

Five Phonics Best Practice Lessons

Summary: The elements of effective phonics instruction are fairly well-established, and in an article for the International Reading Association, literacy coach Lori Oczkus summarizes those best practices. In this write-up, you'll find 5 lesson ideas that Oczkus highlights as particularly strong in teaching phonics, phonemic awareness, and word work.

Practical Applications

Oczkus' article touches on several pieces of phonics instruction, this write-up will be focusing on the lessons she suggests are highly effective:

1. **Win at Wordo (Cunningham, 2008):** "This game, similar to Bingo, can be played with students of any age. Students fill up a Wordo card by copying one word in each box from the class word wall."
2. **Score with Word Sorts (Cunningham, 2008; Fountas & Pinnell, 2001):** This involves giving students a set of cards with words on them and then leading them in different kinds of sorts. The teacher can be creative here – there are "closed sorts" when the teacher sets the guidelines, such as words starting with /d/, and "open sorts" where students make up their own categories. Speed sorts turn it into a game.
3. **Move It, Make It: Making Words (Cunningham, 2008):** This involves students making words from letter cards or magnetic letters. It's often helpful to choose a larger word you want the students to make ("cheering") but pass out the letter cards gradually and leading students to make as many smaller words as possible that highlight the phonics concept you're working on ("chin," "cheer," if you were working on /ch/).
4. **Build, Mix, Fix! (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001):** In this activity, "after a lesson on a sound or spelling pattern, choose 3-4 words to study, or allow students to choose the words." Then, students "build" the words with magnetic letters or letter cards, "mix" up the letter cards and "fix" the cards by remaking them into the different words. This is a great partner activity.
5. **Let's Play the Name Game! (Diller, 2002; Cunningham, 2008):** Capturing young students' enjoyment with their names, this involves creating a sentence strip with each student's name and picture, and then running through a number of exercises using the names (e.g. clapping syllables, longest/shortest, first-letters, etc.). Games can be made up such as "creating one tongue twister per day using a student's name," and the names become references – "you can create analogies such as 'if you can read *Tracey*, you can read *truck*.'"

Conclusion and Citation

There are any number of fun and effective lessons to teach key phonics concepts and these five are proven to be among the best.

Oczkus, L. "Phonics and Phonemic Awareness: Classroom Guide to Best Practices and Top 5 Phonics/Word Work Lessons." International Reading Association (Aug. 2011). <http://bit.ly/tRalp8> (membership only).