

Why Phonics for ELLs?

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ReadingHorizons®

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Objectives of Today's Webinar:

Discuss the relevancy of teaching phonics to ELLs.

Share specific English language skills that ELLs gain.

Validate reasons for teaching phonics to ELLs of various levels.



Objectives of Today's Webinar

(continued):

It is my hope that the information presented in this webinar will generate more interest in the following two areas:

- 1) applying phonics strategies in the ELL classroom
- 2) conducting phonics research for ELLs



Notes

This webinar is for those teaching ELLs who are illiterate how to read English and those teaching ELLs who are literate in their native languages.

This webinar is for those teaching children, adolescents, or adults.



Profile of the Problem

“UNESCO reports that approximately 774 million adults worldwide lack minimum skills in reading, writing, and calculating (Šopova, 2007). This means that approximately one in five adults is not literate, with two thirds of these being women (Tarone et al., 2009, p. 21)” (Vinogradov & Bigelow).



Profile of the Problem (continued)

“With increasing global migration, adults from regions of the world with high levels of illiteracy are moving to the United States and learning to read and write for the first time in English, their second (if not third, fourth, or fifth) language”
(Vinogradov & Bigelow).



Questions to Consider

- 1) How did you learn how to read?
- 2) Was learning to read a positive or negative experience for you?
- 3) If you are a non-native English speaker, do you enjoy reading in English as much as you enjoy reading in your first language? Why or why not?



Application Activity

The dag writox is smowk and spi. Runchet is shonsig, but Thift and Fenel are woagly skeag. Phin can wrozz and Bappet can vox, but Phin can't shass. Bappet can't densing and ranchet in the mirrunsic blage.



The Reading Process

Reading is a complex process. It involves both top-down and bottom-up processes.

- **Top-down processing:** the process used when a reader generates meaning by employing background knowledge, expectations, assumptions, and questions, and reads to confirm these expectations
- **Bottom-up processing:** the process used when a reader builds meaning from the smallest units of meaning to achieve comprehension



The Reading Process (continued)

The best readers are those who use both top-down and bottom-up processes concurrently. This is called interactive reading.

- **Interactive reading approach:** the process used when a reader uses both bottom-up and top-down strategies simultaneously or alternately to comprehend the text



Interactive Reading Approach

“The approach [to teaching second language reading] that is accepted as the most comprehensive description of the reading process is an interactive approach. This... combines elements of both bottom-up and top-down approaches. The best readers in any language are those who combine elements of both. For example, most readers begin reading by using top-down reading strategies until there is a problem, and then they shift to bottom-up strategies. Have you ever read something quickly and suddenly come to several new words? You are required to slow down your reading to decode the new words. When you do this, you are using bottom-up strategies to understand the words” (Anderson, p. 7).



Application Activity

The dag writox is smowk and spi. Runchet is shonsig, but Thift and Fenel are woagly skeag. Phin can wrozz and Bappet can vox, but Phin can't shass. Bappet can't densing and ranchet in the mirrunsic blage.



What does this have to do with
phonics?

Phonics =

Bottom-up strategies

Perceptions of Phonics

Barbara Birch:

“...Phonics in [second language] reading instruction...has...a bad connotation for many reading practitioners. This bad connotation stems, I think, from the way some phonics instruction was done in the past or people’s somewhat muddled ideas about the way that phonics instruction takes place at present. The prevailing idea for many seems to be that phonics instruction is useless (because English writing is so chaotic), pointless (because readers are just guessing anyway), a waste of time (because readers will automatically learn grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences), and boring (because it involves memorizing rules that don’t work or reading sentences that don’t make any sense)...Phonics is not about memorizing rules that don’t work. It is not about reading sentences that are meaningless...Phonics can be taught in an efficient way if we understand how readers read, and it can be embedded as one element within a whole language reading program” (105, 107).



Why Phonics?

Whole language ideology has dominated second language (L2) reading instruction and research. This approach is useful and has provided us with a wealth of knowledge that has helped to make us better reading teachers. But to be truly holistic, we need to consider bottom-up approaches to reading, and this is an area that has been neglected in research interests. Whole language ideology can be supplemented by bottom-up strategies as well to produce a more holistic approach to reading.



Why Phonics?

Interactive reading research is still top-down heavy:

“Despite the emergence of interactive models, I am concerned that much of the second language reading literature continues to exhibit a strongly top-down bias... This research has resulted in many useful insights, but the lack of attention to decoding problems has, I think, produced a somewhat distorted picture of the true range of problems second language readers face” (Eskey, p. 95).

Why Phonics?

This webinar will focus on bottom-up processing (phonics) to stimulate or reinforce the place for phonics in the ELL classroom.



Terminology

- **Phonics:** putting the phonemes (sounds) with the graphemes (letters) that represent them; learning the different letter/sound combinations to decode words
- **Phonemic awareness:** the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes; the consciousness that words are composed of separate sounds; the strategies used to segment strings of sounds and discriminate between these sounds
- **Phonological awareness:** all levels of awareness of the sound structure of words: rhyme, syllables, etc.
- **Decoding:** reading; breaking a whole word down into parts; a receptive skill



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Let's turn to the experts.



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Fred Genesee:

“ELLs with word reading difficulties have the same profile as English L1 students with difficulties—poor phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, vocabulary, etc.”

“[Regarding] comprehension difficulties, poor foundation skills and poor academic oral language skills are probably a source of difficulty.”



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Fred Genesee (continued):

“Difficulty with small-unit skills (decoding) impedes mastery of big-unit skills (text comprehension) [in the following ways]:

- 1) poor knowledge of letter-sound relationships impedes acquisition of word decoding skills
- 2) poor decoding skills impede sentence processing skills and extraction of meaning from sentences
- 3) poor word, sentence-level, and oral language skills, and lack of relevant background knowledge, impede text comprehension.”



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

David Eskey:

“In practical terms, my concern is thus to keep the language in the teaching of second language reading. That may not sound very controversial, but I think that in promoting higher-level strategies—like predicting from context or the use of schemata and other kinds of background knowledge [top-down strategies]—some researchers have been sending a message to teachers that the teaching of reading to second language readers is mostly just a matter of providing them with the right background knowledge for any texts they must read, and encouraging them to make full use of that knowledge in decoding those texts...



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

David Eskey (continued):

“...Though that is certainly important, it is also, I think, potentially misleading as a total approach...We must not, I believe, lose sight of the fact that language is a major problem in second language reading, and that even educated guessing at meaning is not a substitute for accurate decoding” (p. 97).



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Neil Anderson:

“Beginning level readers should be exposed to a strong bottom-up component. This is perhaps the greatest weakness in the development of many reading syllabi. Little or no attention is given to the explicit instruction of bottom-up reading...With a strong foundation in bottom-up skills, beginning level readers will become more proficient readers more quickly” (p. 28).



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Carrell:

“[The introduction of top-down processing] has had such a profound impact [on second language reading] that there has been a tendency to view the introduction of a strong top-down processing perspective as a *substitute* for the bottom-up, decoding view of reading, rather than its complement” (pp. 3-4).



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Nunes:

The [ELL] reader must be competent in both bottom-up and top-down processing.



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Robin Schwarz:

“...Recently, researchers studying native English-speaking students who were having trouble learning a foreign language found that these students have problems similar to those of poor readers and spellers in that they do not perceive and manipulate the sound system and its corresponding written code effectively...”

“...Researchers found that when the struggling foreign language students were explicitly taught the phonology of the foreign language, they were able to learn the target language fairly successfully, and also improve their phonological skills.”

Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

National Reading Panel:

- We know that the National Reading Panel (NRP) asserts that instruction in explicit, systematic phonics assists native English-speaking students in the development of literacy skills.
- The NRP states that "overwhelming evidence strongly supports the concept that explicitly and systematically teaching phonics in the classroom significantly improves students' reading and spelling skills."
- The NRP also reports that "surveys conducted on early reading have repeatedly concluded that word recognition is best learned when it is taught according to three principles..." Word instruction should be: 1) explicitly taught by the teacher; 2) systematically planned and organized; and 3) sequenced in a fashion that moves from simple to complex. So what about phonics for ELLs?
- Some may dispute that because these findings are specific to native English-speaking students, they do not apply to ELLs.



Why Teach Phonics to ELLs?

Shanahan and Beck:

- “Does teaching phonemic awareness, phonics, or sight vocabulary confer similar advantages on English-language learners?”
- “The findings of all five studies are consistent with the solid findings of first-language research” (p. 424).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

1) Decoding



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Decoding

Robin Schwartz:

“[An] important benefit of the phonology instruction...was that the students' decoding skills increased significantly. They amazed themselves by reading multisyllabic words with ease. Finally, overall, these students were able to do much better in their classes than students with similar problems in our program who had not had such intervention.”



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Fluency

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Fluency

Barbara Birch:

“World knowledge and activated schema will only do so much to help their processing if they cannot learn to read quickly with efficient and short eye fixations, accurate projections, and few regressions. These lowest level processing strategies are as crucial to reading success as the higher level cognitive strategies” (p. 82).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Fluency

Barbara Birch:

“The associations between [ELLs’] perception of the graph on the page and the grapheme stored in their memory do not work fast enough, and the associations between grapheme and phoneme may also be missing, faulty, or too inefficient for automatic reading” (p. 83).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Comprehension

Shanahan and Beck:

“...The findings of all five studies are consistent with the solid findings of first-language research. The National Reading Panel examined 52 studies of phonological awareness instruction and another 38 studies of phonics instruction. Both conferred clear benefits on children’s reading development, as determined by a wide range of measures, including beginning reading comprehension. The five studies of phonological awareness and phonics with English-language learners had similar results...”
(p. 427).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension
- 4) Pronunciation



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Pronunciation

Barbara Birch:

“It is more efficient to be able to decode unknown words and assign a pronunciation to them [than memorizing words by sight].”



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension
- 4) Pronunciation
- 5) Spelling



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Spelling

Robin Schwarz:

“Although there is not much research on teaching phonology to ESL students who are at risk, my students' experiences clearly demonstrated the benefits of this instruction. Of course, their spelling improved dramatically...”



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension
- 4) Pronunciation
- 5) Spelling
- 6) Listening



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Listening

Robin Schwartz:

“A more pervasive benefit was that they could perceive individual words in spoken sentences far more accurately than before. This resulted in significantly more accurate dictations and, so the students reported, a noticeably improved ability to follow conversations and proceedings in other classes. In addition to my observations of the students' increased confidence in many domains, their other teachers reported similar improvements.”



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Listening

Barbara Birch:

“If the ESL and EFL instruction that [ELLs] receive has a strong oral/aural focus, they too will master the discrimination of English sounds...**For accurate listening comprehension and reading, the learner’s knowledge base must contain an inventory of English sounds...**” (p. 49).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension
- 4) Pronunciation
- 5) Spelling
- 6) Listening
- 7) Vocabulary



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Vocabulary

Barbara Birch:

“Phonological skills influence the learning of new words...Readers use probabilistic reasoning and analogy to known spelling patterns to read unknown words, and the better able readers are to do this, the better they can repeat and thus retain a new word too” (p. 149).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Vocabulary

Barbara Birch:

“Teach vocabulary and reading in the context of English phonology, orthography, morphology, word formation processes, and grammar to make more new words more pronounceable, repeatable, and comprehensible to the students” (p. 164).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Vocabulary

Barbara Birch:

“The more pronounceable a word is, the more easily it is learned...The more knowledge readers have about the typical phonological structures of the language, the better they can form a phonological image of the word. If the readers can form a phonological image and rehearse it sufficiently to store it in long-term memory...they will retain the word” (p. 152).



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction

- 1) Decoding
- 2) Fluency
- 3) Comprehension
- 4) Pronunciation
- 5) Spelling
- 6) Listening
- 7) Vocabulary
- 8) Autonomy



Skills ELLs Gain with Phonics Instruction: Autonomy

How many times do our ESL students ask, “Teacher, how do you say this word?” We tell our students how to say the word, but we don’t often know *why* we say it that way. We need to help our students develop autonomy by teaching them strategies to learn how to decode and pronounce words on their own. This approach better prepares them for “real-world” experiences.

Phonics for:

- Beginning Level ELLs
- Intermediate Level ELLs
- Advanced Level ELLs



Phonics for:

- **Beginning Level ELLs**
- Intermediate Level ELLs
- Advanced Level ELLs



Phonics for Beginning Level ELLs

Establish the Necessary Foundation

“Teachers often assume that students have already learned how to identify graphs [letters] when they come into our beginning reading classes, but they should not take this skill for granted. Learners may not be using other cognitive or linguistic strategies that compensate for not being able to recognize the graphs on the page” (Birch, p. 83).



Phonics for Beginning Level ELLs

Establish the Necessary Foundation

“Systematic phonics instruction is a bottom-up approach to reading that should be integrated into reading materials for beginning proficiency level readers. However, the reality is that most textbooks do not deal with phonics instruction” (Anderson, p. 28).



Phonics for Beginning Level ELLs

Establish the Necessary Foundation

“Beginning level readers should be exposed to a strong bottom-up component....A guideline that you could follow in preparing a syllabus for beginning level readers is allocating 50 percent of your syllabus to teaching bottom-up skills, 30 percent to top-down skills, and 20 percent to interactive skills. With a strong foundation in bottom-up skills, beginning level readers will become more proficient readers more quickly” (Anderson, p. 28).



Phonics for:

- Beginning Level ELLs
- **Intermediate Level ELLs**
- Advanced Level ELLs



Phonics for Intermediate Level ELLs

Build Confidence:

“I read better, I spell better, and I pronounce English words better than my friend who is in a higher-level English class.”

--Kittipat, intermediate-level ELL



Phonics for:

- Beginning Level ELLs
- Intermediate Level ELLs
- **Advanced Level ELLs**



Phonics for Advanced Level ELLs

Fill in Language Gaps:

“I’ve never had a teacher take me back far enough.”



Phonics for All Levels of ELLs:

- Beginning Level ELLs
 - Establish the necessary foundation
- Intermediate Level ELLs
 - Build confidence
- Advanced Level ELLs
 - Fill in language gaps



Phonics for All Levels of ELLs

“As our students take their first steps on the journey to advanced reading, let’s give them the best provisions and tools we can. Let’s make their first steps as confident and effective as possible so they can read more rapidly and more easily later. We can do this if we get to the bottom of English L2 reading” (Birch, p. 178).



Additional Resources

- Visit my blog www.ESLtrail.com for additional resources on phonics for ELLs.
- A link to the power point slides and the recorded webinar will be sent to attendees. It will also be available on my blog or on the Reading Horizons website: www.ReadingHorizons.com.

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Questions?





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Email questions to
mail@readinghorizons.com,
or post your questions on
www.readinghorizons.com/blog.

For more information on phonics for ELLs,
refer to www.ESLtrail.com.

END SLIDE