

Literacy

Excerpts from the Phonemic Awareness Manual by Marna Scarry-Larkin, MA, CCC-SLP

It's a person with little imagination that can only think of one way to spell a word. Mark Twain (paraphrased)

Introduction

This was my son's favorite quote for years. He has had the darndest time with spelling. He figured that if the reader could sound out what he had written then his spelling was okay. That theory got him to third grade. I know how hard it is for some children to learn to read and spell. I also know that some children will learn to read just by waving a book over their heads. I have one of each.

I'm not proposing that this CD program is a comprehensive reading program. I developed this program to help with the repetition and consistency that some children and adults seem to need in order to become literate. I have incorporated the theoretical framework of Patricia Lindamood, my mentor, and my 25+ years of clinical experience. I also feel that teaching my own children to read taught me a thing or two about education and parenting!

If you have been anywhere near education for the last few decades you know that there has been a pendulum swinging to and fro. I was trained in the late 70's and early 80's when anything "Auditory Processing" was played down and "Language" was the buzz word of the time. Twenty years later we're back to "Auditory Processing" and "Phonemic Awareness". This time, I hope, we will look closely at the research of Tallal, Liberman, and others and apply this knowledge of the brain to how we help our children.

I believe that we learn to read one sound at a time. There must be a solid foundation in the sound to symbol associations. In order to establish this foundation I want each student to watch the videos. I know many will say that they don't need this part, that they already know their sounds, and that it is baby stuff. In many ways they are right. They do know most of their sounds and it is baby stuff. Babies watch mouths very closely to try to pick up on sounds and mouth movements. Many poor readers have a history of chronic otitis media (ear infections) and allergies. This has resulted in fluctuating hearing loss in the years when the auditory processing part of the brain was to be developing. A dyslexic individual's brain did not have a chance to develop the ability to segment sounds, blend them together, identify which sounds were the same which ones different, count individual sounds, notice when sounds were added, omitted, substituted or duplicated. Because these processes were not developed naturally in the early years, for reasons of genetics or environment, they need to be developed at a conscious level before literacy can be expected.

It is not as difficult as one might think. I have tried to set up a plan that will help train the brain to process speech sounds.

There are 58 Videos in *Read My Lips*. When watching the videos, have a mirror on hand for the student to watch her mouth. She should copy the mouth movements and feel how each sound is made.

The game *ABC* does not need to be played in its entirety. The most important aspect of this game is "*What's My Sound*". This game will put each letter on the screen and tell you what sound that letter makes. If you turn off the sound it becomes a flash card naming game.

Put Same with Same involves the students by having them look at the letter, say the sound, then place the card on top of the identical card. Check out the options page to make this game more challenging by removing the card quickly or changing fonts.

Match Up Consonants and Vowels will most likely be a favorite game. I usually let children play this game long after they seem to need it. This of course would be my perception of “need it.” In fact, children will choose games that still challenge them even though they get all the answers right. This is a very important concept for an educator or parent to understand. If children don’t think there is enough challenge in the game, they won’t play the game. If they think it’s too hard, they won’t play the game. Trust their judgement.

Patterns provides an opportunity for auditory bombardment and sound/symbol association. The student sees the sound, hears the sound, over and over. Repetition is good for learning. There are 225 patterns.

Cut Ups! is one of our most clever games (she said modestly). The purpose of this game is to practice sound segmentation. The student must understand the concept that words are like puzzles. There are pieces to the puzzle. Each piece must go into the puzzle at a certain place. When the puzzle pieces are in order, the puzzle looks like a picture and can be seen as a “whole” picture. The concept: Parts make up the whole. In the beginning, make sure the student goes through the entire process of listening to a sound, finding the letter that corresponds, then when the word is complete, playing the Sounds, Blended and Word buttons. This will reinforce segmenting and blending and reduce impulsivity. The goal is not to see how many of the words a student can plow through. The goal is to really understand the idea of breaking words into sounds and blending them back together again. There are 240 words to practice.

And a One, Two, Three is based on the concept of syllable segmentation. Do you remember hearing a foreign language for the first time? Most likely all you heard was, “Laladeedudum.” There seemed to be no spaces between the words! Everything ran together. You couldn’t tell when one word stopped and another began. As you studied the language you could start to hear pauses that you swore weren’t there before. Your ear was being trained to listen to the sounds. Now the interesting part is that there doesn’t seem to be a one to one correspondence between the ends of words and a pause. For example, in that last sentence there is a phrase, “and a pause.” Our eyes see three words, but our ears hear, “andapause.” Written language is the process of assigning symbols to what we hear. The rules are rather fuzzy here. We hear “andapause” but we write “and a pause.” If we are ever going to be able to spell, we will have to learn to break phrases and words to smaller units. In this game, we break them into syllables. The syllable breaks are idiosyncratic as well. I tried to consistently break the words into what I thought would be natural sounding speech for a native speaker. This creates a problem. The syllable breaks don’t necessarily match the dictionary breaks. They do however, match the way most English speakers speak. If you are learning English as a second language or are just having trouble acquiring English and you can model your speech after my model. Choose the “Pronunciation” model on the options page. You will probably sound more “natural” than if I had adhered to the dictionary syllable breaks. If you are working on spelling and natural speech pronunciation is not the target, use the default “Spelling” version.

Back to *And a One, Two, Three*. Have the student say the word, listen to the syllable breaks, then move the colored squares to the line. After they are successful, make the task harder. Don’t listen right away to the Syllable button. Have the student count the vowels. Every syllable must have at least one vowel. You will get into the problem of the silent e and the two vowels that go walking, but teach these as still one vowel sound. Have them say what they think are the syllables, then check their thinking with the Syllable button. Use the colored felts to represent each syllable. There are 240 words to practice.

Rules, Rules, Rules! will introduce a select group of vowels and consonants. The first rule is “This vowel or consonant will usually say this sound.” For example, letter “p” will say /p/ and “oe” will say /oe/. These are

what we can expect a sound to say most of the time. Of course, if you have a rule, then you have an exception. Let the students list the exceptions if they want to, but focus on how there are some rules and consistencies to this language.

The addendum lists the sequence of the introduction of the rules. There isn't anything magical to this sequence. We tried to make sure that we didn't use a word before we had introduced the rule. There are 55 rules and 1,110 and words to practice.

"Spelling Test on Friday!" can be used for reading or spelling practice. I encourage you to teach the student to look carefully at the word. Find the vowel; identify the rule or rules that are operating. Decide if the word plays fair or not. Say the word the real way, then say the word the way it looks like it should be spelled. For example, "yacht" does not play fair. It looks like it should say "yeahchit". Taking time for each word will help put the spelling into the brain for good. Quantity is not the purpose. Even if a student gets only 7 words a week to spell, and learns to spell them correctly, it is better than if he had 20 assigned, only got 7 correct, and moved next week to another 20. Stay with a group until the words are learned. Don't move on just because the calendar says it is time. All brains learn at different speeds. Teach each student to recognize how they learn and to respect that each learner is different. There are 1,800 new words in *"Spelling Test on Friday!"* The list includes easy "instant" words and more difficult sight words.

The *"Spelling Test on Friday!"* program is based on the observation that we learn by repetition. Many of the activities of daily living were hard to learn at first but now come easily. Spelling is one of those activities that can move from being a foreground process to one that occurs in the background. This program is designed to use three channels into the brain: visual, auditory, and tactile. If you see the word, hear it, write it, and check your work, the word has more pathways into your brain and a better chance of moving from short-term memory to long-term memory.

Reading and spelling are complex neurological processing tasks. This program was developed to help the learner listen to the spelling word, look at the word, visualize what the word looks like (hide words/show words option), type the word, proof the word, and spell the word correctly before moving on to the next word.

Proofing is a difficult task for many individuals. My thought is that in order to learn to spontaneously proof your work, you must be conditioned to remember to proof your work. Type the word in the space. Press Spell Word and put your finger on each letter as it is spelled. If it is exact, press Check Answer. If not, change your response. Significant information can be gained from a discrepancy between percent correct on first try and percent correct after proofing. The smaller the difference between these two numbers, the more automatic the word has become for the speller.

Learning Plan

Monday: Choose the week's words and use the Practice button to study the words.

Tuesday: Use the program to Practice the words before you start your home work, and again after you have finished the rest of your homework.

Wednesday: You are ready to Take a Test. Print out the results of the test by clicking on the Print button. Try to figure out why you misspelled any words that you missed. Switch back to the Practice mode and run through the words again, even if you got all of the words right. Remember that we want the words to be moved to permanent memory. The more times you see, hear, and type them, the more likely it is that you will remember them.

Thursday: Test yourself again. Review any words that you missed. Now you're ready for the spelling test on Friday!

Friday: Take that test!

Match Ups! Spelling Test on Friday, Words is the final game. Almost every student looks forward to

playing Match Ups!. We used the same concentration game format as in our other CDs, but put words on the cards instead of pictures. If you want to get rapid reading of isolated words, use the arrow button on the bottom left corner to turn all the cards over. There are three important options to this game. Look under Options on the Menu bar. This game could remain a visual matching task if you always keep the words on the cards. You do have the option of putting a heavier load onto auditory processing and memory by removing the word from the card and playing Symbol to Sound. If you really want to be impish, choose the option, Sound to Sound! :)

In many games, you can print a homework page relevant to the screen you just played by clicking on the you just played by clicking on the *Print* button. There are also extra fonts and templates in PDF files on the CD.

The timesaving features of Session Notes and Save Log on the Clinical Log page, will help with documentation requirements. The Save Log feature saves the session notes and the Clinical Log page. It saves the information on your hard drive in a text file. These files can be read with any word processor or printed at a later date. Session notes can be entered at the time of the therapy session. To align the numbers and notes for easier reading, use a monospaced font such as Courier or Monaco.

In conclusion, this program is meant to reinforce the reading and spelling lessons that are being taught at home or in class. Only isolated words are presented for reading. Do not stop there. Words in phrases and sentences must be next. Then, most importantly, there has to be a reason for reading. Reading for meaning must be checked. It doesn't do a student any good to read words if she is not connecting the words to meaning. If you suspect that students are just decoding the words and not gaining any meaning from them, the problem is a reading comprehension weakness. The treatment for this is to teach students how to connect to the words and make images in their minds when they read a word. This is a separate problem from a decoding problem but must be addressed with as much fervor as a decoding "illiteracy" problem. Students are still functionally illiterate if they can read the words, but not understand what they have read.

I hope you and your students have fun using this program. Learning to read can be a difficult task for some people. The approach we have taken is that if you can see some patterns of what "plays fair" then the "not play fair" words will be less frustrating. Have fun and practice, practice, practice.

Marna Scarry-Larkin, M.A. CCC-SLP
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Literacy

Read My Lips

ABC

Put Same with Same

Patterns

Match Ups! Consonants and Vowels

Cut Ups!

And a One, Two, Three

Rules, Rules, Rules!

"Spelling Test on Friday!"

Match Ups! Spelling Test Word

Letter Identification

Learning sounds:

Read My Lips (Videos)

“What’s My Sound?” on *ABC*

Put Same with Same

Match Ups! Consonants and Vowels

Patterns

Word Identification/Word Attack

Practicing Auditory Sequencing

Cut Ups!

And a One, Two, Three

Match Ups! Spelling Test on Friday Words (options page: Sound to Sound Mode)

Patterns

Metacognitive Skills

Learning Reading and Spelling

Rules Rules, Rules, Rules!

Read My Lips

Dictation

Practicing Spelling

“Spelling Test on Friday!”

Cut Ups! (Hide stimuli, Option H)

Memory

Improving Visual and Auditory Memory

Match Ups! Consonants and Vowels

Match Ups! Spelling Test on Friday Words

Patterns (Hide Stimuli Option)

NOTE: Be sure to check each OPTIONS page for each game to use different fonts and game variations.

This 3 CD program is hierarchically organized. Each individual game is designed to be easier at the early levels and harder at the later levels. If you begin at the first level and play sequentially through each game you should be able to establish the foundation for reading and spelling. It is expected that the student will be playing one or more games from each of the modules each day. There is a folder on the CD labeled, Teacher Workbook. It includes word lists and homework pages that can be printed and photocopied for classroom or literacy center use.

Research

At what age can we predict that a child is at risk for a reading disorder? What skills can we look at as predictors?

“Children diagnosed as speech and language-impaired during their preschool years are at risk for developing serious learning problems during their school careers” (Padget, 1979-1984). These learning problems include significant reading and writing deficits. In the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Child Development Study, Silva et al. found that between 58% and 67% of children with either comprehension or expressive delays at age three had a low reading score at ages 7, 9, and 11 (Silva, Williams, and McGee 1987). According to Lyle (1970) there is an association between articulatory problems in 2 1/2 to 4-year-olds and later reading difficulty. Lundberg stated that the “single most powerful predictor of reading and spelling skills in the first school years is the level of phonological awareness, especially phonemic segmentation.” Van Kleeck (1990) suggests that skills related to phoneme segmentation, such as breaking a word into individual sounds and understanding sound-symbol relationships, are often mastered by the end of first grade. Our clinical experience indicates that if a child does not know letter sounds by the end of the first grade he should be evaluated for dyslexia. Shaywitz describes speech sounds to written letter associations as the “alphabetic principle.” In addition to sound/symbol association, there must be a discovery that “spoken words can be broken down into smaller units of sound, that letters on the page represent these sounds, and that written words have the same number and sequence of sounds heard in the spoken word (Shaywitz 1998).

Are there common characteristics of children who have difficulty learning to read?

Yes, the commonalities are: a history of delayed language, trouble with the sounds of words, a family history of dyslexia, difficulty naming letters, difficulty associating the letter name with the letter sound, and poor phonologic awareness—the knowledge that words can be broken into smaller sound segments (Shaywitz 1998).

What are the elements of early intervention that make it successful?

Brady and Fowler (1988) have found that early intervention results in improved reading ability when both phonological awareness and knowledge of the alphabet were learned. Some understanding of metalinguistic processes was necessary as well as rapid decoding of single words. The best predictor of poor reading comprehension is slow and inaccurate decoding (Fletcher, Shaywitz, et al.). When decoding is quick and accurate the reader can focus attention on reading for meaning instead of decoding skills. How have these factors been incorporated into Literacy? (Games that correspond to the target skills are in parentheses). To learn to read, a child must discover that spoken and written words can be broken down into smaller sound segments (And a One, Two, Three), that printed letters correspond to these sound segments (*Read My Lips, ABC, Put Same with Same, Match Ups! Consonants and Vowels, and Patterns*), and that written words have the same sounds in the same sequence as the spoken word (*Cut Ups!*).

Lindamood, (et al. 1992) makes a distinction between phonic programs that presume the presence of some phonological awareness and those that teach phonological awareness through a “comparator function.” They argue that practice in phonics instruction will not necessarily teach phonemic awareness. There must be a sensory-cognitive connection at a self-correcting cognitive level of awareness. The comparator function includes a hold-and-contrast concept for noticing the sameness/difference, number, and sequence of sounds in syllables. There also seems to be a need for the development of a metalinguistic understanding of the rules of reading and spelling (*Rules, Rules, Rules!*). In addition to phonemic awareness and metacognition, the visual perceptual elements of word recognition and memory play an important part in rapid automatic recognition and decoding of single words (*Match Ups!*).

The goals of Literacy are to build a solid foundation for phonemic awareness, teach the application of this skill to real words, and provide practice in rapid decoding. The next step is to apply single-word decoding skills to reading and spelling in context.

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