



The Principal's Primer

Research-Based Supports for Early Learning Classrooms

This bi-monthly newsletter is designed specifically for Principals and Assistant Principals with early learning classrooms on their campus. In an effort to strengthen your understanding of instructional strategies and developmentally appropriate perspectives, the Children's Learning Institute is pleased to provide you with the latest research, best practices, resources for supporting early learning on your campus, and innovations in technology that support collaborative leadership. Past issues can be viewed in the [Newsletter Archive](#) on CLI Engage.



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Phonological Awareness

Phonological Awareness: A Key Predictor of Later Reading Success

The 2008 National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) synthesized existing research through 2003 to identify early literacy skills that predict later conventional reading ability and to identify instructional techniques that support positive outcomes in pre-K students. Phonological awareness was found to be a key predictor of later reading success.

Research has shown that the most effective way to help students learn this concept is to provide them with many rich and varied opportunities to experience, manipulate, and play with sounds—to create a sound-rich environment. Young students who can hear the individual sounds in words generally develop into good readers. And we know that phonological awareness in Spanish helps students develop phonological awareness skills in English.

Phonological awareness is a key understanding for the alphabetic principle. English uses an alphabetic writing system in which the letters, singly and in combination, represent single speech sounds. Students who can take apart words into sounds, recognize their identity, and put them together again have the foundational skill for using the alphabetic principle (Lieberman, Shankweiler, & Liberman, 1989).

Phonological awareness begins before students have sorted out letter learning and can be successfully taught to pre-K students.



What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and manipulate the sounds of language. Babies and young toddlers listen and learn the sounds of their language in order to learn to talk. As students grow, they begin to listen to the sounds of words and soon are able to think about those sounds. Phonological awareness is not just the ability to hear sounds but also to notice, analyze, and manipulate those sounds. Students must learn to understand that the way a word sounds is separate from what the word means. This is not easy. Students must first think of the word as something that holds meaning. Second, they must be able to think of the word as an object or symbol whose sounds can be analyzed, changed and taken apart.

Phonological awareness development is necessary to learn to read and write. If students do not understand that words are made up of sounds and how those sounds work together, they will not be able to use their knowledge of letters to read or write. As students grow in their phonological awareness and their knowledge of letters, they can eventually put the two together to crack the code of reading. This typically happens in kindergarten or first grade during formal reading instruction. However, the phonological awareness skills young students gain in preschool are critical and is the first step to later reading success.

Phonological awareness has two key dimensions of development: the size of the sound unit that a child can attend to and work with, and the challenge of the task that students are asked to perform with the sound unit.

The first dimension of phonological awareness development is the size of the sound unit that students can attend to (e.g., syllable, onset-rime, phoneme). Typically students are more apt to attend to larger parts of words (e.g., syllables or words within a compound word) first. With development, instruction, and practice, students will be able to attune to increasingly smaller parts of sound (e.g., first sound of a word, all the individual sounds in words).

The second dimension is the challenge of the task that students are trying to do with a specific sound unit. The easiest task is for students to identify a sound unit. These tasks require students to listen and recognize the sound units, but do not require students to

produce or make any sound on their own. Examples of these types of tasks are: asking students to count syllables, listen for whether two words rhyme or not, or listen for words that start with a specific sound.

The next level of difficulty is blending sound units when students take word parts and put the parts together to make a word. For example, blending two short words to make a longer compound words like cup – cake. Another example is blending syllables to make a word like ro – bot, or blending beginning sounds and rimes to make a words like c – at. Also blending individual sounds in words like s – u – n.

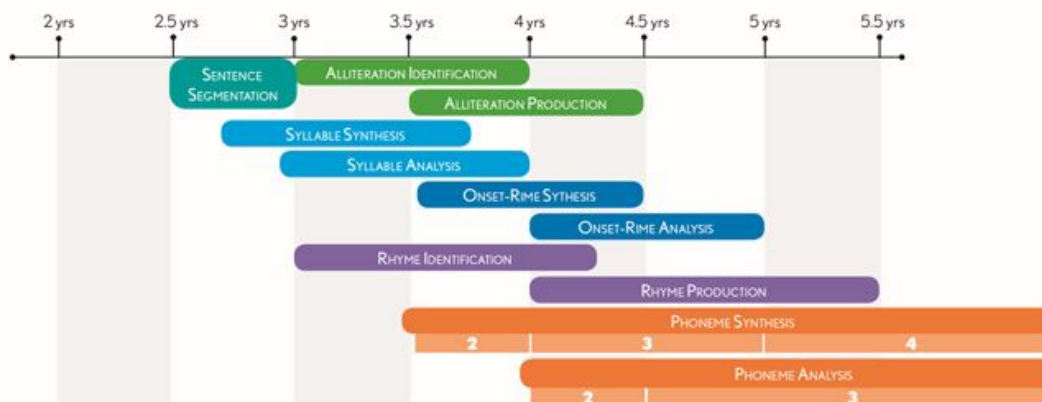
The most difficult set of tasks asks students to analyze sound units. Students must break apart a word into sound units (segmentation) and manipulate those sound units by deleting or replacing sounds or syllables to make new words.

Phonemes are even more challenging because you have to listen for individual letter sounds. As students become able to notice individual letter sounds and play games that change or move the sounds around, they are **moving from phonological awareness to phonemic awareness and phonics**. To understand phonics, students need to know not just the letter sounds but the letter names that go with the letter sound. This is a more difficult skill for students.

These dimensions of phonological awareness combine to form various skills that develop over time. **Phonological awareness develops along a timeline** in which being able to attend to the larger units of sound sets the stage for learning to attend to the smallest units of sound. Below are skills that develop over time in Phonological Awareness.

- Recognize individual words in a spoken sentence
- Blending and dividing words into syllables Adding and taking those meaningful units
- Recognizing and producing rhyming words
- Identifying words that sound the same at the beginning
- Blending words at the phoneme or single sound level

Phonological Awareness Developmental Timeline



There are a number of key points about development that are shown by this timeline and are very important to teaching phonological awareness skills.

- Students' development in phonological awareness has a clear developmental progression. This progression should not be thought of as stages. This means that most students tend to show a very similar pattern to the development of phonological skills. However, students do not need to master one skill before being introduced to another.
- Students' development of phonological awareness varies greatly. The graph shows that skills emerge and continue to emerge over 1 to 3 years. This means that some students will be just beginning with certain skills at the same time that other students are very comfortable with that skill or are showing the emergence of other,

more sophisticated skills. As such, the use of assessments to guide instruction, as well as the use of small groups, are important when providing phonological awareness instruction and practice.

- Production skills develop later and are more difficult than skills that involve listening and recognizing rather than creating and saying. Therefore, it makes more sense to expose students to rhymes but then address additional skills, rather than emphasize rhyme and rhyme production to the exclusion of other aspects of phonological awareness.
- Skills that involve individual sounds or phonemes may emerge in pre-K but extend well into kindergarten and first grade. This is a good indication that most students will not be ready to work with individual sounds—to blend them, take them apart, or manipulate them to form words until kindergarten.

Reference

Lieberman I. Y., Shankweiler D., & Liberman, A. M. (1989). The alphabetic principle and learning to read. In *Phonology and Reading Disability: Solving the Reading Puzzle* (pp. 1-33). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Resources for Principals

An online learning certificate bearing course is available on CLI Engage to develop a thorough understanding of phonological awareness and how to teach this skill. The course includes documentary style case studies of real classroom teachers with video-based demonstrations of effective instructional practices, as well as application-based assignments and activities.

- From the CLI Engage dashboard click the Full Course Catalog button, locate the eCIRCLE Series, and view the courses to find the “eCIRCLE Phonological Awareness” course
- To learn more view [Online Learning & Professional Development](#)

The CIRCLE Progress Monitoring System for pre-K and the Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment System, available on the CLI Engage platform, both assess phonological awareness skills.

- From the CLI Engage dashboard click on the CIRCLE Progress Monitoring Pre-K or Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment button and then enter community/school/class information to access the assessments and search for phonological awareness measures
- To learn more read [Screening, Progress Monitoring, & Observation](#)

The CLI Engage Classroom Observation Tool (COT) has specific indicators in 13 domain areas representing teaching behaviors that research suggests improve child outcomes. Each area describes the core concepts, the strategies and approaches, and the context for instruction. Included in the COT are 21 detailed indicators for phonological awareness.

- Use this link to download the [CIRCLE Prekindergarten Classroom Observation Tool](#)
- To learn more review [Classroom Observation & Goal-Setting Tools](#)

The CIRCLE Activity Collection housed on CLI Engage features a treasure trove of pre-K and kindergarten activities for targeted skill intervention and small group instruction. The phonological awareness activities include exemplar video of teacher implementation, sample lesson scripts in gradual release format, scaffolding tips, alignments to state guidelines, as well as tools to filter and save favorite activities.

- From the CLI Engage dashboard click on the CIRCLE Activity Collection: PreK/K button
- To learn more go to [CIRCLE Activity Collection: Pre-K/K Classroom](#)



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