

Florida Center for Reading Research

Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness

What is Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness?

Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness is a program that is intended to develop the beginning reading skills of phonological awareness, phonics, and word study for all students in grades K-2. It is designed to supplement a school's core reading program with 10 minutes of daily instruction delivered by the teacher in small groups. The program was written by Drs. Darrell Morris and Janet W. Bloodgood who based their work on a large body of reading research including their own that emphasizes the importance for beginning readers being able to recognize and decode printed words. *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* is one component of a modular reading program by Steck-Vaughn, an imprint of Harcourt Achieve. Each of the components: Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension, and Phonics and Phonemic Awareness have been flexibly designed to use together or separately for supplementing specific areas of need.

Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness is organized into five sequential stages, each with a specific set of skills. The stages are color coded to facilitate teacher use and they increase in difficulty. Each stage is further subdivided into sets of lesson plans. A set contains lesson plans for 7 days. However, the teacher can extend lessons to 12 days for struggling readers or combine lessons if appropriate.

Vocabulary development and phonemic awareness begin the instructional sequence for each set of lesson plans. Background knowledge is built through the use of leveled big books and large colorful posters that depict a specific scene. The posters serve as the context for the words students will be introduced to for a particular set of lessons. These words, which are couched in a meaningful environment, will be used daily in a variety of phonemic awareness, phonics, and word study activities. The following lesson involves the teaching of word parts or patterns by teacher modeling and teacher-guided practice. The next lessons consist of independent student practice with game-like activities and with reading and writing opportunities. Word sorts are the vehicle of instruction as students learn to hear and identify, isolate, categorize, segment, blend, delete, and manipulate sounds and letters in words in the *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* program. At the end of each set of lessons, teachers evaluate student progress with assessment options that are directly aligned with the content of the preceding lessons, such as word recognition, spelling, sentence dictation, writing, and a one-page formal assessment that resembles a standardized test format.

The materials in *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* are well-organized, teacher-friendly, and lesson plans use language that is clear and concise. A detailed scope and sequence is included for each stage. Each set of lessons includes well-defined objectives, necessary materials, and suggestions for independent reading and read-aloud trade books that target the phonic skills being addressed. Throughout all lessons are tips for English Language Learners, suggestions for Student Center activities, and Check Points for monitoring student progress. Each stage is in its own boxed set and includes a teacher's guide, a complete set of lesson plans, language posters, word and picture cards, and a phonics notebook. Four diagnostic assessment tasks (alphabet knowledge, concept of word in print, spelling, and word recognition) are included in



the teacher's guide to help teachers place students in the appropriate stage for instruction.

How is *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* aligned with *Reading First*?

The importance of instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics for beginning readers was emphasized in the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000). Based on those findings, the activities in the *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* were constructed to develop in beginning readers a firm understanding of the alphabetic principle and a facility with word analysis.

Several underlying principles guided the development of *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* and are visible features of the program. Instruction is explicit and systematic and all lessons include teacher modeling, guided practice, and multiple opportunities for independent practice. In response to the developmental nature of reading, small group differentiated instruction is the predominant instructional grouping. The hierarchical nature of phonics knowledge is addressed by starting with easier foundational skills and then moving to more difficult skills. For example, the first stage involves instruction of individual sounds of the alphabet by focusing on beginning sounds in words; the second stage involves instruction of short vowel word families and listening to rhyming parts in words; the third stage targets short vowels within the context of familiar non-rhyming words; the fourth stage follows with vowel patterns in familiar words; and finally, the fifth stage consists of advanced vowel patterns, such as the multiple spelling patterns of vowels.

Phonemic awareness activities concentrate on rhyming, phoneme identification, isolation, categorization, blending, segmenting and deleting. Linking the sounds with their representative graphemes is accomplished through work with letters, word families, spelling patterns, and whole words. To reinforce these skills, student practice is accomplished by using picture and word sorts, and decodable books. During a word sort, irregular words such as *have*, *come*, *been* are placed in a separate column called Oddball words. Students' attention is drawn to the fact that even though certain vowel patterns look similar to other words they've studied, they are pronounced differently. As another form of skill reinforcement, students learn to spell various patterns and build words and sentences through writing activities.

The professional development that is offered when a school or district purchases *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* will vary according to the level of implementation. These levels include a simple half-day program implementation training conducted by the sales representative, a full day training conducted by consultant staff, and additional consultant services for larger implementations. The simple implementation training encompasses an introduction of the materials, management, getting started, and a walk through. District personnel may request specific adjustments, as program consultants will accommodate the needs while maintaining the integrity of the content in the program. *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* does not require specific levels of implementation for purchasing. The fidelity of implementation is insured when teachers follow the strategies and routines that are specified in the teacher materials.

Research Support for Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness



Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic awareness is a new program that appeared in August, 2004. The authors developed the program according to findings from the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and from their own research that emphasize the importance of acquiring skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, word building and pattern recognition, as well as the need for small group instruction, and ongoing assessment for classroom instruction in beginning reading. Thus, the design and content of the program are derived from a strong research base. A year-long study to evaluate the effectiveness of *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness* is nearing completion. It was implemented in multiple schools in two different states and involved a randomized control group design with first graders. Results from this study should be available by the end of 2005.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness*:

- This program is explicit and systematic, skills build cumulatively, and instruction is differentiated, which may be particularly beneficial for struggling readers and English language learners.
- Progress monitoring is built into instruction.
- Students are actively and academically engaged in learning letter-sound relationships and spelling patterns through manipulating, sorting, and categorizing activities.
- Words are introduced within a meaningful context and used in a variety of activities across lessons.
- The design and content of this program are derived from research.

Weaknesses of *Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness*:

- None were noted.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Elements of Reading: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness?

Duval	904-390-2115	Osceola	407-870-4008
Escambia	850-469-6130	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Polk	863-534-0521
Jackson	850-482-1200	St. Johns	904-819-7502
Miami-Dade	305-995-1428	Suwannee	386-364-2604

For More Information

www.harcourtachieve.com

References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.

Lead Reviewer: Michelle Wahl, M.S.
Date Posted: November, 2005

Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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