



EPS PHONICS PLUS®

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Beth G. Davis, Differentiated Instruction Guide:
Reteach and Practice

Renée A. Greenfield, Differentiated Instruction Guide:
Learning Differences

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English Language Learners

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Research consistently points to the direct relationship between phonics instruction and success in acquiring the ability to read print. In short, evidence on the importance of phonics is incontrovertible.

EPS Phonics PLUS® is a direct, systematic phonics program for children in kindergarten through grade 3 (Levels K, A–C). A single, easy-to-use program for all students, *EPS Phonics PLUS* provides Differentiated Instruction Guides (DIGs) for Levels A–C to make the program accessible to children with diverse learning needs. Using a single scope and sequence, as well as the same core materials, the program allows teachers to provide instruction tailored to the specific needs of all children in today’s inclusion classroom.

The *EPS Phonics PLUS* core program comprises four Student Books and their accompanying wrap-around Teacher’s Editions. Each Teacher’s Edition includes detailed, systematic direct instruction for every lesson; unit pre- and posttests; and centers activities for reinforcement, practice, and ease of classroom management. The Levels A–C Teacher’s Editions also include point-of-use references to the Differentiated Instruction Guides. Levels K and A Student Books include sturdy key word cards. Literature Charts also accompany these grade levels.

There are three Differentiated Instruction Guides at levels A through C: Reteach and Practice, Learning Differences, and English Language Learners. Lessons in the DIGs build on the foundation of the core materials.

A Picture Glossary provides visual representations of selection vocabulary from all four levels, some of which might not be available in standard picture dictionaries.

A set of appealing Decodable Readers at each grade level provides practice and reinforcement of newly acquired phonics and sight word skills.

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I. INTRODUCTION

EPS Phonics PLUS is a comprehensive, research-based phonics program. While phonics instruction is in the forefront of the program, it does not occur in a vacuum. Therefore, this paper presents *EPS Phonics PLUS* within the context of reading instruction as a whole.

This paper begins with the topic of literacy, and particularly phonics, instruction. It goes on to present more specific information about each of the component strands—or pillars—of reading instruction. Finally, it includes sections on differentiating instruction and teaching children who are learning English. The various sections, written by experts in each field, focus on the most up-to-date research and highlight how teaching with *EPS Phonics PLUS* will help teachers help their students achieve success.

II. PRINCIPLES OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION

John F. Savage

Phonics in a Comprehensive Reading Program

On the subject of teaching children how to read, research confirms what common sense suggests: phonics is an essential component of any instructional program.

The English writing system is based on the alphabetic principle: that is, individual speech sounds (called phonemes) are represented in writing by individual alphabetic symbols (called graphemes). Children need to understand this alphabetic principle as they learn to read. Mastering these sound-symbol relationships is what phonics is all about. It is also the goal of *EPS Phonics PLUS*.

Research leaves little doubt about the necessity of phonics as part of early reading and writing instruction. For decades, research studies have concluded that programs with a strong decoding orientation are effec-

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tive in helping children learn to read. Evidence suggests that explicit attention to sound-symbol relationships in a direct and systematic fashion enables children to decode accurately from the very beginning stages. Research consistently points to the direct relationship between phonics instruction and success in acquiring the ability to read print. In short, evidence on the importance of phonics is incontrovertible.

Recognizing the importance of phonics, national organizations and state departments of education have made knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and understanding of the features of written English essential standards in language arts. These standards typically require that decoding strategies be taught, applied, and assessed throughout the entire process of children's literacy acquisition. Not the least of these is No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal government's initiative to improve reading in the nation's schools.

The Five Pillars

EPS Phonics PLUS was designed to focus on the five pillars of reading instruction, as identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP):

Phonological/Phonemic Awareness Research has shown that the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in words is an essential element in learning to read. It is viewed as the strongest single determinant of early reading success, a better predictor of early reading acquisition than general intelligence, listening comprehension, and other factors. Lack of phonemic awareness puts children at risk of failure in learning to read. *EPS Phonics PLUS* begins with rhyme recognition and rhyme production and continues with segmentation, isolation, deletion, substitution, and blending of phonemes throughout the program.

Phonics Since English orthography is based on the alphabetic principle, decoding is essential to successful reading at any level. Research indicates that explicit instruction in sound-symbol relationships significantly improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension from the very early stages of learning to read. *EPS Phonics PLUS* focuses extensively on enabling children to master discrete phonics elements and apply this knowledge in fluent and accurate reading.

Fluency The ability to read text accurately and quickly bridges the gap between word recognition and comprehension. Fluent readers decode words automatically, and they read texts effortlessly and with expression. *EPS Phonics PLUS* directly addresses automaticity and fluency; children practice decoding words quickly and effortlessly as they learn to read sentences and longer passages with meaning and expression.



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Phonemic awareness—the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken words—is crucial to success in beginning reading. It is, in fact, a better predictor of success in learning to read than listening ability, IQ, and several other factors.

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While the program emphasizes these five essential elements [phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary], *EPS Phonics PLUS* does not overlook the affective and motivational dimensions of learning to read. The program uses contemporary poetry, traditional rhymes, simple versions of folk and fairy tales from diverse cultures, informational selections, and other sources. From these selections children will discover the joy and satisfaction that reading can bring.



Comprehension Building meaning is the ultimate goal of any reading instruction. Without comprehension, reading does not really occur. *EPS Phonics PLUS* emphasizes reading comprehension from the very early stages and throughout the program, with the use of research-based strategies and skills that help children understand sentences and longer segments of text.

Vocabulary Research has demonstrated the intimate link between word knowledge and effective reading. Successful decoding relies on word meaning, and children’s vocabulary provides the foundation of understanding what they read. Through exercises in using context clues, synonyms and antonyms, structural analysis, and other direct instructional activities, *EPS Phonics PLUS* promotes vocabulary growth as an essential element of learning to read.

While the program emphasizes these five essential elements, *EPS Phonics PLUS* does not overlook the affective and motivational dimensions of learning to read. The program uses contemporary poetry, traditional rhymes, simple versions of folk and fairy tales from diverse cultures, informational selections, and other sources. From these selections children will discover the joy and satisfaction that reading can bring.

Getting Ready to Read

Children are getting ready to read long before they receive their first formal instruction. Kindergarteners come to school with a sizable store of words in their listening/speaking vocabularies. Children also have a solid intuitive understanding of how language works; that is, they can construct a variety of spoken sentences in a way that enables them to communicate. Most kindergarteners are also aware of the alphabet, including the names and forms of some letters when they begin school.

Phonics instruction builds on this already quite extensive foundation of phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge. Research has demonstrated the importance of both in successful early reading. Phonemic awareness—the ability to recognize and manipulate sounds in spoken words—is crucial to success in beginning reading. It is, in fact, a better predictor of success in

learning to read than listening ability, IQ, and several other factors. Research has also established a strong link between alphabet knowledge and success in beginning reading.

Learn to Read and Read to Learn

Although phonics remains an essential component of word recognition, other strategies need to be taught in helping children identify words and unlock the meaning of words they encounter in print. Children use multiple clues in identifying words, including sight recognition and context clues, and

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explicit attention to these components needs to be integrated with the study of phonics. Explicit teaching of comprehension strategies is no less important.

Phonics is not—or should not be—a separate or isolated component of an instructional program in reading and writing. As children learn to apply knowledge of the alphabetic principle in decoding words, they should be surrounded by a rich diet of stories, poems, informational text, and other language experiences, along with plenty of opportunities for involvement in reading and writing. Phonics is not an end in itself; rather, it is a tool to help children achieve automaticity, independence, and fluency in decoding and encoding written language.

Phonics extends beyond the language arts as well. The payoff to facile word recognition occurs when children independently derive meaning from new words that they encounter in science, social studies, and other subject areas, as well as words that they encounter in their recreational reading.

Closely integrated into *EPS Phonics PLUS* are other components of a comprehensive early literacy program. Included from the beginning pages are word recognition activities for high-frequency words, or Star Words as they are called in this program. Structural analysis is included in activities involving compound words and contractions, along with the morphemic elements prefixes, suffixes, and roots as part of decoding. *EPS Phonics PLUS* also deals extensively with onsets and rimes. Word families built from onsets and rimes are an effective and efficient means of helping children learn phonics. Hundreds of words can be derived from a handful of phonograms, thereby increasing children's listening, speaking, and reading vocabularies (Johnston, 1999).

Differentiating Instruction

Despite the best efforts of skilled teachers, some children encounter difficulty in learning to read. Because of developmental delays, environmental factors, language disabilities, perceptual problems, or a host of other factors, these children do not acquire reading as easily as their age-mates. These children often need adjustments and accommodations in their instructional program, along with practice and reinforcement, to master the phonics that will support their ultimate success as readers and writers. To this end, *EPS Phonics PLUS* integrates three Differentiated Instruction Guides (DIGs) at levels A, B, and C:

- Reteach and Practice Guide for all readers who struggle with one or more of the concepts taught or who just need extra practice
- English Language Learners Guide for children whose first language is not English
- Learning Differences Guide for children who have specific language-based learning differences

References to the complementary pages in each of these Guides are provided in each core Teacher's Edition lesson.



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Benefits of *EPS Phonics PLUS*

This phonics program

- is built on a solid foundation of research about how children learn to read
- focuses directly and explicitly on helping children master sound-symbol relationships for the purpose of learning to read and spell
- views reading and writing as meaning-making processes, and therefore maintains attention to vocabulary and comprehension of text
- integrates phonics with children's developing semantic and syntactic cueing systems

- extends decoding practice so that children can apply what they learn to other reading experiences, including content areas
- builds on a foundation of phonemic awareness and alphabet knowledge
- includes extensive practice with onsets and rimes as a means of helping children master orthographic elements
- helps children develop automaticity in decoding, which leads to fluency and is positively related to comprehension
- provides a variety of practice activities (including word sorts, word building, word games, and the like) in addition to functional reading and writing exercises
- addresses state and national standards related to the knowledge and application of phonics as part of developing proficiency in reading and writing
- pays particular attention to the needs of atypical learners, including children with special needs and children whose first language is not English

In sum, the ultimate aim of phonics instruction—and the ultimate aim of *EPS Phonics PLUS*—is to help children become productive readers and writers. Productive readers read for entertainment as well as for information. Productive writers convey their ideas in writing according to linguistic and social standards. Productive readers and writers become self-actualized members of a literacy community.

III. PHONICS, PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS, AND THE ALPHABET

Francine R. Johnston

Good News!

Consider the list of factors below that are related to leaning to read. Select the two that you think are probably the most powerful predictors, the ones that are most highly correlated with success in early reading:

- phonemic segmentation
- letter naming (knowledge of the alphabet)

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- Peabody Picture Vocabulary (a measure of oral language and IQ)
- father's occupational status (a measure of socioeconomic status)
- parents reading to children
- sex
- age
- parents read in their spare time
- preschool attendance

If you are like many teachers, you may have included as one or both of your top two whether or not the parents have exposed the children to books by reading aloud in the home, or whether the parents model an interest in literacy by reading in their spare time. We know that these environmental factors play an important role in early reading. However, according to a longitudinal study by Share et al. (1984), these factors, selected from a longer list, are actually in rank order. This means that the most powerful factors are the ability to isolate or segment the individual phonemes or sounds in a word and knowing the alphabet.

The importance of the first two factors should not devalue experiences such as reading aloud to children. However, look at the factors on this list and ask yourself which ones teachers can do anything about. As educators this should come as very good news! We cannot change a family's economic status as measured by the father's occupation. We would have limited success convincing parents to read more in their spare time or even to read to their children more. But teachers can certainly do something about the top two. (Of course we can and should read to children a great deal in preschool and primary classrooms to make up for any lack of books in the home.)

Why might phonemic segmentation and alphabet knowledge be more powerful predictors than other factors? Let's consider this scenario. A kindergarten teacher has taught her students, who are not yet true readers, to memorize the words to a short jingle: *Sam, Sam the baker man/washed his face in a frying pan*. The two lines are written on a chart and the children are asked to come forward and point to the words as they recite the jingle from memory. If a child has some awareness of oral language, he or she might segment the first line into four rhythmic units: *Sam/Sam/the baker/man*. Or a child might segment it into six syllabic units: *Sam/Sam/the/ba/ker/man*. Since the line has five words, a child will get off track with either one of these strategies when attempting to match spoken units to the words on the page. But if the child has alphabet knowledge and the ability to segment at least an initial phoneme, then he or she may realize that when saying the word *man*, one should have a finger on the group of letters that has an *m* in it and when saying *baker*, the letter *b* should be touched. This ability to track a line of print using at least partial alphabetic clues and to self-correct when off track is known as a concept of word (Morris, 1981; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003). A concept of word enables a child to actually find the words on the page, certainly a necessary skill if one is to learn to read. Without a concept of word, no amount of book exposure, interest in reading, or oral language ability will help a child identify the words out of the sea of letters on a page of print.

The Alphabet

It should come as no surprise that knowing the graphic symbols of the alphabet is critical to learning to read, and this knowledge has been long identified as the most highly correlated factor in numerous studies (see reviews in Chall, 1967, 1996; Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; NRP 2000). Reading is, after all, the process of translating visual symbols on the printed page into meaningful language. Many

children learn their letters before they come to kindergarten through playful interactions with puzzles, magnetic letters, videos, games, software, television programs, and so on. They learn them from siblings, from parents, and from child care providers. It takes several years for most children to learn to recite the letters in order, to recognize and name the different forms of letters (uppercase and lowercase), and to write the letters for themselves. Lucky children from literacy-rich homes have both the time and adult attention required to master the alphabet prior to kindergarten.

If children come to kindergarten not knowing most of their letters, then teachers need to plan intensive instruction in the early part of the school year. Children without alphabet knowledge in today's kindergartens may be at risk in the current environment of high expectations. Twenty years ago children were expected to learn to read in first grade. Now some children are being retained in kindergarten if they are not able to read at prescribed levels. A "letter a week" will not cut it—26 weeks is more than two thirds into the school year.

So what should instruction in alphabet look like? Along with systematic coverage of the letters, teachers should be sure that students are shown *why* letter knowledge is important. Activities such as "name of the day" (Cunningham, 1995) and interactive writing (Button, Johnson & Furgeson, 1996) not only show students how letters are used to record important information but teach a variety of concepts related to print. Asking students to write, spelling as best they can, to label drawings, and to make journal entries is another impetus for learning letters. Children can take part in shared reading (Holdaway, 1979) even if their alphabet knowledge is limited. Indeed, shared reading, in which children use their memory and knowledge of language to support their initial attempts to read, is one more way to demonstrate the value of learning those letters. Teachers should direct children's attention to letters on charts, in big books, in little books, on posters, on T-shirts, and everywhere print occurs. Children are most likely to master letters quickly when they are seeing them and using them all day long for a variety of purposes.

Alphabet knowledge includes not only visual recognition but also knowledge of the letter names, and letter names give children insight into the sounds they represent (Adams, 1990; Bear et al, 2004). The letter name for *b* is "bee" and it starts with /b/. The letter name for *m* is "em" and it ends with /m/. There are some letters, such as *h* or *w*, that offer no clue and some, such as the soft sounds of *c* and *g*, that offer clues that are not very useful. But if students are exposed to alphabet books and activities that pair letters and sounds, then they will begin to use letter names as a clue to sound correspondences.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to consciously attend to sound segments of our spoken language: to syllables, onsets and rimes, and to the smallest units known as *phonemes*. Phoneme tasks involve segmenting sounds in words (cat = /k//ă/ /t/) as well as blending sounds, deleting sounds, and substituting sounds. In study after study, various measures of phonological awareness have consistently been highly correlated with success in beginning reading (Juel 1983; Adams 1990; NRP 2000). For example, Maclean, Bryant, and Bradley (1987) found that children who knew nursery rhymes and were able to identify rhyming words were more successful at learning to read than children without this kind of knowledge. Curiously, the role of phonological awareness has received widespread attention in only the last fifteen years or so. Prior to that, reading teachers talked of auditory discrimination as a factor. But we now understand that much more is involved than that term suggests. It should come as no surprise therefore that parents and even many teachers are not fully aware of the role that phonological awareness plays and are often confused about how it differs from phonics.

Phonological awareness is not something most parents understand well enough to directly teach their children before beginning school because it is an oral skill and much more abstract than the very concrete and well-defined task of naming or writing letters. Still, parents who share alphabet books, read rhyming books, such as those by Dr. Seuss, and help their children memorize songs and jingles are helping their children develop some aspects of phonological awareness indirectly. It is a rare parent who models phoneme segmentation or blending, so children are much more likely to enter kindergarten with limited phonological awareness than with limited alphabet knowledge.

Fortunately research shows that most children can be taught phonological awareness as a means to enhance early reading achievement (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Ball & Blachman, 1988). Such instruction need not take a lot of time (NRP, 2000), but some instructional time is critical. Teachers in kindergarten and first grade should plan activities that address phonological awareness, and many resources are available, including games and software. While children are learning about letters in the activities listed earlier, they can also learn about sounds. Nursery rhymes are a natural resource not only for listening pleasure and memorizing but also for shared reading. During interactive writing, teachers model writing letters and segmenting words into sounds. It turns out that phonological awareness, although it need not involve print since it is an oral language skill, is most readily learned in connection with print (Bradley & Bryant 1983). As children are asked to match the sounds they can hear to the letters they know, phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge are coming together, and this is what we know as phonics.

Phonics

Phonics knowledge depends upon those two important factors noted earlier. No phonics teaching will be successful unless children have alphabet knowledge and some degree of phonological awareness. It seems necessary to say something about what phonics is not before we talk about what it is. Phonics is not a method for teaching children to read. It is a tool, a knowledge set that enables children to understand the alphabetic nature of our writing system and as such it facilitates young readers' efforts to both read and spell. All reputable reading programs include some attention to phonics, and this has been the case for many years, especially since the publication of Jean Chall's book, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate* in 1967. Her findings helped put an end to purely "look-say" programs. However, in all those years no phonics-based reading program has surfaced that makes learning to read especially easy. Why not? Phonics is no quick fix, as some proponents would have us believe. Literature-based programs have been criticized for the lack of systematic instruction, but even phonics-intensive programs that teach isolated sounds and how to blend them before children read even one word of carefully constructed decodable text have not been dramatically more effective when carefully researched. No best method of teaching phonics has ever been established, even though research does consistently show that students who have phonics knowledge get off to a better start in reading (Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998).

Why is there not a more dramatic difference? That may be because children learn phonics in at least two different ways. To begin with, children teach themselves phonics when they induce letter-sound relationships in the process of reading (Thompson, 1999). They construct their own understanding of the phonic system as they match their oral language to print (Stahl, Duffey-Hester & Stahl, 1998). Initially this print may have been memorized in familiar predictable books or from charts such as our example of *Sam, Sam*. Students with alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness have a distinct advantage in such self-teaching, since they are more likely to notice how the sounds they say match to the letters on the page. Because some children are capable of teaching themselves phonics, we should never withhold engaging whole text at the same time we are instituting a systematic phonics

program. To do so limits the phonics knowledge many children are capable of learning for themselves. Children in literature-based programs that de-emphasize the systematic teaching of phonics must rely on self-teaching to learn phonics. The children who become skilled readers induce it for themselves through lots of reading practice, just as children must have done during the “look-say” era of Dick and Jane. Unfortunately we cannot be sure that all children are able to do this effectively enough to make the kind of progress needed for success in school.

Children also learn phonics from the instruction provided by teachers. Such instruction might be systematic and direct or it might be incidental and random, but it does involve providing children with information about how letters match to phonemes. Undoubtedly most children learn phonics through a combination of induction and instruction, but since phonics is necessary to become a skilled reader, it only makes good sense to address it early and in depth.

Given the importance of phonics, the issue of how to teach it is critical. The answer does not lie in promoting any single approach. Instead there are general principles that must be heeded:

1. Phonics instruction should be early, systematic, and explicit (NRP 2000; Stahl, Duffy-Hester & Stahl, 1998). This does not mean that it must be skill and drill with endless worksheets to complete, but it does mean that teachers should have a good understanding of the phonics features appropriate for the level and needs of students. Instruction should be fast paced and carefully planned, not simply left to chance or addressed only in the immediate context of something children may be reading.
2. Phonics is only one part of a total reading program and must not supplant the opportunity for children to do a lot of reading in engaging text (NRP 2000; Stahl, 1992). Doing a lot of reading offers students the opportunity to apply phonic understandings they have been taught and, as noted above, to induce phonic relationships. At the same time students will reap the other benefits associated with engaged reading, such as vocabulary growth and the development of comprehension skills.
3. Phonics should help students develop automatic word recognition so that the focus of reading instruction is upon comprehension (Stahl, 1992). The ability to recite rules or sound out words is *not* the goal of phonics instruction. Instead, readers need to be able to recognize words effortlessly and automatically (Adams, 1990). Not all effective phonics programs will require students to sound out words as a measure of successful learning. Analytic approaches to phonics begin with words students can already read. These words are then analyzed and compared to other words in an effort to discover phonic generalizations and spelling patterns (Bear et al, 2004).
4. A good phonics program should include opportunities for students to write, spelling as best they can (Stahl, 1992). Ironically, proponents of phonics are sometimes opposed to allowing students to invent spellings. However, there can hardly be a more meaningful exercise of phonics knowledge than in the act of writing. This is particularly true in kindergarten and first grade where children are learning the most basic letter-sound relationships and patterns. In a study of first graders, Clarke (1988) found that children who were encouraged to invent spellings rather than to wait to be given correct spellings during writing time did better on reading and spelling measures at the end of the year.

Phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge underpin any phonics instruction. They need not precede instruction in letter-sound relationships but should be regarded as key pieces in the literacy

puzzle. Phonics understandings may develop as children learn to read but should not be left to chance. An effective early literacy program must attend to all three of these aspects to assure that all children are successful at learning to read.

TEACHING PHONICS, PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS, AND THE ALPHABET WITH *EPS PHONICS PLUS*

Beth G. Davis

G. Reid Lyon (1998) has stated that learning to read is not as “natural” a process as many people once thought; therefore children must learn phonemic awareness and phonics skills and practice them with text in the early stages of reading acquisition. *EPS Phonics PLUS* begins in Level K acknowledging the key roles of phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge in the learning-to-read process. The entire kindergarten curriculum focuses on tasks that assist children in achieving proficiency with these skills.

Alphabet Knowledge Because there is more to alphabet knowledge than merely being able to sing the alphabet song, *EPS Phonics PLUS* proceeds from knowing the alphabet to recognition of letter names, both in isolation and at the beginning of key words for each letter. The order of the alphabet with capital letters is emphasized in lessons such as 7b, “Connect the Dots,” in which children connect the alphabet letters in order, resulting in a picture of a castle. An example of an exercise matching capital letters is found in Lesson 10, “I Spy.” In this activity, children are asked to match the capital letters appearing in a poem to capital letters hidden in the garden flowers, trees, birds, and other pictures. Children continue learning and practicing a variety of alphabet skills with lessons where they are asked to match capital to lowercase letters, write the letters, and demonstrate recognition of vowels and consonants.

Throughout the four units, each of the letters is individually presented with systematic, direct, explicit instruction, not only on the letter names, but also on initial sounds, as well as on writing both capital and lowercase forms. Lesson 32a on the letter *Mm* on and Lesson 42a on the letter *Pp* are typical examples. In these lessons, a rhyme introduces the letter. Children color pictures of an object beginning with the letter sound if a matching capital and lowercase form of the letter in question is written on the picture. On lines provided, children then trace and write the letters. On the facing page, children continue to practice matching the sound to a letter and writing that letter. All of these alphabet skills are reviewed and practiced again in the first unit of Book A. Alphabet skills are developed at a more sophisticated level when children are asked to alphabetize words to the second and third letter in Book C, Lesson 23b, a skill needed for using dictionaries and other reference works (Book C, Lesson 40).

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Instruction and practice in phonological and phonemic awareness skills are present in all four levels of the core program and in the Differentiated Instruction Guides (DIGs) that accompany Books A, B, and C. These important skills are especially emphasized in Books K and A, as children focus on multicultural poems, nursery rhymes, and alphabet poems. Lesson 20 in



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EPS Phonics PLUS adheres to the principles that are critical to the effective teaching of phonics.



Book K and Lesson 2a/b in Book A offer examples of alphabet poems. In various other lessons, children are asked to identify rhymes, choose rhyming words, and produce rhyming words.

Other phonological awareness tasks have children segmenting sounds as they identify numbers of syllables and initial sounds. Children also blend onsets and rimes and substitute initial consonant sounds. As children progress through the program levels, they combine their knowledge of sound-to-letter correspondence with a variety of phonics activities that proceed

from isolated words to varieties of connected text. The introduction of each new phonics element, however, works with pictures and sound to confirm children's ability to segment the spoken word into its phonemes and recognize the phoneme under consideration.

Phonics *EPS Phonics PLUS* adheres to the principles that are critical to the effective teaching of phonics.

1. *EPS Phonics PLUS* begins in kindergarten and concludes at the end of third grade, during which time a full range of phonics skills, carefully sequenced to build from simpler to more complicated elements, are explicitly taught, practiced, and reviewed. Assessment is built into the program at the beginning and end of each unit. The DIG: Reteach and Practice provides opportunities for reteaching and extra practice to follow each lesson or group of lessons as needed.
2. Wide reading must be part of any phonics program. Within *EPS Phonics PLUS* is a variety of real reading opportunities—fiction, folktales, tall tales, plays, poetry, book reports, and expository articles on subjects such as animals, weather, outer space, history, and nature. These provide children practice with phonics elements they are learning and focus as well on elements of genre and appropriate comprehension strategies. For example, after reading the *pourquoi* tale “Stars in the Sky,” Lesson 70 in Book B, second graders are asked to choose statements about a phenomenon in nature that might be part of a *pourquoi* tale. In addition, the Teacher Editions for all four grades offer suggestions for read-alouds and connections to literature throughout.

Finally, a series of engaging, colorfully illustrated Decodable Readers offers children practice with their new skills and reinforcement of skills already mastered. As Moats has suggested, “These books, created to make independent reading possible for a beginner, are a device to provide practice reading words that have specific spelling patterns or letter-sound correspondences and to encourage sounding words out. Many children can retain new sound-spelling patterns only with cumulative, distributed practice” (Moats, 1998).

The key to good decodable text is in the match between what is to be decoded and what has been taught. One of the challenges for teachers, then, is finding decodable books that follow the same sequence of instruction as their classroom teaching. The *EPS Phonics PLUS* Decodable Readers were specifically developed to match the scope and sequence of skills and sight words taught in the core program. According to a recent study (Menon and Hiebert), texts that have been crafted to incorporate controlled vocabulary can help support children's transition to independent reading. This is especially true for children who find learning to read a challenge (2005).

3. Automatic word recognition is encouraged in a variety of ways in *EPS Phonics PLUS*. Multiple examples of words illustrating the phonics elements under consideration are provided

to help children internalize the patterns. The lessons are structured so that the task is often the same, allowing children to focus on just the change in the phonics element. Rereadings of connected text are called for with partners, in choral readings, and as a whole class to build fluency. Timed readings of word lists illustrating specific phonics elements also build automaticity. In-book Word Walls provide children with their own place for collecting words and practicing reading them to automaticity.

4. Writing opportunities to reinforce sound-symbol relationships occur at the word and sentence level with regularity in *EPS Phonics PLUS*. In addition, children write longer text such as stories, plays, and poems as they progress through the program.

IV. FLUENCY

Melanie Kuhn

One of the major goals of literacy instruction involves ensuring that students become fluent readers (Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Reutzel, 1996). This goal is important since fluent reading incorporates both the ability to recognize words accurately and automatically and to read texts with expression. Accuracy, automaticity, and expressive reading combine to make oral reading sound like spoken language. Equally important, however, is the role reading fluency plays in aiding comprehension.

Fluency's Role in the Reading Process

Given the limited time available for reading instruction, it is important to understand the two ways fluent reading contributes to skilled reading and comprehension (Dowhower, 1991; Kuhn & Stahl, 2000; NRP, 2000; Samuels, 1979; Schreiber, 1991). The first involves the development of automatic word recognition while the second deals with prosody, or the components that allow for expression.

Contribution of Automatic Word Recognition to Comprehension

Skilled readers are able not only to identify words accurately but also to recognize them instantly. As a result, they do not need to focus a great deal of their attention on decoding each word as they encounter it. Readers who need to spend time identifying individual words do not have enough attention remaining to understand what they have just read (Adams, 1990; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974; Perfetti, 1985; Samuels, 1979; Stanovich, 1980). In fact, the most effective way for learners to develop automatic word recognition is through a combination of word study and the extensive reading of connected text that reinforces what they have learned (Allington, 2001; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; Cunningham, 2000; Rasinski & Padak, 2001). This combination is key to ensuring that students can transfer their decoding skills to their reading of connected text. It cannot be overemphasized that this transfer does not occur automatically, and it is often the case that students can become quite facile at recognizing words in isolation, yet still experience difficulty when they encounter those same words in text.

Contribution of Prosody

While automaticity accounts for accurate and effortless decoding, it does not account for the expression that is part and parcel of fluent reading (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). This expression incorporates features such as pitch, stress, and the use of appropriate phrasing (Dowhower, 1991; Schreiber, 1991) and allows

Accuracy, automaticity, and expressive reading combine to make oral reading sound like spoken language. Equally important, however, is the role reading fluency plays in aiding comprehension.



oral reading to sound like spoken language. It is also important to look at how such expressive, or prosodic, reading contributes to comprehension.

Disfluent readers tend to read in a monotonous and choppy fashion; in other words, they have little or no expression and their phrasing is either word-by-word or involves awkward groupings of words (Dowhower, 1991; Reutzel, 1996; Schreiber, 1991). Fluent readers, on the other hand, integrate pitch, emphasis, and the appropriate use of phrasing in their reading (Chall, 1996; Dowhower, 1991; Schreiber, 1991). This use of appropriate expression occurs only as readers become aware of the connection between written and oral language and indicates their understanding of what they read; it would certainly be impossible to apply these elements without such an understanding. This ability develops best when learners are provided with skilled models of expressive reading.

Strategies for Developing Reading Fluency

Once the importance of reading fluency has been established, the next step is to determine how fluency instruction can be effectively incorporated into the literacy curriculum.

There are four strategies designed to assist learners with their fluency development, ranging from individual instruction to whole class approaches. By integrating these strategies into the literacy curriculum, as is done in *EPS Phonics PLUS*, it becomes possible to help students succeed in making the transition from word-by-word reading to an expressive rendering of text.

1. Repeated Readings Perhaps the best-known of the strategies for reading fluency is that of repeated readings developed by Dahl and Samuels (Dahl, 1974; Samuels, 1979). It relies upon repeated practice of a given passage in order to improve word recognition. Dahl and Samuels felt this repetition would lead to improved fluency on the practiced material and would transfer to previously unread texts as well. Growth in fluency was to be measured through an increase in reading rate, and the approach has proved successful in numerous studies (Dowhower, 1989). Repeated reading is a simple technique that is easy to use. The procedure is designed for individual students who are generally accurate but slow decoders. The strategy consists of two components. The first involves selecting a short passage (approximately 100–200 words) that is at the high end of the student’s instructional level or even a little beyond (approximately 90–95% accuracy), while the second involves recording both the number of words read per minute and the number of miscues made during each reading. With each additional reading, the number of words read per minute increases and the number of miscues decreases until an optimal level is achieved.

For the initial reading, the student should read the passage aloud with the teacher timing the reading and marking any miscues. From this information the teacher should chart both the number of words read per minute and the number of miscues. The teacher should then review the miscues with the student. At this point the student should practice the passage independently, charting a new words-per-minute rating along with the number of miscues in order to have a visual indicator of progress. The student should continue practicing until a rate of approximately 100 words per minute and 1 or 2 miscues per 100 words

(you may wish to divide this practice time into 2 or 3 sessions) is reached. However, if it takes the student more than seven attempts to achieve this, you may wish to move to an easier passage. Further, it is important to emphasize speed over accuracy for these passages since the goal is to establish automatic word recognition. The student should continue with new passages at the same level until she or he has reached the point where a new selection can be read at a relatively fluent pace on the initial reading; at that point, selections should be made at a more difficult level.

2. Paired Repeated Readings Numerous studies have proven that repeated readings are a highly effective strategy for improving reading fluency. However, this approach is often considered too time-consuming for the teacher to employ with more than one or two students over the course of the day. Given this situation, paired repeated readings provide a more classroom friendly alternative (Koskinen & Blum, 1984, 1986). This procedure parallels traditional repeated readings by providing opportunities for students to repeatedly read connected text in order to improve their accuracy and automaticity. However, the procedure provides several variations from the original strategy. For example, rather than working one-on-one with the teacher, the students work with one another in pairs. In order to ensure that the students' interaction goes smoothly, the teacher gives training so that students are able to offer positive feedback. This allows students to act as coaches, better ensuring a partner's improvement.

The procedure itself involves students' selection of a passage, approximately 50 words long, from material they are currently using as part of their classroom reading. (It is recommended that each student in a pair select different passages so as to minimize "direct comparison of reading proficiency" [Koskinen & Blum, 1986, p. 71]). Students are to read through their passages silently and decide between them who is to read aloud first (creating an alternating schedule might also serve to minimize disputes).

The first student reads a passage aloud to a partner three times, assessing his or her own performance and recording how well each rendition went on a self-evaluation sheet. The partner who is providing feedback listens carefully to each of the readings and, after the second and third rendition, comments on the ways the performance has improved. These improvements are also recorded on a listening sheet. The partners then switch roles and the procedure is completed with the new reader. Since paired repeated readings can be used with the entire class or reading group, it is possible to integrate this procedure; the method seems to have many of the benefits of the original procedure.

3. Reading-While-Listening Another highly effective strategy is that of reading-while-listening. This strategy was designed by Carol Chomsky (1978) as a means of assisting struggling readers who had received extensive decoding instruction but were unable to make use of this knowledge. Chomsky felt that it might be possible to assist these children by exposing them to significantly lengthy connected text in an accessible format. In order to achieve this, she provided students with tape recordings of books that were at the upper end of the students' instructional level. The process was slow initially, but, as the children became increasingly familiar with the process, they found it easier to keep track of the story, and they took less time to reach mastery on each subsequent selection. Further, according to both parents and teachers, the children were more willing both to read independently and to engage in writing activities.

The procedure is straightforward and consists of having the students repeatedly listen to a portion of a recording while simultaneously reading along with a section of the text. This continues until they



**Readers who
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time identifying individual
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enough attention
remaining to understand
what they have just read.**

are able to render the material fluently. Then, they move on to a new passage. It is important to provide a number of texts on tape so that the children have a choice. Commercial tapes of many books are available (make sure to get the unabridged versions), and older students can create recordings for younger children. You can also enlist parents or classroom assistants in creating these resources. Students should be allowed to choose from the recordings available and to set their own pace within reasonable guidelines (e.g., 10–20 minutes of reading-while-listening per day). It is important to emphasize that students are held accountable for this method, thereby making it different from most traditional listening centers in which students engage in a story on the affective level but are not generally expected to be able to read a text independently after hearing the story, even though they may choose to read along with the tape.

4. Reader's Theater Another approach easily adapted to whole class instruction or with groups of students is that of Reader's Theater (Allington, 2001; Bidwell, 1990; Henning, 1974; Optiz & Rasinski, 1998). It is possible to use any reading material as the basis of the recitation, including poetry and non-fiction (Hoyt, 2000). The method is popular in that it provides a real purpose for practicing a particular text repeatedly. There are two ways to conduct this activity. The first makes use of plays that are often available in literature anthologies and basal readers or through the school or public library. The second involves rewriting a text or a portion of a text as a performance piece. Since Reader's Theater is not meant to be an all-out performance, there is no need to provide props, sets, or costumes. Nor are students required to memorize their lines. Instead, they are expected to provide an expressive rendition of the text simply through their oral reading, which is practiced for smoothness and intonation.

As with the previous strategies, this method helps students develop the automatic word recognition that is essential to fluent reading. However, there is also a significant emphasis on using appropriate expression to convey the text's meaning. The procedure incorporates several distinct steps that make it adaptable as both a small group and a whole class activity. First, either you or the students should select a text that you consider to be easily adaptable to oral performance. You can then either read the material aloud to the students or, depending on their reading ability, they can read through it independently. The students should next be divided into working groups. At this point you can either provide them with a copy of a play or a script, or the students can turn a text into a script as part of a writing workshop. Students can have a role for which they are responsible or can read portions of the script as pairs or chorally. One critical thing is that students are provided with enough time to become comfortable with their section of the script by practicing their passage(s) both silently and aloud. They should also solicit and contribute positive feedback from their peers regarding their performance. Upon completion of their practice, the students "perform" by presenting their interpretation to their classmates. Students can also critique their own performance using a self-evaluation form. While this activity is not one that should be used on a daily basis, it is one that most students enjoy and one that adds to their overall reading development through an enjoyable literacy activity.

A Fluency-Oriented Literacy Program

In addition to strategies that can be integrated into an existing literacy curriculum, there are methods that attempt to redesign the literacy curriculum in order to make fluency a primary instructional focus. The Oral Recitation Lesson (Hoffman & Crone, 1985) is one such approach. The program builds effective oral reading approaches into the general literacy curriculum and can be used with basal readers, literature anthologies, or trade books. Rather than simply using oral reading as a means of assessing

students' reading ability, the Oral Recitation Lesson emphasizes developing the students' use of expression. In order to achieve this goal, the procedure stresses modeling of expressive reading by the teacher, practicing of text by the students, and a criteria for mastery that includes improved fluency as measured by improvements in rate and expression. Further, it incorporates a significant focus on comprehension.

As part of their research into effective oral reading instruction, Hoffman and Crone (1985) found two approaches used in the nineteenth century that seemed particularly relevant in terms of developing students' expression and comprehension: the recitation lesson and the story method. In both examples, the lessons begin with the teacher's oral rendering of a text and are followed by a guided discussion of the readings in order to ensure that the students have a solid understanding of the passage. Students are then given the opportunity to select and practice a portion of the text that they were expected to read aloud. This performance provides students with the opportunity to present their own oral interpretation of the passage. The teacher then provides feedback.

Based upon these historical methods, Hoffman and Crone (1985) created the Oral Recitation Lesson. This procedure incorporates five steps:

- the teacher reads the story aloud "with expression" (p. 78)
- the teacher and students discuss the story
- the teacher allows for guided practice of the text using various fluency strategies
- the students practice a section of the text independently
- the students provide an oral rendering of the passage.

In addition, the procedure calls for a ten-minute period in the mornings during which the students are meant to reread their selection from the text. They should also be furnished with copies of the stories to bring home. Students were considered to have achieved mastery of a selection if they reached criteria in three areas: accuracy, rate, and expression. Their accuracy rating should be 98% or higher; they should have achieved a words-per-minute rating of at least 75; and they should read in ways that involve the appropriate use of pitch, stress, and breaks between words (juncture). Students should be assessed by their teacher on a twice weekly basis and moved on to a new story when mastery is achieved for the selection.

Assessing Reading Fluency

A final area worth discussing involves the assessment of fluent reading. First, it helps you identify which students need fluency-oriented instruction and, second, it allows you to determine the progress that is being made as a result of a given intervention. The scale presented here, the National Assessment of Educational Progress's (NAEP) Oral Reading Fluency Scale (NAEP, 1995) is a generalized measure of expression and phrasing. The NAEP is a four-point scale (see chart) designed to rate students in terms of their reading fluency. This scale ranges from reading that is primarily word-by-word and does not maintain a sense of grammar to reading that is both expressive and appropriately phrased. The NAEP scale can be easily implemented in most classrooms, something that is especially important, given that assessment of readers' fluency is not nearly as universal as assessment of their word recognition. Such an assessment measure will allow you to identify which, if any, of your students need additional support in this area and will allow you to determine when they are ready to move up to a more difficult level of text. Given in conjunction with other suggestions in this paper, it should help you help your students to become expressive oral readers.

NAEP'S ORAL READING FLUENCY SCALE

Level 4: Reads primarily in larger, meaningful phrase groups. Although some regressions, repetitions, and deviations from text may be present, those do not appear to detract from the overall structure of the story. Preservation of the author's syntax is consistent. Some or most of the story is read with expressive interpretation.

Level 3: Reads primarily in three- or four-word phrase groups. Some smaller groupings may be present. However, the majority of phrasing seems appropriate and preserves the syntax of the author. Little or no expressive interpretation is present.

Level 2: Reads primarily in two-word phrases with some three- or four-word groupings. Some word-by-word reading may be present. Word groupings may seem awkward and unrelated to larger context of sentence or passage.

Level 1: Reads primarily word-by-word. Occasionally two-word or three-word phrases may occur, but these are infrequent and/or they do not preserve meaningful syntax.

TEACHING FLUENCY WITH *EPS PHONICS PLUS*

Beth G. Davis

Question: The child who has successfully completed all four levels of *EPS Phonics PLUS* displays

- a. accuracy in word recognition
- b. automaticity of word recognition
- c. expressive reading
- d. all the above

Because a graduate of the *EPS Phonics PLUS* program is meant to emerge as a fluent reader, the correct answer is "d. all of the above." Accurate, automatic word recognition and expressive reading—the skill elements that characterize fluent readers—are skill elements that characterize much of the instructional focus of *EPS Phonics PLUS*.

Star Words are one mechanism used to build accuracy in word recognition in *EPS Phonics PLUS*. Star Words are the high-frequency words that occur over and over in printed text. In many cases, with words like *the*, *have*, and *to*, the words do not conform to expected sound-symbol correspondences. Star Words are first introduced in kindergarten, and new ones appear repeatedly, always adding to the children's bank of instantly recognizable words. Working with the words in isolation, children do tasks such as matching, tracing with their fingers, and writing the words. In-book Word Walls and games like Tic-Tac-Toe and Dominoes (Book K, Lessons 68a/b and 79a) are also used to reinforce accuracy and automaticity. In lessons such as Book K, Lesson 6a, rebus is used, enabling children to read the words in sentences like "A [picture of a bone] is for the [picture of a dog]". Reinforcement activities that address Star Words specifically continue throughout Books A and B. Because these high-frequency words are so much a part of all connected text, the sentences and longer text present in Books B and C cement accuracy and automaticity as well.

All the phoneme-grapheme elements and phonic and morphemic word part activities promote accurate and automatic word recognition. Multiple repetitions of words illustrating the elements being taught occur with each lesson. Children progress from phonemic awareness of the elements to work with phonics that builds from simple sound-symbol correspondences to larger word patterns and orthographic

units. These larger units facilitate speed of recognition of the illustrative words used first in isolation and then in contextual settings. Review is built in after every few lessons and for students in need of further teaching and/or practice, there are coordinating pages in the *Differentiated Instruction Guide: Reteach and Practice*. To help children stay focused on the words, many of the skill lessons, such as those teaching short or long vowels, keep the tasks the same, changing only the words to highlight the new sound.

In-book Word Wall lessons occur frequently at the culmination of work with a phonic element. Typical teacher instructions for these lessons focus on building accuracy and automaticity. “Have children read the words on the Word Wall as quickly and as accurately as they can. For practice, have children read by row and by column. Have individual children read the words to you and record their time” (Book A, Lesson 23, “Short a Word Wall”). With sentences and longer text, children build fluency through various scenarios of repeated readings: whole group, choral reading, and partner reading.

Expressive reading is promoted most often with longer segments of text. Children are encouraged to reread the selections several times, focusing on expression and on how the speaker would say the words if the text includes characters. Reader’s Theater activities are sometimes suggested as with the story “Coyote Looks for Dinner” (Book C, Lesson 29) where, with partners, one child reads lines for Coyote and the other child, the lines for the other animals. In other instances, children read sentences, for example, with their voices expressing different emotions (Book B, Lesson 19b). *EPS Phonics PLUS* includes a number of readings—such as poems, folk tales, and even knock-knock jokes—that are excellent vehicles for helping children achieve expressive reading. Finally, *EPS Phonics PLUS* presents several plays for children to read and perform as Reader’s Theater or as full-blown performances. In Book A, children read a series of related short plays (Lessons 33, 57, 87, and 109). Books B and C also feature plays for children to read and perform.

V. COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

Sharon Walpole

Comprehension in a phonics program? Definitely. All literacy instruction is in the service of comprehension development. The young learners you will be working with are on a language bridge, using what they know about oral language to gain access to written language. Phonemic awareness will help them to make more specific use of their oral language. Phonics will be a tool to match written language to their store of oral language. Fluency work will initially help them to make written language sound like oral language; then it will help them to learn about the structures of written language that are not part of their oral language. In this article, I will present some basic comprehension-building activities that you can integrate into all of your language and literacy work with young readers and writers, including your phonics lessons. I will start with strategies for word learning, move to strategies for understanding written language grammar, or syntax, and finish with attention to strategies for understanding whole texts.

Learning New Words

The most basic connection between phonics and comprehension is that both allow us to gain access to new words. The key difference is what is new about the words. In basic phonics tasks, young readers use phonics to access the sound of printed words that are already part of their meaning vocabulary. What is new about the words is their written form. In basic vocabulary-building tasks, young readers use what they already know about words and their meanings to build knowledge of the meanings of new

words. In most of those cases, what is new is both the sound and the meaning of the word. In the early years of school, children are building their meaning vocabulary at astounding rates. Let's examine the instructional choices that facilitate this development.

- Children need access to whole texts that contain novel words.

That children enjoy sharing stories with adults is no news. However, there is more to read-alouds than sheer fun. There is much evidence that listening to texts read aloud increases children's vocabulary knowledge. Anderson, Heibert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985) identified read-alouds as absolutely essential building blocks for literacy, and later Adams (1990) summarized the research on word learning. The sheer number of words that are learned during children's school experience points to the power and importance of incidental word learning—the learning of new words as a byproduct of text comprehension (Nagy, Anderson & Herman, 1987). In essence, much vocabulary growth occurs very naturally through exposure to new words in rich and meaningful contexts. A review of studies on this incidental vocabulary learning (Swanborn & de Glopper, 1999) estimated that the chances of learning a new word from normal reading were 15%—good odds with no additional support.

How does this apply to the vocabulary learning of young children? Young children's "reading" is really listening, and listening to texts read aloud (rather than oral language) provides a rich context for meeting new words. Beck and McKeown (2001) identified 1,500 potentially unfamiliar words in 80 books selected as read-alouds for kindergarten and first grade children—a number too large to ignore. Elley (1989) demonstrated that read-alouds of storybooks do develop vocabulary knowledge in young children. One way to develop the vocabularies of young children, then, is to read aloud to them from these texts that are rich in opportunities for incidental word learning from listening.

- Children need to learn new words through both definition and context.

We can increase the likelihood of vocabulary learning during read-alouds with specific interactions. Both definitions and context are important. Elley (1989) repeated his own experiment above with the addition of teacher explanation. During the storybook readings, teachers simply included synonymous phrases, simple role-plays, or direct references to supportive illustrations. Children learned almost twice as many words with these simple additions of various types of definitions within the context of the story.

Beck and McKeown (2001) provided a simple rubric for teaching new words found in storybooks. After reading the books in an interactive way, they targeted specific vocabulary words for special attention in four steps: they reviewed the word in the way it was used in the story, they told the definition, they gave the word a new context (different from the one in the story), and finally they invited the children to use the word in supported context.

- Children need meaningful repetition in order to build their vocabularies. Unfortunately, the old adage "use it once and it's yours" does not hold true for direct instruction in new words. One of the keys to word learning is meaningful repetition. Beck and her colleagues (Beck, Perfetti & McKeown, 1982; McKeown, Beck, Omanson & Perfetti, 1983) examined the issue of repetition in word learning with older students and found that as many as fourteen meaningful exposures were needed in order for a word to be added to a learner's vocabulary. In the word learning procedure described above, Beck and McKeown added a simple tracking system for teachers to encourage children to continue to use the words that had been targeted. They created a chart to track the words targeted for instruction and the additional times that children were able to use

them. In essence, they worked to develop teachers' and children's consciousness of learning new words and excitement for using them in new ways.

Fortunately some repetition can also be accomplished through simple rereadings. Given what we know about the power of incidental word learning and the need for meaningful repetition in order to solidify vocabulary gains, new text is not always better than previously read text. In fact, rereading an "old" text for a new reason may have significant effects on vocabulary development for our young learners. Parents of young children know that this focus on rereading for potential vocabulary gains is often consistent with what children want anyway—witness the number of times that children want to hear a favorite story.



All literacy instruction is in the service of comprehension development. The young learners you will be working with are on a language bridge, using what they know about oral language to gain access to written language.

Learning the Sound and Syntax of Written Language

Learning to read is more than learning to read oral language that is written down. Learning to read involves learning to read writing, and written language is actually different than spoken language. In spoken language, our grammar is both clipped and simple. In fact, it is filled with written-language error. We tend to speak in sentence fragments. Much of the meaning of our language is contained in our nonverbal actions and in the shared reference points we have with our listener. Written language is decontextualized from those shared references. Young learners must learn the grammar of written language as they have learned the grammar of the spoken language of their families. We can make instructional choices that facilitate that language learning and in turn build text comprehension:

- Children need support in understanding the meanings of written language syntax in the context of engaging texts.
- Children need repeated meaningful exposures to texts that contain new language structures.
- Children need to engage in oral language production of written language structures.

Learning New Text Structures

There is still more to comprehension development for young children than learning new words or learning the syntactic structures of written language. Those new words and new language structures are embedded within even larger structures—the structures of texts. Teaching children the basic components of these structures helps them to focus their attention on the most salient parts of texts so that they can both understand them and remember them. Text structure instruction also helps empower young children to see themselves as writers. Instructional choices facilitate this process:

1. Children need instruction in the basic elements of narrative.
2. Children need instruction in the basic elements of information text.

Learning Simple Comprehension Strategies

Words, syntax, and text structure provide the basic context for the most important work of young comprehenders—construction of meaning at the intersection of the text and their prior knowledge. Good readers are builders. They are building understanding of text using as their building materials information from the words, the pictures, and things that they already know. Some of that construction work is effortless and unconscious, but some of it is not. When readers consciously decide to engage in these processes to aid their understanding, they are being strategic. Even young learners can begin to use comprehension strategies, given teaching environments that make them accessible:

- Children need instruction in how to make predictions.
- Children need instruction in how to visualize.
- Children need instruction in how to retell.

Comprehension First

We know that explicit, systematic phonics instruction is key to early literacy success (National Reading Panel, 2000). We also know that the real goal of all reading and all reading instruction is comprehension (Snow, 2002). We know that exemplary early literacy instruction is comprehensive by nature, including the phonics instruction that children need and connection to real reading and writing tasks, including direct and explicit instruction in the comprehension process (Pressley, M.; Allington, R. L.; Wharton-McDonald, R.; Block, C.C.; & Morrow, L. M., 2001). Teachers need access to curriculum materials that help them to manage a both/and approach rather than an either/or approach.

TEACHING COMPREHENSION WITH *EPS PHONICS PLUS*

Beth G. Davis

EPS Phonics PLUS offers a curriculum approach that melds decoding with the teaching of comprehension. While the major purpose of *EPS Phonics PLUS* is phonics instruction, teaching word skills coexists with comprehension instruction and focuses on reading and writing tasks as well—some of the many “pluses” in the program. The building blocks of comprehension are developed, in part, through the acquisition of meaning vocabulary as well as automaticity of word recognition. Vocabulary is such a strong key to comprehension, that if readers do not understand approximately 90 to 95 percent of what they read, they will not fully comprehend a passage. In fact, according to Andrew Biemiller (2003, pp. i–ii), “Jeanne Chall argued that testing vocabulary is functionally equivalent to testing reading comprehension. Chall found the correlation between the two to be so high that only vocabulary needed to be assessed.” Vocabulary questions, therefore, make up an important part of the comprehension sections of most state and other high-stakes tests.

Vocabulary Building Vocabulary building—or word meaning knowledge—is promoted throughout *EPS Phonics PLUS*. In many instances it occurs incidentally via read-alouds and in other instances through direct teaching. Examples of read-alouds that expand vocabulary knowledge in the kindergarten program can be found in the many nursery rhymes and poems, such as Book K, Lesson 57a, with its rhyme “Wicked Wily Cat.” Books A, B, and C include selections that are initially read aloud to or with the children and subsequently read by the children. Most contain some words whose meanings may be unfamiliar to the children but through context, illustrations and discussion, come to be understood.

EPS

“The Pickety Fence” by David McCord in Book A, Lesson 29a offers a playful example of using a familiar word, *lick*, with a less familiar meaning. The context in Lesson 60, “Looking at the Moon” in Book B, helps to reveal the meanings of the more difficult words through illustrations, synonymous words, and examples. The Teacher’s Editions of *EPS Phonics PLUS* at every level suggest accompanying books and poems to further illustrate and enrich the lessons with vocabulary knowledge that is acquired incidentally.

There is a strong emphasis on vocabulary in the daily work children do. Teachers are instructed to ascertain that children know the meanings of the names of nearly every object pictured and every word used to illustrate phonics elements. Many lessons ask children to create sentences using these words. Discussion of word meanings is integral to many of the lessons at all levels, beginning in Book K. Making word webs is often suggested. Several lessons in Book B focus on prefixes and suffixes, illustrating how meaning is affected. Lesson 89 asks children to find homophones in two poems. Work with homophones occurs throughout Books A, B, and C.

Book C places an even stronger emphasis on vocabulary in longer passages, including practice with the types of assessment children are likely to face on high-stakes tests. Lesson 7 is an assessment exercise for “Ananse and Turtle” and contains a vocabulary question that pertains to a word from the text. This type of assessment exercise follows many longer connected text readings in Book C. In addition there are lessons on math, science, social studies, and geography words, lessons on Greek and Latin word parts, synonyms, antonyms, homophones, and multiple meaning words. Lessons 66a and 66b relate word meanings in simple analogies.

Syntax of Written Language To aid children in learning the syntax of written language and a variety of written text structures, *EPS Phonics PLUS* works with children at the sentence level as well as with longer text. In Book A, Lessons 81b, 83b, and 106a, children progress from understanding sentence meaning by matching sentences to pictures, to writing correct word order for endings of sentences, to writing the proper word order for complete sentences. Text that goes beyond the sentence level includes narrative and expository text as well as plays, poetry, and book reports.

Text Structures Children read the texts not only to build sight and meaning vocabulary and fluency but also to learn identifying characteristics of the various text structures—an important concept for comprehension. In most instances they not only read these text structure examples but are asked to write their own poems, stories, plays, and reports—at their own levels—to enhance their understanding of the elements that define different genres. In Book B, Lesson 69, using the elements of narrative text from the play *City Mouse and Country Mouse* as an example, children are asked to create a title, characters, setting, plot, and theme for a story which they then write. In Book C, Lesson 49b, using the play *Johnny Appleseed*, from the previous lesson, children identify characters, time, place, and narrator to write a play based on ideas from their reading. Using the expository text “Trees,” children learn by creating a KWL chart to activate prior knowledge to help them identify what they want to learn and recall what they have learned (Book A, Lesson 93a/b).



“Jeanne Chall argued that testing vocabulary is functionally equivalent to testing reading comprehension. Chall found the correlation between the two to be so high that only vocabulary needed to be assessed.”
—Andrew Biemiller

In Book C, there is an even stronger emphasis on vocabulary in longer passages, including practice with the types of assessment children are likely to face on high-stakes tests.



Comprehension Strategies Comprehension skills and strategies are taught with nonfiction text selections, as well as with fiction. An example of retelling strategies can be found in Book K and Book A in a lesson on Trees, the selection mentioned above (Book A, Lesson 94, “Trees: Retelling”). Thorough instructions about how to use this strategy and a Retelling Response Sheet are included in the corresponding Teacher’s Edition pages.

Think Aloud modeling for teachers to emulate accompanies the direct instruction for many connected text readings throughout *EPS Phonics PLUS*. The modeling illustrates a number of strategies for identifying words, for test taking, and most often, for comprehending. Examples of comprehension skills modeled with Think Alouds are included in the direct instruction for the *Johnny Appleseed* text noted above to help children

understand how to predict and visualize while reading. How the text raises questions and how the reader identifies main idea are still other strategies modeled in several other lessons.

Review of the skills and words used is built into *EPS Phonics PLUS* after every few lessons. Rereadings are encouraged to build both fluency and repeated exposure to new meaning vocabulary.

VI. AN OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Cindy A. Strickland

There has always been learner variability in the classroom, and good teachers have always differentiated their instruction, although they probably did not use that term. So differentiation is not a new idea. What is new, however, is the increasing pressure on teacher educators and staff development specialists to help teachers learn how to address the variability of today’s classrooms in systematic and consistent ways. A major goal of the differentiation model, as outlined by Carol Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2004) is to help teachers recognize and embrace the need for variability in instruction and then develop and refine classroom-friendly strategies to facilitate both the design and the implementation of a multitask classroom.

Differentiated Instruction Defined

Differentiation of instruction is first and foremost a philosophy of teaching and learning that recognizes and embraces student diversity in all its forms. Differentiation is “classroom practice that looks eyeball to eyeball with the reality that kids differ, and the most effective teachers do whatever it takes to hook the whole range of kids on learning (Tomlinson, 1999).” “Whatever it takes” often means that teachers have to resist the temptation to design one-size-fits-all classroom activities and instead, to provide multiple ways for students to access and refine content knowledge and process skills, as well as multiple ways to show evidence of their learning. More than an attempt to vary teaching style from time to time with the hope that students will get what they need at least some of the time, teachers who strive to differentiate work to provide a “reasonable range of approaches to learning much of the time” (Tomlinson, 2001). In a differentiated classroom, the teacher works hard to design lessons to address variability in students’ interest, learning profiles, abilities, and readiness for the task at hand.

Student Interest

Teachers have long recognized the power of tapping into student interest. People learn better and faster if they have some interest in the topic or skill at hand. While it is probably not possible to convince students that everything in the required curriculum is fascinating and highly pertinent to their lives, savvy teachers do their best to link content to student interest whenever they can. If a student is reluctant to read but is interested in motorcycles, we try to find appropriate reading matter on motorcycles. If a student sees no purpose to algebra, we bring in people who use algebra in their jobs. If a student finds the history of the Civil War less than fascinating, we tell them stories of children from that time period and how the war affected their lives and the lives of their parents to help students see how history connects to their own world experiences.

At the same time, we recognize that part of our duty as educators is to increase the breadth of student interests as well as the depth. How can a student be interested in something that he or she has never heard of? Thus, we find ourselves in the position of needing to respond and connect to existing student interests as often as possible and introducing students to a variety of exciting topics and skills that we hope will become new interests along the way.

Student Learning Profile

A student's learning profile consists of a number of characteristics. A learning profile encompasses students' preferred learning style (such as visual/auditory/ kinesthetic, or preference for part-to-whole or whole-to part learning); their pattern of strengths and weaknesses in terms of multiple intelligences (Howard Gardner's verbal/linguistic, mathematical/logical, visual/ spatial, musical/rhythmic, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligences (1983, 1993), or Robert Sternberg's analytic, practical, and creative intelligences) (1985); learned cultural and gender preferences for learning (for example, preference for competitive or collaborative learning); psychological characteristics (such as introversion vs. extroversion or focus on thinking vs. feeling); and environmental preferences (such as a preference for an environment which is busy or spare, low in light or bright, warm or cool).

Providing differentiated instruction in the classroom, then, is important for all students. It becomes even more crucial, however, when students fall into one of three categories that present special challenges:

- English language learners face the dual task of learning English and learning to read. According to Mary Drucker, "Out of nearly 3 million public school teachers surveyed by the National Center for Education Statistics, 41% report teaching limited English proficient (LEP) students, while only 12.5% have received eight or more hours of training (NCELA Newsline Bulletin, 2002)." (Drucker, 2003, p. 22)
- Children with language-specific learning differences, many of whom would have previously been taught in a specialized setting, are now members of the "inclusion classroom." So it becomes the general classroom teacher's task to help these children develop literacy.
- Struggling readers—a somewhat catchall term for students who struggle with much of the instruction presented and those who struggle with a few concepts from time to time—can easily fall through the instructional cracks. Teachers of these children need materials at the ready to provide scaffolding as needed.

When teachers make it possible for students to learn in a manner that is comfortable for them, they are able to learn more efficiently. With the large amount of content in today's curriculum, efficiency of learning

So differentiation is not a new idea. What *is* new, however, is the increasing pressure on teacher educators and staff development specialists to help teachers learn how to address the variability of today's classrooms in systematic and consistent ways.



is crucial. But as with interest, the wise teacher recognizes the need to indulge a student's preferences when possible, but balance that with safe opportunities for students to try out less-developed aspects of their learning profile. Not to do so would handicap students in the long term, for their learning preferences cannot and will not always be honored.

Student Readiness

Experienced teachers know what psychologists, brain researchers, and education experts have been telling us for years: students learn best when what they are asked to do is just a little bit harder than what they are currently capable of doing. By offering learning activities that are slightly beyond what students can do unassisted and then providing the scaffolding necessary for students to succeed at these tasks, we facilitate cognitive growth in an atmosphere that is neither too challenging, which promotes frustration and resentment, or too easy, which promotes boredom and apathy.

A student's readiness to learn encompasses several factors. Certainly students' past achievement and/or aptitude for a subject area are a consideration, but so too are students' previous

exposure to the topic at hand, their mastery or lack of mastery of prerequisite skills, their physical and emotional state, and their attitude toward the topic or skill in question. It is the teacher's job to consider all of these factors when determining a child's readiness to learn and then to match learning experiences to the student's background and needs as often as possible.

High-Quality Differentiated Instruction

In many ways, the differentiated classroom resembles any good classroom—one in which students are offered a challenging curriculum that is stimulating and pertinent to them in an atmosphere that is safe and accepting. The mission of the teacher in a differentiated classroom is to provide challenging curriculum that is matched to students' needs in terms of readiness, interest, and learning profile in an atmosphere that is welcoming, respectful of differences, supportive of appropriate academic risk-taking, and that emphasizes both cognitive and affective growth for all students. As part of this mission, there are four qualities that must be present in a classroom for it to be truly differentiated: high-quality curriculum, respectful activities, flexible grouping, and ongoing assessment.

High-Quality Curriculum There is no point to differentiating curriculum that is unfocused, misleading, developmentally inappropriate, and/or disconnected to students' lives. Before we even begin to vary what we ask students to do in the classroom in terms of content, process, and/or product, we must first ensure that what we are starting with is of the highest quality possible. According to Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2004), high-quality curriculum

- is clearly focused on the essential understandings and skills of the discipline that a professional would value
- is mentally and affectively engaging to the learner

- is joyful—or at least satisfying
- provides choices
- is clear in expectations
- allows meaningful collaboration
- is focused on products (something students make or do) that matter to students
- connects with students' lives and world
- is fresh and surprising
- seems real (is real) to the student
- is coherent (organized, unified, sensible) to the student
- is rich, deals with profound ideas
- stretches the student
- calls on students to use what they learn in interesting and important ways
- involves the students in setting goals for their learning and assessing progress toward those goals

High-quality differentiation, then, must be all of the above and match the varied learners' readiness, interest, and learning profile as often as possible and to as great an extent as possible.

Respectful Activities In order to define respectful activities, it might be easier to begin by considering the kinds of activities that would *not* be considered respectful of student time. It is not respectful to ask students to work with curriculum that is developmentally inappropriate, consistently too challenging or too easy, disconnected to their lives, disrespectful of their life experiences, or unrelated to key skills and key understandings about the themselves and the world they live in. "Busy work" is not respectful. Work that focuses solely on rote memorization and regurgitation of facts is not respectful. Work that elevates the status of one group of students while denigrating and/or demoralizing other students is not respectful.

What is respectful is work that is engaging and challenging for all students and that leads students to ever-increasing success with key skills and key understandings. What is respectful is work that is equally engaging for all learners in a classroom whether they are all doing the same thing or are working on different materials, on different activities, or to develop different products that meet their readiness, interest, and/or learning profile. What is respectful is the teacher expecting that all students, not just the most advanced, achieve at optimal levels; that no matter the child's background or previous knowledge, he or she is expected to grow as much as possible as quickly as possible. What is respectful is the teacher and the students working together to determine the best ways to do these things in an atmosphere of mutual respect and shared excitement for personal achievement and growth.

Flexible Grouping Flexible grouping refers to the teacher's consistent and purposeful use of multiple ways of grouping students for instruction. In a differentiated classroom there is a place for all kinds of grouping configurations, including whole class direct instruction, paired or small group work,



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and individual work. The key to successful instructional grouping is the teacher's awareness of his or her instructional goals, the characteristics of his or her students, and the external constraints on school such as time and space.

In a differentiated classroom, a teacher is careful to group students for instruction in a variety of ways so that no students feel labeled by any one facet of their educational profile. We do not want students to feel that they are always in the "slow" group nor always in the "high" group. We want students to see themselves as learners with a variety of strengths and weaknesses who can contribute to the classroom and to society in meaningful and valued ways. We want students to recognize that in the differentiated classroom, they work in a number of different ways, with a number of different students, on a number of different tasks, all in pursuit of essential knowledge, skill, and understandings. Teachers in a differentiated classroom must reflect often on their grouping practices to ensure that they are not overusing any one type of differentiation, in particular differentiation on the basis of readiness. If teachers group for instruction only on the basis of student readiness, they may find themselves heading down the perilous path of tracking.

Readiness differentiation is not synonymous with tracking. Tracking is greatly out of favor in education today and justly so. Tracking implies that students are assigned to a low or high track from which they are seldom able to escape. Tracking often assumes that students are gifted or learning disabled or below grade level in all subjects, virtually excluding the possibility that a student could be advanced in one area and average or struggling in another. And perhaps worst of all, tracking too often results in low expectations for those students placed in the lowest tracks (Oakes, 1985; Slavin, 1987).

But in a differentiated classroom, students are grouped and regrouped in many different ways and according to many different parameters. One day, students may find themselves working with other students who are reading at the same level. Another day they may be part of a group that is homogeneously grouped according to a common interest. Still another day, they are likely to find themselves working with a heterogeneous group of students who represent a preference or talent for varied ways of working. The key to ensuring that the differentiated classroom does not become or is not perceived as a tracked classroom is the teacher's commitment to "mixing it up," to ensuring that over time students work with a variety of students and in a variety of configurations, keeping in mind the learning goals of the learning activities involved. The Centers activities in *EPS Phonics PLUS* are excellent vehicles for differentiation and for flexible grouping.

Indeed, it is the careful examination of and attention to learning goals that set differentiation apart from more lock-step methods of grouping students. Before deciding how—or if—they should differentiate a particular lesson, teachers must have a clear idea of the learning goals for the unit or lesson as well as a solid understanding of the students in their class. Once learning goals are clear and the needs of various students have been considered, the teacher can make informed decisions about the type of differentiation—interest, learning profile, or readiness—the homogeneity or heterogeneity of student groups (if groups are called for); and the way in which groups will be formed or tasks will be assigned—self-selected, teacher-selected, or random.

Ongoing Assessment It is difficult to imagine how a teacher might differentiate instruction effectively if he or she does not constantly and carefully study the students for whom this differentiation is designed. How can we know what students are interested in, how they like to learn, and what they already know, understand, and are able to do? The answer is to pre-assess, continue to assess along the way, and assess at the end of the experience in order to know what needs to come next. It is particularly important

that teachers not stop with pre-assessment, for it is sometimes the case that a student does not perform well on a pre-assessment, but after a day or two of instruction, things seem to “click” and progress is rapid. It is also possible that a student performs well on a pre-assessment even though the knowledge and skills assessed are not as solid as they seemed, and starts to flounder midway through the lesson or unit. Ongoing assessment, both informal and formal, can help the teacher diagnose and prescribe for student needs that often change throughout the course of a learning experience.

Teachers in a differentiated classroom use all the information they can gather about students when planning and carrying out these assessments. Certainly, diagnostic skill tests, formal chapter pretests, ready-made interest inventories and learning style questionnaires are helpful, but so are more informal assessments. An especially useful method of ongoing assessment is observing students carefully to see how they perform in various tasks and what they choose when given options, and making note of this in student anecdotal records or in teacher plan books. Of course, teachers can also ask students and parents for information about readiness, interest, and learning profile, as well. Students tend to be quite honest about their skills and interests— especially if they see that a teacher acts upon this information to make the classroom more responsive to their needs.

Differentiating Instruction with *EPS Phonics PLUS*


Beth G. Davis

EPS Phonics PLUS was conceived by the author and publisher as a general classroom phonics program—with an important difference. Fully cognizant of the fact that “one size does not fit all,” it was decided early on to build in features and components that would help teachers meet the variety of needs encountered in today’s inclusion classroom.

Kindergarten Kindergarten provides the first systematic literacy learning experience for most children. While some children come to kindergarten knowing all their letters and even some of the letter sounds, most kindergarteners can still benefit from a systematic introduction of the alphabet. Phonemic awareness and oral language are key for all children at this stage. *EPS Phonics PLUS* K Teacher’s Edition provides suggestions throughout the Direct Instruction section to help teachers help children who, for one reason or another, are not “getting it.” You will find point-of-use suggestions for helping English language learners and notes to provide reteaching opportunities for struggling readers. Pre- and post-unit assessments can help you place children where they need to be for optimal learning.

Grades 1–3 As learning to read becomes more complex, so do the needs of learners. By first grade, teachers need more options for working with children of differing abilities and needs. The three Differentiated Instruction Guides (DIGs) at each level provide such help. All were conceived as an organic part of *EPS Phonics PLUS*. All were designed to allow different types of learners to use the *EPS Phonics PLUS* core student books along with their classmates to the greatest extent possible and to follow the same scope and sequence. Blackline masters (BLMs) have been provided where appropriate, along with teacher notes, to help children learn and practice the same skills as their classmates. Accommodations have been made in the DIGs to provide for the specific needs of three kinds of students:

- *DIG: English Language Learners* gives teachers routines and suggestions for helping these children learn to read in English. In addition, a Picture Glossary helps children with many of the picturable words from the selections in the student books.

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- *DIG: Reteach and Practice* offers review and reteaching suggestions that help students access learning skills in different ways from how they were originally presented. It also provides additional practice materials. Most children will require occasional forays into this material, either for help with a single elusive concept or for additional practice. Other children will benefit from more consistent reteaching and practice.
- *DIG: Learning Differences* is designed for the child with language-specific learning differences. This guide provides Orton-Gillingham based instruction and practice to help these children reach their potential as readers.

The Differentiated Instruction Guides offer a unique opportunity to use a classroom phonics program with a variety of types of learners. In the “Differentiated Instruction” section of each *EPS Phonics PLUS* Teacher’s Edition lesson, you will find references to the corresponding DIGs pages you can use to modify the lesson for these three types of learners. Since you will often be working with different groups, you will also find suggestions for Centers Activities that reinforce each lesson’s skills and provide you with classroom management alternatives.

The Three-Tiered Instructional Model and *EPS Phonics PLUS* *EPS Phonics PLUS* was also developed to fit the three-tiered instructional model, providing a means for the early intervention needed to correct reading problems. Tier 1 in such a model comprises research-based, systematic instruction

using a core reading program offered to the whole class. Tier 2 offers supplemental instruction in a small group setting. Tier 3 offers intensive, remedial instruction for those children who have more severe learning disabilities.

This three-tiered model, combined with a Responsiveness to Intervention (RtI) approach (Kovaleski, 2003), sets children up for success rather than waiting for them to fail. Historically, intervention has been offered only after a point that some researchers and teachers feel is too late. Many current approaches to identifying the learning disabled child are referred to as “wait to fail” models. That is because most children are not identified until third grade or later—too late for early intervention. With an RtI approach, children are identified early and offered increasingly intense intervention if they fail to respond to the second tier of intervention. *EPS Phonics PLUS*, with its strong core program and Differentiated Instruction Guides, provides an opportunity to help children who can benefit from early intervention.

Tier 1 In the first tier, systematic and explicit instruction from the core program is offered to the whole class. The direct instruction and its accompanying activities enable teachers to identify on an ongoing basis those children who appear to need other instructional approaches to or continued practice with particular concepts, those whose needs point to a specific learning disability, or those whose English language learning creates a roadblock to which attention must be given. *EPS Phonics PLUS* provides precisely the tiered instruction called for by the amended Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 04), which acknowledges children’s disabilities revealed by their inability to learn—RtI— from

scientific, research-based programs' first line teaching without specific intervention.

As an example of how differentiated instruction is built into *EPS Phonics PLUS*, look at Lesson 28a/b in Book A. The Teacher's Edition provides whole class teaching first for initial and then for final digraphs, *ch*, *sh*, and *th*. Key words are written on the board with the digraphs underlined as the children are reminded that each letter grouping represents a single sound. Children then listen to a group of words beginning (or ending) with the digraphs and point to the appropriate digraph card. In their books, children circle pictures that begin (or end) with the designated digraph. Children can then go on to reinforce and practice what they have learned with the Centers activities provided: word wheels with the target digraphs, a word sort, and a Go Fish type game that helps children link words with these digraphs to their meanings.

Tier 2 Children who demonstrate a need for more practice or teaching may receive further instruction with the corresponding lesson of the *DIG: Reteach and Practice*, in which a number of further teaching strategies are offered for the teacher to choose from. Children are given onomatopoeic words to clue the sounds, and may write the initial (or final) digraph for dictated words in appropriate columns with the teacher finishing the word and helping children distinguish between voiced and unvoiced *th*. In addition, teachers may choose to have children sort picture cards, play card games with the picture cards, or relate to the sounds in a more physical game, substitute initial sounds to make rhyming words, and/or read simple sentences using short *a* words with the digraphs. On BLM 24, children write the digraphs they hear at the beginnings or ends of words that name pictures.

Tier 3 For children requiring still more intensive instruction, the *DIG: Learning Differences* breaks down and reviews the digraphs in separate lessons. Lessons 13a and 13b on the digraph *th* is divided into lessons for the unvoiced and voiced sounds. In this *DIG*, the direct instruction for each lesson is divided into three steps: Prepare, Teach, and Apply. With the *th* sounds, instruction begins with children learning how the sounds are formed in the mouth. Modeling and practice proceed with the help of a mirror. Skywriting the letters is also modeled and practiced. Children continue in the unvoiced lesson by listening to where they hear the sound in words, responding first with raised hands and then with chips on cards. Finally the exercises on BLM 23 and 25 ask children to color squares to indicate where they hear the *th* sound, while BLM 24 asks them to distinguish between the voiced and unvoiced sounds.



As learning to read becomes more complex, so do the needs of learners. By first grade, teachers need more options for working with children of differing abilities and needs. The three Differentiated Instruction Guides (DIGs) at each level provide such help. All were conceived as an organic part of *EPS Phonics PLUS*. All were designed to allow different types of learners to use the *EPS Phonics PLUS* core student books along with their classmates to the greatest extent possible and to follow the same scope and sequence.

DIG: English Language Learners addresses the difficulty that children for whom English is a second language may have with sounds that may not occur in their native languages. The digraphs from the whole class lesson offer three such examples. In the corresponding DIG lesson, teachers are instructed to assist children with discriminating, speaking, reading, and writing the three digraphs through modeling with multiple opportunities for practice. The names of the items shown on the core program page are reviewed. If children are unable to identify the pictures in English, they are encouraged to use their first language when necessary as a bridge for connecting to English. Picture Glossary words are a part of most lessons in the DIG. It is also strongly recommended that teachers always have a good picture dictionary on hand.

Differentiated Instruction Today and Tomorrow

In some ways, differentiation of instruction may seem to be the latest educational buzz word. Yet good teachers have always recognized that “one size fits all” instruction does not serve students well. Particularly in today’s world, where the backgrounds of our students are so diverse and their needs seemingly so numerous, teachers must find ways to reach more children more often. We can increase the likelihood of this happening by recognizing and responding to our students’ varied readiness levels for new learning, honoring and celebrating their diverse interests, and understanding their unique preferences for how they learn new information and practice new skills.

VII. LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Mileidis Gort

Increasing numbers of teachers will have English language learners (ELLs) in their classrooms in the coming years. Projections indicate that 25% of the entire U.S. school population between the ages of 5 and 17 will fall into this category by the year 2020 (Garcia, 2000). Although the majority of these students are Spanish speakers, others may speak Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, Mandarin, Polish, Russian, or Vietnamese, to name just a few. Understanding the diversity within the general ELL population and the Spanish-speaking population (i.e., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Venezuelan, Spanish, Peruvian, Costa Rican, and so on) is important not only because of the language variation, but also because of these groups’ diverse sociocultural and socioeconomic histories. Children from these groups will have differences in background knowledge, home and community print experiences, and understandings about the functions of reading.

Developing English Language Skills

Second language acquisition, like reading and first language development, is a developmental process. Although reading, writing, speaking, and listening are related, English language learners do not develop all these skills at an equal rate. For example, listening ability tends to develop much quicker than the other skills, approaching the listening proficiency of native English speakers within three to four years.

It may take as long as five to seven years, however, for English language learners to gain the command of English needed to perform successfully in academic tasks (Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1984). In other words, while English language learners may be able to speak and understand English at fairly high levels of proficiency within the first three years of exposure, their academic skills in English reading and writing are not likely to reach comparable levels until much later. Although students at the initial stages

of English language acquisition may be able to participate in a variety of oral-language activities, it is not reasonable to expect them to perform at an equivalent level on English reading and writing tasks.

Like children acquiring their native language, English language learners tend to follow a common sequence in the development of their second language oral skills. Young English language learners often temporarily stop using their new language with people who don't understand them (Tabors, 1998). They may become frustrated as they attempt to communicate in their new language and retreat into nonverbal modes of expression, including pointing or using facial expressions. Although most English language learners go through this silent period, it does not mean that they are not learning. In fact, they are actively learning by collecting information, listening intently, and preparing to go public in their new language.

As children become more comfortable in English, they may engage in telegraphic and formulaic language. That is, they often go through a stage where they use specific, short utterances or clipped catchphrases. At this point, they begin to actively engage in the oral activities of the classroom.

From telegraphic language, English language learners develop more complex forms of communication. Because they are applying their newly learned skills, they may make more "mistakes." This may create the illusion that they are regressing. On the contrary, these errors actually indicate that the children are taking risks in their new language and that they feel confident doing so. In fact, the learners' errors tell us a lot about what they are learning and how they are applying this new knowledge. All we have to do is pay close attention and listen.

Teachers can and should support English language learners' efforts to communicate in a new language. Instead of correcting errors, a more effective teaching strategy is to restate the sentence in standard English, modeling how the sentence should be said. Students can benefit from opportunities to try out the new language in small groups. High-pressure situations, such as being asked to speak in front of a group, may make even the most confident child uncomfortable if he or she does not feel ready.

Literacy Development of English Language Learners

Although we know a great deal about the early literacy development of native English speakers (Clay, 1975; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984; Teale, 1984; Teale & Sulzby, 1986), relatively little research investigates the emergent literacy development of English language learners. What we have learned thus far suggests that English reading and writing development processes are generally similar for both English language learners and native English speakers (Edelsky, 1981, 1982; Hudelson, 1984; Urzua, 1987). For example, we know that all learners gradually come to use their developing knowledge of the English language, the world in general, and their understanding of print conventions to make sense



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of written text and to put their ideas on paper. For all learners, literacy development is a complex process that evolves over time. During this process, learners demonstrate gradual approximations to mature versions of reading and writing. In both reading and writing, all learners must learn the forms of print in English, including the letters of the alphabet and how they are combined to make words, sentences, and paragraphs to create stories, letters, and other forms of written communication. At the same time, all learners must learn to select from the rich array of written discourse forms to achieve the communicative functions at hand. Lastly, literacy learning takes place in a social context, serves personal and social purposes, and is achieved through interpersonal relationships in the varying social contexts in which literacy instruction takes place. Thus, literacy development evolves through social interactions involving written language from which children develop ideas about the forms and functions of print. They also become aware of the ways print is used in different social contexts for a wide variety of purposes (Peregoy & Boyle, 2001).

While many aspects of literacy development are essentially similar for English language learners and native English speakers, there are important differences as well. Two of them are related to a learner's English language proficiency and her or his literacy abilities (Hudelson, 1987). Students at the beginning stages of English language development are

still acquiring basic knowledge of English while learning to read and write English in school. Research shows that English language learners can benefit from English literacy instruction well before they have developed full control of the language orally. That is, oral and written English can develop simultaneously (Hudelson, 1984; Goodman, Goodman & Flores, 1979; Urzua, 1987), as long as instruction is carefully organized to be meaningful and relevant.

Decoding is one of several discrete language skills taught in the early grades. Other specific literacy skills and concepts include the direction of print, upper- and lowercase letters, the alphabet and alphabetical order, recognition of sight words, and spelling rules. Some children have developed at least some of these skills and concepts by the time they start school. English language learners can develop these skills in English as they learn their first words and begin to communicate in English.

Of course, being able to sound out words does not necessarily lead to an understanding of their meaning. Unlike native English speakers, English learners may be encountering written words and grammatical structures they do not understand orally. In fact, some of them are able to decode fluently, yet understand little of what they read. Thus, although discrete language skills are an important aspect of overall literacy development, proficiency in these skills does not guarantee academic success for English language learners.

English language learners who are already literate in their native language bring literacy skills that they can apply to the task of English reading. Keep in mind, however, that children learning English in grades K-3 will have developed few, if any, literacy skills, even in their native languages.

While about 75 percent of English words are regular in spelling and pronunciation, many common ones are irregular. All children—native English speakers or not—must learn these words, but not by applying the rules they are learning. Therefore, these “sight words” must simply be learned to the point where they can be recognized automatically.

Instructional Practices That Support the Early Literacy Development of English Language Learners

Students who are beginning to read and write in English need to develop

- awareness and appreciation of the variety of purposes of reading and writing
- an understanding of the relationships between print and oral language, including the alphabetic principle
- knowledge of print conventions
- knowledge of specific sound-symbol correspondences, or phonics
- the ability to recognize a growing number of words on sight

During early English literacy development, learners need to begin to coordinate these understandings to read and make sense of simple texts.

There are many ways to facilitate reading instruction for English language learners. Teachers should

- begin with the premise that language and literacy skills are learned through socially interactive settings that allow children to play with language and take risks
- focus on comprehension and meaning, even when teaching phonics and decoding strategies
- help children decode words that they already know orally and teach them the meanings of words as they learn to sound them out
- use as many visual clues as possible: real objects, pictures, gestures, and pantomime
- model what you do in the classroom, describing your actions as you do so
- help children think in English: rather than translating, show a picture and say the English word

Explicit phonics and sight word instruction is key for English language learners, as it is for a vast majority of children. Phonics and sight word instruction should be based on words that students have already seen and heard many times in stories, poems, songs, letters, and other texts. With numerous meaningful and functional print experiences, English language learners increase their awareness of why we read and write, that is, the functions of print. Explicit phonics instruction increases students’ knowledge of how print works, that is, its form. Both are important aspects of early literacy development and are components of any comprehensive early literacy program. By attending to the language development, concept expansion, thinking processes, and decoding skills that are so critical to learning to read, teachers can help English language learners become proficient readers, writers, and users of English.



Research shows that English language learners can benefit from English literacy instruction well before they have developed full control of the language orally. That is, oral and written English can develop simultaneously as long as instruction is carefully organized to be meaningful and relevant.

Teaching English Language Learners with *EPS Phonics PLUS*

Beth G. Davis

For English Language learners who are facing the daunting task of learning to speak, read, and write a new language, it is especially important for the classroom teacher to provide the kind of instruction and support that the research has found effective. With *EPS Phonics PLUS*, teachers are able to implement appropriate English literacy instruction using organized, relevant material that is explicitly and systematically taught while expanding oral language facility at the same time.

As noted above, there are a number of helpful strategies and instructional practices that support English language learners. These are acknowledged in recommendations found throughout the *DIG: English Language Learners*, which offers teachers ways of assisting these children to complete and learn from the *EPS Phonics PLUS* lessons. Examples from Book A follow.

When learning the alphabet, children are asked to write and match capital and lowercase letters in Book A, Lesson 5a/b. Additional practice is recommended in the corresponding *DIG: English Language Learners*, having children find five words in the room or from the Star Words list to copy using capital letters. They are then asked to recopy the words with lowercase letters, naming the letters as they write. Finally they read the words aloud, perhaps with a partner.

Sight words taught in the Star Words lessons are most often words whose meanings cannot be revealed by pictures and therefore are more difficult to learn, especially for English language learners. In Lesson 12b, children's comprehension of the Star Words is assessed *before* they do the core student book page by asking them to respond to words physically or verbally ("Come to me."). After completing the top half of the student page, children are asked to act out the story that you read to them and then to find or draw pictures of the rhyming words in the story to ensure their comprehension of the words' meanings.

Modifications for *EPS Phonics PLUS* lessons for English language learners are recommended for most skills. In Book A, Lesson 19b, in order to help children determine the number of syllables in the words, children clap the syllables as you read the words a first time and then with a second reading, write a tally mark for each syllable they hear. Adding the tally marks enables them to determine the number of syllables. Throughout the program, children's comprehension of the objects pictured or words used is assessed. When the English word for a picture is not known, children are encouraged to use their native language to name the object, after which the teacher gives the English equivalent, stressing the sound that is being taught.

For activities such as "Ask Nat the Cat," Book A, Lesson 23a, which requires children to read and react to sentences—an activity that may be difficult for English language learners—the children pair with native English speakers. The DIG page suggests as a follow-up having these pairs take turns acting out the sentences with the non-actor guessing the sentence. Pairings with more fluent English speakers are suggested for Word Wall activities, as well; in these activities, children create new words and then with their more fluent partner, use the words in sentences and illustrate them. For activities such as "What Did You Learn about Cats?" Book A, Lesson 24b, children are encouraged to precede the activity by retelling what they learned in English after pairing with a child of their own first language to help them formulate their ideas. Similar suggestions are made for many of the activities that require comprehension of connected text, as does Lesson 57. At times, small heterogeneous groups reflecting different levels of English proficiency and/or different first languages are proposed after using a

page from Book A as a Shared Reading, acting out the questions, and modeling the answer format as in Lesson 41a of the DIG, “Ask the Bug.”

Writing sentences may be even more challenging for English language learners as they attempt to meld their new vocabulary with their new sense of English syntax. Pairing these children with native English speakers offers them support. Additional practice is suggested for a number of these lessons; for example, “Writing Sentences with Long Vowels,” Lesson 83b, has children copy four to six word sentences from their favorite books onto paper strips. Cutting the words apart from all the sentences and having children reassemble the sentences forces them to use their new skills with a familiar format.

Throughout, children are encouraged to use their Picture Glossary. The glossary is a valuable tool, as children can make them their own (by coloring) and then use them as a reference frequently as an adjunct to a good general picture dictionary.

The examples above illustrate many of the recommended instructional practices and strategies for teaching English language learners. These include the use of socially interactive settings, pairing English language learners with native speakers or more fluent speakers, as well as with other speakers of the same first language; a focus on comprehension and meaning while teaching decoding skills; the use of visual clues through real objects, pictures, and acting out of both words and text; and modeling of all skill acquisition techniques.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The National Reading Panel’s research leaves no doubt: unless phonics is taught in a direct, sequential fashion, most children will fall behind. The good news is that it *is* possible to provide this instruction.

EPS Phonics PLUS was designed to help young readers develop phonological awareness and alphabet skills, to provide instruction in sound-symbol correspondence, and to offer ample practice in decoding. *EPS Phonics PLUS* does all this within a context of engaging literature and informational text, giving attention to the other pillars of reading instruction as designated by the NRP—fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Built right into *EPS Phonics PLUS* is the differentiated instruction so necessary if our schools are truly to leave no child behind. Children who struggle occasionally, children with more severe learning differences, and children who are learning English for the first time—each child’s needs are addressed.

EPS Phonics PLUS provides an approach to phonics that is part of the comprehensive reading instruction all children need.

Biographical Information

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Dr. Savage has written several professional books, including *Sound It Out: Phonics in a Comprehensive Reading Program*, Third Edition (McGraw-Hill, 2006); *For the Love of Literature: Children and Books in the Elementary Years* (McGraw-Hill, 2000); and *Teaching Reading and Writing: Combining Skills, Strategies, and Literature* (McGraw-Hill, 1998). In addition, he has written many professional articles and is a popular speaker at local, regional, and national conferences. He has presented at several recent national conferences, including the International Reading Association (IRA), International Dyslexia Association (IDA), National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

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Dr. Kuhn has authored or co-authored several articles, including "Helping students become accurate, expressive readers: Fluency instruction for small groups" (2004) and "Fluency: A Review of Developmental and Remedial Strategies" (2000) with Dr. Stahl. She has been a frequent presenter at the International Reading Association (IRA), National Reading Conference (NRC), American Educational Research Association (AERA) conventions, and at several international conferences.

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