

TPRI newsletter

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A Focus on Phonics

Phonics is one of the five essential components of a complete and comprehensive early reading program. It is closely tied to phonemic awareness, the focus of last month's newsletter. Phonemic awareness relates to the individual sounds in spoken language, whereas phonics, is the understanding that sounds are represented by individual letters or a combination of letters.

The TPRI assesses phonics within the Graphophonemic Knowledge (GK) and Word Reading inventory portions. The GK portion of the TPRI includes tasks for letter to sound linking, phoneme substitution and deletion, word reading, and spelling. The Word Reading Task is a new addition to the 2010-2014 TPRI kit. This task consists of four sets, each consisting of five words. The words within each set share some common phonic elements.

According to the National Reading Panel, 2000, effective phonics instruction is explicit and systematic and should build upon a strong foundation of phonemic awareness ([NICD, 2000, p. 2-132](#)). Explicit phonics instruction occurs daily and involves whole or small group direct instruction, focusing on the recognition of the letters in the alphabet and the understanding of sound-symbol relationships and spelling patterns.

Our November/December newsletter continues our spotlight on the five key components of early reading instruction. This month, **Becky Beegle** joins us from the Children's



Learning Institute to share her expert knowledge about effective phonics instruction in K-2. Becky has worked in elementary education for 30 years as a classroom teacher, coach, Statewide Coordinator for Texas Reading First, and is currently coordinating the development of an exciting new reading intervention program for K-1 called *Super Readers!*

Using the TPRI to Guide Phonics Instruction

Information gathered from the GK and Word Reading portions of the TPRI can be used to determine which students may be in need of additional support or intensive intervention in the area of phonics. Careful analysis of student spelling and Word Reading errors helps teachers identify specific areas to target during phonics instruction. In order to conduct error analysis on the Word Reading portion of the Inventory Section, teachers must record student errors during reading. Analysis tools for both Spelling and Word Reading are part of the Student Record Sheet.

To help teachers identify students who may be in need of additional support or intervention in phonics instruction, the following information may be helpful:

- Kindergarten: It is not unusual that some students will score Still Developing (SD) on most or all of the GK tasks at the beginning of the year. Additional phonics instruction may be required for students who score SD on GK-1 or GK-2 at MOY to help them meet EOY goals.
- Grade 1: Schools often expect students to score Developed (D) on letter sound tasks at BOY. Those students who score SD on GK-1 or GK-2 at BOY will likely require additional support. A reasonable MOY goal is for students to score D on GK-1, GK-2, and GK-3.
- Grades 2 & 3: Students scoring SD on GK Spelling Set 1 at BOY or SD on Set 2 at MOY may require additional focused or intensive instruction to meet grade level goals. The same is true for Word Reading. Students who score SD on Set 1 at BOY or Set 2 at MOY may require additional support.

Experts Say ...

"In order to make sure that phonics instruction is having the desired effect, teachers must assess students and use data to shape their instruction."

Mesmer, H., & Griffith, P. (2006). Everybody's selling it-but just what is explicit, systematic phonics instruction? *The Reading Teacher*, 59(4), p. 375.

"... systematic and explicit phonics instruction improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension ... Most students who have had effective phonics instruction can read quickly and easily and have an effective decoding strategy for reading unknown words."

Vaughn, S., & Linan-Thompson, S. (2004). *Research-based methods of reading instruction, grades K-3*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD, p. 32.



Making Spelling Instruction Count

In the remaining sections of this newsletter, Becky Beegle will share research-based reasons and methods for teaching spelling.

Phonics and the English Language

Studies tell us that about 50 percent of the words in the English language are predictable and consistent in their spelling and can be spelled correctly by sound-symbol correspondences alone (Hanna, Hanna, Hodges, & Rudorf, 1966). Another 36 percent of the words in the English language have spellings that are predictable and frequent where spelling is determined by the position of a phoneme in the word (such as the soft *c* and *g*).

Common spelling instruction often follows a sequence like the following. On Monday, a list of words is provided to students. During the week, words are discussed and practiced for homework, and then students spell those same words from memory on the Friday test. For those students with strong skills in memorization, making high marks in spelling is a breeze! However, for students who cannot memorize the list of words as effectively, and for those who do not easily see the patterns in the words, spelling becomes a difficult task. And, even if a child manages to memorize the words long enough to pass the test on Friday, the spellings aren't retained for long.



Do The Math

On average let's say that students are provided with 20 spelling words per week. There are 36 weeks in the average school year, and students attend 13 years of school, K-12. (We'll calculate the whole time, even though spelling lessons often end as early as grade 5.)

$$20 \text{ words} \times 36 \text{ weeks} \times 13 \text{ years} = \mathbf{9360 \text{ spelling words}}$$

The Result

Those students who were able to successfully memorize the spelling of a handful of words each week, and manage to retain them, will learn to spell **less than 4 percent** of the words in the English language (there are approximately 250,000 words in the English language). For the students who were not successful at memorizing and retaining the words, they may end their school years being able to correctly spell only a fraction of the words in our language.

Make It Count

If we teach students the basic sound-spelling relationships, and an understanding of how they are affected by phoneme placement and environment, students have the opportunity to be able to spell **almost 90 percent** of the words in the English language. This is a much more effective approach to teaching spelling than using only lists of words.

90%

Hanna, P.R., Hanna, J.S.; Hodges, R. E., & Rudorf, E.H. (1966). *Phoneme-grapheme correspondences as cues to spelling improvement*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Using Phonics to Effectively Teach Spelling

The following are steps for equipping students with a knowledge and understanding of the patterns, principles, and rules of spelling in the English language:

- * **Get Ready!** As teachers, we must become knowledgeable of the most common spelling patterns and generalizations in our language. Various resources are available for the teacher who wants to be knowledgeable about English language spelling conventions (see the "Check it Out!" section on the next page).
- * **Get Set!** Students need to be taught the spelling patterns, principles, and rules in a direct, systematic way. In what sequence should the patterns be introduced? No single sequence has proven to be better than the rest, although it is recommended that the most consistent and commonly-used ones be taught before the more unreliable and obscure ones.
- * **Go!** Once a scope and sequence for the spelling patterns have been outlined, how should the lessons be designed? An effective spelling lesson should include 3 components:
 1. Direct instruction of the pattern.
 - What is the pattern?
 - Where is the pattern usually found in a word—at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the syllable/word?
 - Are there any other generalizations about the pattern which would help the student know when to use the pattern?
 2. Teacher-directed activity designed to reinforce the learning of the pattern (an example is provided in the next section).
 3. Dictation: direct application of the pattern by the students, with teacher support.

A Routine for Teaching Spelling

The following is an example of direct, explicit instruction of a spelling pattern, including the three components mentioned on the previous page. The whole lesson should take approximately 15 minutes.

Direct Instruction Component

I do: Write *i_e* on the whiteboard.

This pattern makes the sound /i/, which we also call “long i.” The blank between the *i* and the *e* means there has to be a consonant between the *i* and the *e* in order for the pattern to make the sound /i/. That means I can only use this spelling when it is followed by a consonant sound. I can use the spelling in the word *white*, because /i/ is followed by /t/. I cannot use the spelling in the word *why*, because there is no consonant sound after /i/. I can use *i_e* in *slide*, but not in *sly*, because /i/ has to be followed by a consonant sound in order to use the spelling pattern *i_e*.

We do (students respond together; call on volunteers to answer the follow-up question): **Help me decide which words could use the spelling pattern *i_e*. I will say a word. You show me a thumbs-up signal if we could use *i_e* in the word.**

Fly	Ask students to explain why they chose to give or not give a thumbs-up signal.
Wife	signal.
Try	Correct responses: “I gave a thumbs-up signal because there was a
Pry	consonant sound after the <i>long i</i> sound,” or “I didn’t give a thumbs-up
Time	signal because there wasn’t a consonant sound after the /i/.”

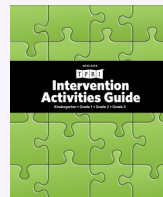
You do (call on individual students to respond):

I will say a word. Think about whether it can use the spelling pattern *i_e*. When I call your name, show me a thumbs-up if *i_e* could be used in the word.

Ask individual students to explain their responses. Be sure to say the word *first*, THEN call on a student—that way, all students should be thinking the answer!

Teacher-Directed Activity

Follow the directions for Activity [GK-45 Long Vowel Sort](#) in the TPRI Intervention Activities Guide (IAG). Use the words representing the *i_e* and *_y* spelling patterns for the long *i* sound.

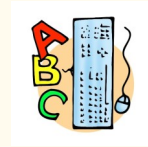


Dictation (Dictation is a teacher-directed activity, NOT a spelling test.)

Have students number a sheet of paper from 1-5. Tell them they will be spelling words with the long *i* sound, and that the spelling pattern they will use for the sound will either be *i_e* or *_y*, depending on where the sound comes in the word. Instruct students to say the word after you, then say it slowly (segment the sounds) if needed. After all words have been completed, allow students to go back and check their own work as you work together with the class to spell the words correctly on the board. Any missed spelling patterns should be crossed out (NOT erased—you need to be aware of the spelling patterns that were missed so they can be retaught), and the whole word should be written correctly beside it. Some suggested words for this dictation would include *cry*, *side*, *fine*, *fry*, and *wipe*.

The Digital Age

Think for a moment—what do you do when you want to use a word in your writing that effectively communicates what you want to say, but you don’t know for sure how to spell it? Chances are, with today’s technological advances, you make your best guess at the word and then rely on Spell Check to do the rest! As the poem goes,



*I have a spelling chequer,
It came with my pea sea.
It clearly marques four my revue
Miss steaks I kin knot sea.*

-Anonymous

Obviously, spell check is *knot* the answer.

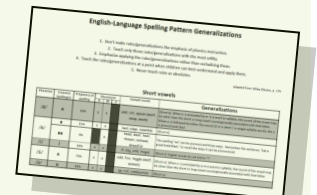
Check it Out!

Check out these helpful resources for teaching phonics.

“Graphophonemic Knowledge: *Enhancing Spelling and Word Study*” is a useful resource with additional routines and procedures for effective spelling instruction. To download the booklet, please click [here](#).



This resource is also available in Spanish. To download the Spanish booklet, please click [here](#).



This *English-Language Spelling Pattern Tool* is a helpful guide for teaching phonic elements. To download this chart, please click [here](#).

A Final Word on Phonics Instruction

Using the type of direct, systematic instruction described by expert Becky Beegle will support students in becoming successful readers and writers. Explicit instruction of spelling patterns and principles provide students the tools they need to spell the majority of words in the English language. Implementing a strong routine will bring your students more learning bang for your instructional buck!