

Reading Instruction/remediation and fluency

By: Diane Allen

Can you read CINTA? If so, then you have internalized at least some of the rules of phonetics which form the basis of our written language. While this isn't a "real word", being able to read it accurately reveals the importance of learning the rules of phonics to reading.

The value of phonics instruction is accepted in homeschool circles. What is missing for most homeschool educators is an understanding of exactly **how** to structure a lesson in reading. We depend heavily on whatever reading program we have chosen to guide us along each day.

So the central question for most of us is exactly what program to choose from the many that are available. Having chosen a program, many of us simply drift through the motions of one program (and for some of us several in succession) with varying degrees of success depending on our child's learning style.

Having been down the phonics road before (with the help of a paid tutor no less!) I was certain that I understood how to teach reading when my last child came along! For the most part, I was right. I had learned the importance of using a "simultaneous, multisensory approach and I had even chosen wisely in the materials we used. However, we bogged down after two years of instruction. Since she was "reading," my daughter didn't really want to keep going through the phonics work book. I found the instruction book lacked specific details of structuring a reading lesson I was floundering at the daily lessons. My lack of focus and stumbling approach was leading to reluctance and whining on her part.

The October Dayspring parent meeting came to my rescue! I can say without hesitation that this was the most informative meeting of the last two years for me. Mimi Pomeroy was the guest speaker for those interested in phonics instruction with younger children. She is a certified Orten-Gillingham Language Therapist with years of experience in teaching beginning and remedial reading to students. In her presentation, Mimi explained what problems arise from a lack of phonemic awareness (poor spelling and difficulty decoding), the importance of a simultaneous, multisensory approach (to stimulate all the learning centers of the brain) and exactly how a typical phonics lesson should be structured. As a special favor to our group, Mimi took the time to investigate the most popular phonics programs we homeschoolers use and offered a critique of their completeness and ease of use.

I left the meeting revived in my determination to teach phonics correctly and energized to push on. Best of all I had an outline to guide me through the necessary daily drill that builds fluency in phonetic decoding and correct spelling. Thank you Mimi!

The following is a compilation of my notes of the meeting. Any errors or strong opinions are entirely my own and I apologize to Mimi in advance if I misrepresent what she said.

To begin with, the critical components of any total reading program are

- 1- Developing phonemic awareness (hearing the sounds) beginning at birth
- 2- Systematic phonemic instruction using the multisensory approach including syllabic division
- 3 - Fluency instruction
- 4- Vocabulary development: understanding roots or words and affixes
- 5- Comprehension

Phonological awareness is the ability to understand the internal linguistic structure of words. You can begin this with pre-reading activities that help children recognize rhymes and beginning sounds. The process continues with specific instruction in phonemes - the smallest recognizable unit of sound (/ough/ /ight/ /a/ etc).

Phonemic awareness allows a child to decode (read) and encode (spell) a word correctly. Ninety percent of the words in our language follow predictable patterns so phonics IS the basis for spelling!

In her critique of phonics instruction books Mimi looked at several at the Homeschool Gathering Place. While ABEKA and other traditional school programs are solid in phonics, they often don't include the multisensory aspects that make learning to read easier for all students. A portion of the population simply doesn't employ an auditory learning style and programs that rely on chanting and reading alone are not as successful with those students.

Several of the other programs Mimi reviewed had a good multisensory approach but they stopped just short of being the entire phonics program one needs to cover through third grade. Stopping short of all the higher order phonemes (ight, ough, etc) leaves gaps in a student's ability to decode and spell. Mimi made a point to stress that Explode the Code was an excellent resource for practice – especially for younger students – but it IS NOT a phonics program unto itself.

Since many people are using these programs in the first grade, two mothers asked “Once you have finished one of these, like How to Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, what do you do next?” A corollary to that question was “what about the older child, fourth grade or above, who is having difficulty?”

The answer in both instances appears to be – get one of the simple but complete texts: AlphaPhonics and Phonics Pathways were two specifically reviewed. Both are complete in scope and inexpensive. Phonics Pathways received the highest marks. However, both of these texts failed to include a detailed analysis of daily instruction and many mothers teaching would be unaware of the importance of writing in the reading instruction.

Toward meeting that need for a specific outline, Mimi broke down the sequence she follows with tutorial students. Notice the emphasis on the multisensory approach: seeing, saying and writing the words at the same time!

TYPICAL PHONICS LESSON (can be used with Phonics Pathways):

1- (10 min) Review of material: flash card review of phonemes previously mastered
Have the student read each phoneme, then dictate a selection for the student to write
Ex: spell long a in the middle of a word answer: ai

These phonemes are listed in a chart form in the text and flash cards can be made from that.

2- (10 min) Spelling dictation: choose 10 words at grade level that include the phonograms taught. These words can come from lists in the Phonics Pathways book.

3 – (15 minute) New Rule: Introduce new phonogram or review the one recently introduced until it is mastered. You will pace the introduction of new phonograms to the student's ability to master them.

Read the word list provided in text, discuss the pattern, practice writing the words, and try some from dictation after writing them. You might use something other than paper to write at this stage since large motor use is helpful for many students.

4- (10 min) Sentence Dictation: Use sentences that include phonograms mastered, just introduced and those in recent review. This is where you practice high frequency sight words, and work to improve spacing, handwriting reversal etc.

5- (10 min) Read – use any book that captures your child's interest. It is helpful for beginning readers to use books that are somewhat phonetically controlled or those that have repetitive language. Mimi mentioned that she liked Dr. Seuss books. When helping a child decode a new word you should use some technique to segment the word into syllables.

***These times are really approximate! In short the lesson is about 50 minutes to an hour.

Other techniques that were discussed:

Story formation: Have the child write a story using a set of phonetically controlled words. They can dictate the sentence to you and then read it back. This is particularly since most young children like to read their own work. If they can't think of an entire story you might have them write sentence with groups of two or three words included in the same sentence. Phonics Pathways includes lists of pairs and sets of words that can be used for this purpose.

Developing Reading Fluency:

Practice reading the same passage over and over until it can be read fluently. The author of Phonics Pathways publishes a book called Pyramids that is good practice for this and for developing eye tracking skills in young children.

Develop an awareness of syllabification rules (i.e. vowels are always long in open syllables). Megawords is a resource that is helpful for this for students 4th grade and above.

To develop reading fluency you should read with the child. **One specific technique is “pop corn” reading** where you read the passage and then have the child read the next passage. Or you can read the passage and have the child read the same passage after you. The idea is to model good phrasing and expressive voice.

Reading the same passage aloud until it is read fluently is good practice for improving reading speed because it increases automaticity in common word recognition. Choose a passage of 50 to 100 word (depending on age) that is moderately difficult for your child. Make a note of all the substitutions, deletions, stumbling pronunciations in the first reading. Practice reading the passage again with your child and then have them practice reading it aloud everyday for a short period of time until they are perfectly fluent. They may enjoy making a tape of themselves reading. When they are ready, have them read it again aloud to you and make note of the improvements.

Develop vocabulary by teaching root words and affixes.

With this outline any parent should be able to teach phonics using a thirty dollar book and the library!