

## How can I learn more about instruction in phonological awareness?

More information is available from the Florida Department of Education. "What Every Teacher Should Know about Phonological Awareness" (item #309872) provides an in-depth, but still brief, overview of the topics covered in this alert and a list of relevant curriculum materials. For comprehensive information, request the book *Assessment and Instruction in Phonological Awareness* (item #309934). To order, call 850-245-0475 or send your request via electronic mail to [bric@fldoe.org](mailto:bric@fldoe.org)

## Is Training Available?

Project Central offers training for individuals who wish to train other teachers in their district in how to integrate instruction in phonological awareness into the K-2 reading/language arts curriculum. For more information, call 386-254-3031 or visit this website: <http://reach.ucf.edu/~CENTRAL>.



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# Education Alert! Phonological Awareness

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## Did you know?

- ✓ Over the past 25 years, the federal government has spent more than \$100 million on research to understand why some children have particular difficulties learning to read. This research has effected a fundamental change in our understanding of how skilled readers read, how children acquire reading skills, and why reading is so difficult for some children.
- ✓ One of the most important discoveries of this research is that lack of skill in *phonological awareness* is a *primary cause* of problems children have in learning to read.
- ✓ Phonological awareness can be improved in most children
- through classroom-based, explicit instructional activities.
- ✓ Research has shown that instruction in phonological awareness improves average reading growth, regardless of the type of formal reading curriculum that follows it.

## What is phonological awareness?

- ✓ Phonological awareness is an *oral* language skill that involves the ability to notice, think about, and manipulate the individual sounds in words. For example, the word *cat* has three sounds (phonemes): /k/-/a/-/t/. A child with a beginning level of phonological awareness can notice that *cat*, *car*, and *can* all begin with the same sound, which is different than the beginning sound of *box*, or *fat*, or *give*.
- ✓ Children with highly developed awareness of phonemes can pronounce the first or last sounds in words (or even all the sounds in short words) or can blend separate sounds together to form words.
- ✓ Kindergarten children who have higher levels of phonological awareness almost invariably become better readers than children with lower levels of phonological awareness.
- ✓ Phonological awareness is *not* the same thing as phonics. Phonics involves learning to use relationships between letters and sounds to identify printed words. Phonological awareness *enables* children to acquire phonetic reading skills because it allows them to notice the number, identity, and order of the sounds in words.

## Why is phonological awareness important?

- ✓ Phonological awareness is important because it strongly supports learning how the words in our language are represented in print.
- ✓ At least beginning levels of phonological awareness are required for children to understand how they can use phonemic cues in identifying printed words.
- ✓ Without some awareness of the phonemic segments in words, children cannot understand the rationale for learning individual letter sounds, and the common strategy of “sounding out” words in beginning reading will not make sense to them.

## What causes differences among children in phonological awareness?

- ✓ About half of all variability in phonological awareness is caused by inherited factors. The other half is caused by differences in children’s home language environment.
- ✓ Child/parent interactions can have a significant impact on the growth of phonological awareness.
- ✓ With proper instruction, every child can acquire sufficient phonological awareness to learn to read.

## What are the characteristics of effective instruction in phonological awareness?

- ✓ Effective instruction in phonological awareness is explicit and fun.
- ✓ It involves exploratory activities that help children learn about language.
- ✓ It is directly linked to beginning activities using letters and sounds.
- ✓ It can be taught in 15 minutes a day, blended with other reading experiences.
- ✓ Such instruction can be offered to children at any time they are being taught to read, but the preferred time is kindergarten or first grade.

## Are curriculum materials available to help teach phonological awareness?

- ✓ Curriculum materials specifically focused on phonological awareness are available.
- ✓ Several reading publishers have incorporated instruction in phonological awareness into kindergarten and first-grade materials.
- ✓ Computer programs to help stimulate phonological awareness in young children are available.