Phonemic Awareness, Letter Knowledge, and Concepts of Print

Phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge account for more of the variation in early reading and spelling success than general intelligence, overall maturity level, or listening comprehension. [1] They are the basis for learning an alphabetic writing system. Children who have poorly developed phonemic awareness at the end of kindergarten are likely to become poor readers. Explicit instruction in sound identification, matching, segment and blending, when linked appropriately to sound-symbol association, reduces the risk of reading failure and accelerates early reading and spelling acquisition for all children.

Teaching these skills well, however, is not as easy as it might seem. Teachers must themselves be aware of s sounds and how they differ from letters in order to help students acquire awareness of phonemes and the syn that represent them. There is growing evidence that many adults need explicit instruction about language befo they themselves demonstrate the level of sound and spelling awareness needed to teach it well. [2] In addition, teachers need to understand the developmental progression from spoken word and syllable identification to blending and segmenting all the phonemes in simple words. [3] Finally, instruction in this domain begins with auditory-verbal exercises to direct children's attention to sound, but phonemes should be linked with letters o children understand that letters represent segments of their own speech. At that point, phoneme awareness becomes part of a well-designed reading or spelling lesson.

Table 1 outlines concepts (teacher knowledge) and practices (teacher skills) that contribute to reading success third column on the right suggests professional development experiences that can help teachers acquire know and skill in this domain. The concepts and practices included in the teacher knowledge and teacher skills colur reflect consensus in research-based statements of the components of effective reading instruction. However, t specific professional development experiences suggested in the third column reflect our view, based on our collective experience and the limited research available, of the types of activities that are likely to lead to impr instruction and student achievement. The professional development experiences listed are neither all-inclusive necessarily superior to all other approaches. But, while dramatically more research is needed in this area, the listed experiences are the type that are likely to be found in an effective professional development program.

Table 1: Phonemic Awareness, Letter Knowledge, and Concepts of Print

Teacher Knowledge	Teacher Skills	Possible Professional Development Experienc
Know the speech sounds in English (consonants and vowels) and the pronunciation of phonemes for instruction.	Select and use a range of activities representing a developmental progression of phonological skill (rhyming; word identification; syllable counting; onset-rime segmentation and blending; phoneme identification, segmentation, and blending).	Practice phoneme matching, identification, segmentation, ble substitution and deletion.
Know the progression of development of phonological skill.		Order phonological awareness activities by difficulty level and developmental sequence.
Understand the difference between speech sounds and the letters that represent them.	Use techniques for teaching letter naming, matching, and formation.	Practice and analyze letter-sour matching activities (identifying letters and letter groups are use representing speech sounds).
Understand the causal links between early decoding, spelling, word knowledge, and phoneme awareness.	Plan lessons in which phoneme awareness, letter knowledge, and invented spelling activities are complementary.	Observe and critique live or videotaped student-teacher interactions during phonological awareness and alphabet instruc
Understand the print concepts young children must develop.	Teach concepts of print during shared reading of big books.	Role-play the teaching of print concepts during interactive reac aloud.
Understand how critical the foundation skills are for later reading success.	Have ability to monitor every child's progress and identify those who are falling behind.	Discuss children's progress, usin informal assessments, to obtain help for those in need of it.