

**Subject Area:** Language Arts (Reading)

**Instructional Approach:** Phonics

**Grade Levels:** Pre-K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade

**Description of Approach:** “Phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It teaches children to use these relationships to read and write words.” (Wagner) Therefore phonics is a word attack skill in which you “sound out” words. There are several different approaches to phonics instruction. These include analogy based, analytic, embedded phonics through spelling, onset-rime instruction, and synthetic phonics.

**References in APA format:**

1. Cunningham, P. (2005). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing*. Boston, MA: Pearson.
2. Eldredge, J.L., & Baird, J.E. (1996). Phonemic awareness training works better than whole language instruction for teaching first graders how to write. *Reading Research and Instruction, 35*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from WilsonSelectPlus database.
3. Mercer, C. D., & Mercer, A. R. (2005). *Teaching students with learning problems*. Columbus, OH: Pearson.
4. Pikulski, D. J. (n.d.). *The role of phonics in the teaching of reading: A Houghton Mifflin position paper*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from [www.eduplace.com](http://www.eduplace.com)
5. Wagner, E. (n.d.). Word knowledge. *Literacy at school and home*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from <http://www.mason.gmu.edu>

**What makes this work in the classroom:**

Phonics can work in a classroom if the instruction is taught clear and direct in a way that all students can understand. One concept of phonics that students must learn is the relationship between letters and sounds. “There are many opportunities to practice and apply these learning in a variety of ways, including manipulating letters to build words and applying phonics skills to decodable texts and to writing. Through phonics and spelling instruction children develop the ability to segment and blend phonemes and to sound out words by blending letter sounds from left to right” (Pikulski). Instruction of phonics works better if the amount of time of the lesson is kept to a shorter length and also the lessons are not just drill and practice. This approach will be a success in the classroom if the teacher will use it throughout lessons, for example having the students use phonics in science just not in reading and writing. According to the Pikulski article

“In order for children to gain full use of phonics skills they need many opportunities to apply them to functional and interesting reading and writing activities” (Pikulski).

### **What a teacher needs to know:**

According to Mercer and Mercer there are general guidelines to follow when teaching students phonics. “These guidelines are use lowercase letters for beginning instruction, introduce most useful skills first, introduce easy sounds and letters first, introduce new letter-sound associations at a reasonable pace, introduce vowels early, but teach consonants first, emphasize the common sounds of letters first, teach continuous sounds prior to stop sounds, teach sound blending early, introduce consonant blends, introduce consonant digraphs, introduce regular words prior to irregular ones, and read connected text that reinforces phonic patterns” (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). It is important for teachers to understand that there are several approaches to phonics. These approaches are “synthetic phonics, analytic phonics, analogy-based phonics, phonics through spelling, embedded phonics, and onset-rime phonic instruction” (Wagner). Synthetic phonics is when children learn how to blend letter sounds together to create words. Analytic phonics is when “Children learn to analyze letter sound relationships in previously learned words” (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). Analogy-based phonics is when “children learn to use parts of word families they know to identify words they don’t know that have similar parts” (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). Phonics through spelling is when “Children learn to segment words into phonemes and to make words by writing letters for phonemes” (Mercer & Mercer, 2005). Embedded phonics is when “Children are taught letter-sound relationships during the reading of connected text” (Wagner). Onset-rime phonics instruction is when “Children learn to identify the sound of the letter or letters before the first vowel (the onset) in a one-syllable word and the soul remaining part of the word” (Wagner).

**Implications for Practice:** There is controversy over phonics and whether this approach teaches students better than whole language approach. Whole language is when “reading is taught as a holistic, meaning oriented activity and is treated as an integrated behavior rather than learning decoding skills and the student is taught to break the code in reading within the context of meaningful content” (Mercer & Mercer, 2005, p 294). Eldredge and Baird say that whole language is the “belief that individuals learn a language (both oral and written forms) by using it, not by learning and practicing its separate parts” (1996). It is not that one approach is better than another it is the choice of the teacher and what the school’s curriculum is based on. Critics of phonics also believe that there are too many irregular words in the English language that do not follow the rules of phonics. Mercer and Mercer (2005) in rebuttal to this argument say that instruction in phonics teaches a system for remembering and recognizing words. Phonics also provides students with instruction in letter sound patterns that some irregular words contain that help students read those words.

### **Additional Links:**

Clifford’s Sound Match: Great interactive game for young children

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/clifford1/flash/phonics>

Reading A to Z-Phonics

<http://www.readinga-z.com/phonics/reading-phonics.php>

Practice Quiz on Phonics

<http://english.glendale.cc.ca.us/phonics.html>

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