may need to monitor the progress of struggling students as often as twice a month or even weekly. A good tool for doing that is DIBELS (see Figure 3.2), which provides alternate forms for frequent monitoring of initial-sound fluency and phonemic segmentation fluency.

Sample Lesson Using the Intervention Framework With Struggling Primary Students: Blending Phonemes

This lesson is planned for Karen, a first grader who has been found to have problems blending phonemes.

Assess and Diagnose

Karen's teacher used observation and DIBELS to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses associated with phonemic awareness. Diagnosis revealed that Karen was able to segment words into sounds but was unable to blend individual sounds into words.

Teach/Reteach

OBJECTIVE: Karen will be able to accurately blend three phonemes to make a CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) word.

MATERIALS: bingo chips, "Say It Fast" chart (Figure 3.5)

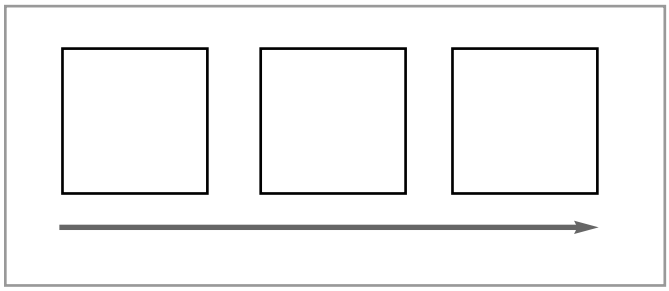


FIGURE 3.5 "Say It Fast" chart (Neuhaus Education Center, 1998)

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCEDURE: The teacher sits side-by-side with Karen, with the "Say It Fast" chart in front of them. From there, she

1. reminds Karen of her ability to segment sounds and tells her that today she will learn to blend separate sounds into words and that this will help her learn to read. She has Karen segment three CVC words with continuous consonant sounds: *sun*, *van*, and *mom*.

2. calls attention to the "Say It Fast" chart and explains that each box represents one sound. Tells Karen that she (the teacher) is going to blend three sounds to make a word and, as she says each sound, she will move a bingo chip into a box. Karen's teacher goes on to explain that the arrow on the chart will remind her to say the word fast after blending the three sounds.
3. models the activity by saying, "Listen as I blend sounds to make a word. I'm going to move a chip for each sound I say; each box can only have one chip."
4. says the word slowly, stretching out the sounds while sliding a chip into each box while making each sound: /*mmmmaaaaaaannnnnn*/.
5. says it fast: *man*.
6. models several more examples of short CVC words using continuous sounds: *sam*, *fan*, *sis*, *mess*, *fuss*.
7. has Karen think of a word, segment it, and model blending sounds while moving chips into the boxes, and then saying the word fast.
8. continues the activity until Karen is able to segment a CVC word into separate sounds, blend the three sounds, and then say the word fast.

COMMENTS: Note that this lesson is focused just on phonemic awareness, not on letter-sound relationships. The student has already been taught to segment sounds (listen to a word and separate the sounds) and is learning to blend sounds (produce separate sounds and blend into a word). In Chapter 4, we talk about the importance of blending sounds while learning letter-sound relationships as a way to promote word-recognition skills in older children.

Practice

Have students practice segmenting and blending sounds in words using the "Say It Fast" chart. Sit with students and monitor their efforts, using your own "Say It Fast" chart. If a student isn't successful 100 percent of the time, stop and model.

Most likely, very young students to whom you teach phonemic awareness lessons have not yet been taught the letters that stand for the sounds. They won't be able to recognize a letter and make the correct sound. Therefore you must guide practice activities.

After students are successful in using the "Say It Fast" chart, try this game with small groups:

Children practice segmenting and blending phonemes as they play Beanbag Toss.

Beanbag Toss

- Have children stand in a small circle with you.
- Say a CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) word such as *man*.
- Toss the beanbag to a child and ask him or her to segment the sounds.
- Have that child toss the beanbag to another child who blends the sounds back into the word.
- Have that child say a new word and toss the beanbag to another child who segments the word into sounds.
- Continue until everyone has had several chances.

(This game can also be played by rolling a ball while seated on the floor.)

If you are combining phonemic awareness lessons with introductory letter-recognition and phonics lessons, you might ask students to use letters as they segment and blend word sounds during the game.

Apply

Application of a phonemic awareness skill differs from practice mostly in the degree to which students carry out activities independently. When students apply skills, they should receive less assistance from you. As you observe children engaged in activities, make sure they are able to segment and blend individual sounds in words.

Of course, purposeful segmenting and blending sounds will not occur until children are beginning to work with print—in other words, when children start learning the letters of the alphabet and the sounds associated with them.

COMMENTS: There is no need to teach phonemic awareness lessons for each sound in our language, although you may want to teach lessons in words with four or five phonemes. Phonemic awareness involves the ability to hear the individual sounds in words, to segment those sounds (say the individual sounds), and to blend individual sounds into words. Once children begin to segment words successfully, they are ready to learn the letters that stand for individual sounds and to use that knowledge to begin to decode words in print.

For struggling readers beyond the first grade, you may combine phonemic awareness lessons with the lessons in letter recognition and the association of a particular sound with each letter and combination of letters. Phonics is discussed in Chapter 4.

Reassess

Your close observation during practice activities may be enough to reassure you that a student has acquired phonemic awareness. If you are uncertain, though, or if your school system requires closer monitoring, use an instrument designed for frequent progress monitoring, such as DIBELS.

Conclusion

Phonemic awareness is a necessary prerequisite to learning to read, where readers are required to see a letter (or combination of letters) and associate the expected sound with it. It is also a prerequisite to spelling, where writers say a word to themselves, hear the sounds, and associate the appropriate letters with the sounds. For struggling readers of any age, phonemic awareness and phonics may be taught concurrently. Because phonemic awareness involves learning the sounds in words, classrooms in which it is a priority will not be silent, nor should they be. Finally, we caution the reader that it is very difficult to adequately describe phonemic awareness instruction in a book. If you do not have experience and expertise with this topic, we encourage you to seek professional development and classroom assistance while working with struggling learners.