

## Introduction

Welcome to the video overview of the Phonological Awareness Continuum. I am Kristi Santi, Professor of Special Populations at the University of Houston. I am a team member of the UH AIPaT Model Demonstration Project and want to take a moment to give a shout-out to the other team members. The goal is to highlight the continuum and the complexity and individual nature of learning critical skills that lead to better reading comprehension.

## Concept

Phonological awareness is a critical component of early reading development that involves the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound structures of language, such as phonemes, syllables, and rhymes. It encompasses a range of skills that develop progressively, from basic recognition of larger sound units to more sophisticated manipulation of individual phonemes.

## Key Elements

1. **Rhyming:** Recognizing and generating rhymes is one of the earliest phonological awareness skills. Children learn to identify words that sound similar at the end, which helps in developing sensitivity to sound patterns.
2. **Syllable Awareness:** This involves the ability to break down words into syllables. Children practice clapping out the number of syllables in words, which helps them understand that words can be divided into smaller parts.
3. **Onset and Rime:** This skill involves recognizing the initial consonant sound (onset) and the string of letters that follow (rime) in a syllable. For example, in the word "cat," /c/ is the onset and /at/ is the rime.
4. **Phonemic Awareness:** The most advanced level, where children can identify and manipulate individual sounds in words. This includes blending sounds to make words, segmenting words into individual sounds, and manipulating sounds within words (e.g., changing /c/ in "cat" to /h/ to make "hat").

## Implications for Educators

Educators play a vital role in developing students' phonological awareness through structured activities and intentional instruction. Key strategies include:

- **Explicit Instruction:** Direct teaching of phonological skills using a systematic approach. This includes breaking down each skill into manageable steps and providing clear examples and practice opportunities. Think of the teaching strategy: I do (model), We do (lead), and you do (test).
- **Multi-Modal Activities:** Engaging students through activities that involve listening, speaking, clapping, and movement to reinforce phonological skills.
- **Scaffolded Learning:** Gradually increasing the complexity of tasks as students' skills develop. Start with larger sound units like syllables and rhymes before moving to individual phonemes.
- **Integrating Phonological Awareness in Daily Activities:** Embedding phonological awareness activities into daily routines, such as morning meetings, storytime, and transitions, to provide consistent practice and reinforcement.
- **Assessment and Differentiation:** Regular assessment to monitor progress and adjust instruction to meet the needs of all learners, including providing additional support for those who struggle and extending activities for those who advance quickly.

## Individual Differences

It is important to recognize that children develop phonological awareness skills at different rates. Some children may need to follow each step sequentially, mastering one skill before moving on to the next, while others may seem to leap ahead, as they acquire the skills more rapidly. This variation can be likened to taking the stairs versus an escalator.

- **Stair Step Learners:** These children benefit from structured, sequential instruction with clear, incremental steps. They need repeated practice and reinforcement at each stage to solidify their understanding and ability to manipulate sounds.
- **Escalator Learners:** These children may intuitively grasp phonological concepts and quickly progress through the continuum of skills. They often require less direct

instruction and may benefit from more advanced or varied activities that challenge their developing abilities. Hence the escalator on the graphic.

### **Addressing Individual Differences in Instruction**

- **Flexible Grouping:** Use assessment data to group students according to their current skill levels, allowing for targeted instruction that meets each group's specific needs.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Provide a range of activities and materials that cater to different learning paces. For example, while some students work on rhyming, others might engage in phoneme manipulation tasks.
- **Ongoing Assessment:** Regularly monitor students' progress to identify those who need more support or additional challenges. Adjust instructional strategies and groupings based on assessment results.
- **Personalized Learning:** Incorporate individual learning plans that outline specific goals and strategies for each child. This personalized approach ensures that all students receive the appropriate level of support and challenge.

### **Closing**

Phonological awareness is foundational for reading success. By understanding the continuum of phonological skills and implementing research-based instructional strategies that account for individual differences, educators can effectively support all students in developing these essential early literacy skills. The ultimate goal is to build a strong foundation for reading that will enable all students to become proficient and confident readers, regardless of whether they take the stairs or the escalator in their learning journey.

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