

Phonological Analysis with Synthetic Phonics A Comprehensive Reading Program

Research over the past 30 years has clearly identified a weakness in phonological processing (also called phonemic awareness) as a primary cause of reading problems. This skill is the ability to judge the number, order and identity of individual sounds in the language. This skill is fundamental to the individual being able to understand the 'code' of written language and make the sound to symbol connection necessary for 'decoding' words, reading.

Dyslexia is essentially a difficulty with reading that is not accounted for by low intelligence or lack of instruction. It is not due to the letters of the words being visually misplaced or reversed by the individual, a common misconception. It is not a hearing problem, as the individual can generally hear the words just fine.

While there are a variety of symptoms related to dyslexia, at the core it is often an auditory processing problem. The individual has difficulty segmenting the word into individual sounds and comparing those sounds to the individual letters in the written form of the word. About 25% of the population does not automatically and effectively develop this critical cognitive skill, which underlies the reading process.

According to 30 years of study by the National Institutes of Health, direct and specific instruction in phonemic awareness tasks combined with synthetic phonics is the most effective way to teach reading. It is also the most effective way to remediate reading problems. These researched methods form the foundation of the PASP program.

PASP

Arguably one of the most effective approaches to phonemic awareness training, oral motor reinforcement is the beginning stage of the PASP program. The students are engaged in a process by which they discover what their mouth and tongue are doing as each separate sound is produced. The sound and its 'feeling' are then connected to a label (name) that is descriptive of the mouth activity. This connection between the auditory sound, what it feels like, and its label, provides a different way of conceptualizing individual sounds (phonemes) so that the student can retain the image of the sound through its characteristics (auditory conceptualization.) The student is using three different areas of the brain to analyze the sounds.

Labeling requires the student to make a connection between the sound's attributes (mouth activity,) that are very concrete, and provides a way to abstractly discuss the sound later without naming the letter. Graphemes (written letters) are introduced to form the connection between sound/feeling/label and the reading process.

The student begins by learning the consonants, then the vowels and diphthongs. At each stage, the sounds are learned in groups that correspond to the similar mouth activity being used by the sounds. As the student becomes skilled at connecting the sound, feeling and label, exercises are done with blocks to develop the student's ability to judge the number, order and identity of sounds within spoken syllables.

Block exercises begin with just two-sound syllables, not letters, and made-up words are used to encourage the student to use phonological analysis rather than previous letter knowledge to identify and manipulate the sounds used. Changes are made to the phonemes in the syllable and the student is required to represent those changes with the blocks. When the student is consistently successful with two sounds, three-sound syllables are

introduced, followed by four sound syllables and later the student will progress into multi-syllable exercises.

Concurrently with the block practice, letters have been associated with the sound/feeling/labels that have already been learned. Multi-sensory instruction, including symbol imagery techniques, is used to reinforce the connection between sound and symbol as well as to improve orthographic recognition. The student begins reading phonologically controlled texts out loud; to allow for errors to be identified and the student to be cued into the phonological analysis skills she has learned to correct the errors.

During this time the student is also receiving specific instruction in the high use words in our language. As the student gains confidence and becomes stable using the skills, they receive instruction in the common prefixes and suffixes to encourage more rapid identification of words. Instruction in the rules of orthography, which govern how words are spelled, is included to provide additional tools for the student to use when spelling.

The student progresses through this highly structured, sequential program beginning with single syllables and progressing through multi-syllable words. The student always moves forward at her own pace. Skill mastery must be demonstrated at each step, before new skills are introduced. Students begin reading controlled texts as soon as practicable, and are monitored for errors and cued to use the skills being developed.

These cognitive exercises develop improved phonemic awareness, auditory conceptualization, auditory memory, problem solving skills, orthographic recognition and attention skills. All of these cognitive areas are critical to the reading process.

This is a comprehensive reading program, not just an introduction to reading, and routinely results in multiple year gains in reading for the students. It is most successful when administered intensely, a minimum of three times per week. The PASP program is an intervention that on average takes 60 to 100 hours to administer.

Anticipated outcomes include improvements in word attack (sounding out unfamiliar words), word knowledge (words quickly recognized), reading accuracy (words misread, skipped or guessed at), reading rate (how quickly a student reads), and comprehension (the ability to identify and remember important information in what is read.) It is also our hope to foster a desire and interest in reading with the student.



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Colorado Reading Center

303-781-9800

450 West Jefferson Ave • Englewood, Colorado 80110
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