

Phonological Awareness and its Implications for Reading Acquisition

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Abstract:

Researches of more than two decades has affirmed the importance of phonological awareness and its relation to reading acquisition. Chard & Dickson (1999) consider phonological awareness as a "cognitive substrate to reading acquisition" (p.1).

This article explains Phonological awareness and its relation to reading acquisition.

Key words:

phonological awareness- reading acquisition- phonemic awareness

Phonological awareness and its multiple dimensions

Phonological awareness is part of a large construct in coding and retrieving verbal information known as phonological processing (smith, Simmons, Kameenui) and is conscious ability to detect and manipulate sounds (Cossu, Rossini, Marshall, 1993; Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, 1994). This manipulation includes moving, combining, deleting and adding syllabells or sounds. Spoken Language can be broken down in many different ways, including sentences into

words into syllables, onset and rime¹, and individual phonemes (Chard, Dikson 1999; Wray, 1994). Phonological awareness is the understanding of these different ways and manipulating of these units.

Phonological awareness is a general ability with multiple dimensions of varying complexity which use a single modality- Auditory- and referring to all sizes of sounds units, such as words, syllables, onset- rimes, and phonemes, the latter called phonemic awareness. So Phonological awareness is a general term and means a general understanding at all levels of word including phonemic awareness which is the understanding that words are made up of individual sounds or phoneme and the ability to manipulate these phonemes either by segmenting, blending or changing individual phonemes within words or create new words. Skills of Phonological awareness lie on a continuum of complexity. As Chard and Dickson (1999, p.2) suggest: At the less complex end of the continuum are activities such as initial rhyming & rhyming songs as well as sentence segmentation ... At the center of the continuum are activities related to

segmenting words into syllables and blending syllables into words. Next are activities such as segmenting words into onset and rimes and blending onset and rimes into words. Finally, the most sophisticated level of phonological awareness is phonemic awareness.

Developmental studies indicated that the more difficult dimensions such as phoneme segmentation usually did not develop without instruction, in contrast to the easiest dimension such as rhyme or syllable segmentation (Wray, 1994).

Relations between Phonological awareness and reading acquisition

There are three main types of writing systems: logographic, syllabic, and alphabetic (Thomson, 1990).

In alphabetic writing systems, reading involves associating the sounds of one's language and their written form (Cormier, Dea, 1997; Asher, Simpson, 1994). Once children have grasped this principle they will become independent in reading, and be able to recognize words that they have never seen before. Without awareness of the phonemic segments into which words can be divided, decoding using grapheme-phoneme correspondence rules and blending are impossible (Asher, Simpson, 1994).

There is a strong positive relation between phonological awareness and reading acquisition in alphabetic scripts (Huang, Hanley, 1995; Goswami, 1990). Researches show a direct relation of

phonological awareness with the ability to read unfamiliar words independently (Asher, Simpson, 1994).

According to Chard and Dickson (1999) "an awareness of phonemes is necessary to grasp the alphabetic principle that underlies our system of written language" (p.2). Prereading success on the phoneme segmentation task predicts reading success in the later period of education (Hurford et al., 1994; Leather, Henry, 1994, McDougall, Hulme, Ellis, Monk, 1994; Catts, 1993; Mann, 1995; Wimmer, Landerl, Linortner, Hummer, 1991). "Experimental studies demonstrate that training reading disabled children in phonological sensitivity positively affects their reading, support a causal role of phonological sensitivity in reading acquisition" (Anthony et al, 2003).

Difficulty with the mental processing of phonological information is a core deficit that accounts for many children's difficulties in learning to read (Anthony et al, 2003). phonological measures clearly differentiated children with and without reading disability and may aid in the diagnosis of this disorder. Developmental dyslexia results from some sort of phonological deficits (Ramus 2001; Rhea, 2001). Martin, Pratt and Fraser (2000) suggests "children with developmental dyslexia are shown to have problems with phonological awareness and , in particular, with phonological decoding." On the other hand comparisons between illiterate and literate groups and logographic & alphabetic scripts show

that reading instruction may develop some sophisticated skills of phonological awareness (Wray, 1994; Goswami, Bryant, 1990)

Chard and Dickson (1999) state that "explicit instruction in phonological awareness skills is very effective in promoting early reading. However, instruction in early reading (specifically explicit instruction in letter- sound correspondence) appears to strengthen phonological awareness, and in particular the more sophisticated phonemic awareness"(p.3). In short , phonological awareness has a causal and a reciprocal relation to reading acquisition. In other words phonological awareness facilitate reading and is facilitated by reading instruction. (Wray, 1994; Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, 1994).

Critical levels of phonological awareness can be developed through carefully planned instruction, and this development has a significant influence on children's reading and spelling achievement (Chard & Dickson, 1997). The intervention studies provide strong support for phonological awareness instruction prior to reading instruction (Smith, Simmons, Kameenui).

Among different dimensions of phonological awareness "integrated instruction in segmenting and blending seems to provide the greatest benefit to reading acquisition (Chard , Dickson, 1999, p.4).It is important to notice that(2003). Phonological Sensitivity: A quasi- Parallel progression of word structure units and Cognitive operations. Reading Research Quarterly. Oct- Dec. Vol. 38, ISS. 4: 470-484.

-Asher, R. E., & Simpson, J. M. E.

phonological awareness is necessary but not sufficient. A combination of phonemic awareness (especially phoneme segmenting and combination of segmenting with blending or detection) and letter - sound correspondence training is necessary to understand the alphabetic principle. This Combination produce the positive effects on reading acquisition (Smith, Simmons, Kameenui).

Conclusion

phonological awareness relates to an awareness that words can be segmented into syllables and sounds which can be manipulated and blended to create new words. phonological awareness has multiple dimensions and seems to develop along a continuum from rhyme to segmenting. Success in early reading depends on achieving a certain level of phonological awareness. Instruction in phonological awareness especially some its skills such as segmentation benefits reading acquisition.

These findings that phonological abilities can be taught at a young age and the positive effects of phonological awareness instruction on reading acquisition has powerful implication for the possibility of reducing reading failure.

References:

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