

Effective Phonics Programs

Programs which are the most effective for phonics instruction should include three defining factors:

1. The program teaches letter-sound relationships in organized logical sequence. Students first manipulate sounds then are taught that letters are what we use to name those sounds. The letters are arranged in a logical sequence so letters that are very similar are not taught at the same time and always taught with a strong relationship between the sound and a picture cue. The picture cue will always be used to represent the connection between that sound and letter being displayed and referenced with practice as an anchor.
2. The program will also have explicit instructions for the teacher to follow in a consistent way with precise directions. These directions can seem very repetitive but will make pathways in a student's brain that will allow quick connections between sound, letter, and meaning. These paths will become the 'roads' of automaticity.
 - a. **Systematic:** the letter-sound relationship is taught in an organized and logical sequence
 - b. **Explicit:** the instruction provides teachers with precise directions for teaching letter-sound relationships
3. Lessons within the program will include opportunities to practice using the phonics for decoding in words, sentences and text. The programs yielding the most effective transfer and maintenance of phonics instruction move directly into decodable text. These programs also include time devoted to making and building words linking between the decoding and spelling needed for strong literacy development. Classroom instruction will link phonics within reading, spelling and expect those patterns to be used in writing.

Research has proven that systematic and explicit phonics instruction:

- teaches the major sound/spelling relationships of both consonants and vowels
- gives children substantial practice in applying knowledge of letter-sound relationships as they **learn to read and write**
- uses text (books or stories) which contain a large number of words children can decode by using the letter-sound relationships they have learned and are learning
- provides students with opportunities to spell words and to write their own stories with the letter-sound relationships they are learning (decodable texts)
- produces the greatest impact on children's reading achievement when it begins in kindergarten or first grade (However, phonics should be included in the instruction of any student who has not yet mastered phonics skills, no matter the age)

Handout #7 Effective Phonics Programs

- results in kindergarten and first-grade students being better readers and spellers than their peers who are not taught phonics in a way that is systematic and explicit
- significantly improves children's reading comprehension
- is beneficial to children regardless of their socioeconomic status. It helps children from various backgrounds make greater gains in reading than non-systematic instruction or no phonics instruction.
- helps to prevent reading difficulties among at-risk students
- helps struggling readers overcome reading difficulties