



BELINDA HILL
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SPEECH PATHOLOGISTS



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Emerging Literacy Skills



Emerging literacy skills are crucial to successful acquisition of reading and spelling. It is not uncommon to discover that children in the primary years who are struggling in the area of literacy, are also lacking in the following skills. Early literacy skills may not automatically evolve as a child develops their communication and academic skills. Reading success is more likely if children are explicitly exposed to phonemic awareness and early literacy skills. They include:-

1. Metalinguistic Skills – understanding the difference between a sound, a word, a sentence and a story. It is the ability to talk about language concepts explicitly.
2. Determining word length – being able to discriminate and judge if a word is 'long' or 'short' in duration.

3. Rhyming words – the ability to judge if words rhyme and also produce rhyming words when given an example. For example ‘ball’ → ‘tall’. This helps children to learn word families at school
4. Syllabification – being able to clap/mark the beat in words and identify each syllable boundary, eg. *Mo-tor-bike*. This helps sounding out longer words
5. Segmenting – separating individual sounds within words. It is primarily an auditory task, so the child would not typically do this while looking at the printed form of the word. Once print is added, their skill becomes a visual and auditory one, eg. Smell → *s-m-e-ll*
6. Blending – the reverse process of above. When given sounds, the child assembles them to recreate the original word. For example ‘c-a-n’, Child: ‘can’.
7. Sound Identification- the awareness of sounds within words ie. starting, middle and ending sounds. Often more impaired with children who have a history of speech/articulation difficulties. The student has to isolate the sound then label it, eg. What sound is at the end of *map* – ‘*p*’. It is important the child can distinguish between letters versus sounds.
8. Sound Manipulation – being able to delete, add or substitute sounds in words heard, to form new words eg: Say “‘ball’, now say it again, but instead of b say c”. Response ‘call’. The child needs a number of the previous skills to perform this task successfully. This helps children when spelling and reading as they can apply sound patterns from a known word to spell and read a new similar looking word.

These skills develop from the preschool years until Year 2 or later if the student has a delay with phonemic awareness.

Students who are competent in the area of phonemic awareness are more likely to be flexible and accurate with their reading and spelling. Students who are strictly visual spellers/readers (ie. they learn by remembering ‘whole’ word units) may not have the word attack strategies to read and spell unfamiliar or new words.

Combinations of visual and phonemic strategies increase the chances of literacy success.

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