EPI Study Guide for Instructional Reading Pre-test.

Core Language and Literacy Skills

A core, or essential, set of skills have been identified by research as those skills young children must have in order to become successful readers (Snow et al., 1998). To learn to read and write easily, children need to develop experience with these skills within a print-rich environment. As young children experience each of these foundational aspects of literacy, they begin to understand how print and language work together. The core language and literacy skills fall into six major categories: oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Oral language is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings.

Oral Language

Oral language is the ability to speak and listen with understanding. Using language to communicate includes grammar, word meanings, and listening comprehension. In order to comprehend oral language, children need to pay attention and listen with purpose. They need to quickly recognize words they hear and connect new information with what they already know. Oral language comprehension is important because it provides the language foundation for learning to read and write. Shared book reading, singing songs, finger plays, storytelling, and dramatic play are a few of the ways to help children explore, learn, and use oral language in the pre-school years. This is a complex system where sounds are connected to making meaning. It is important to note here that beginning readers have a difficult time understanding words that are not part of their oral vocabulary.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness involves hearing the sounds of language apart from its meaning, which is difficult for most children because they must be consciously aware of the structure of language, rather than simply using language to communicate. They need to learn how to listen with purpose for the number of words in sentences, (I / ate / soup / for / lunch) – 5 words, the number of syllables in words (com-pu-ter) – 3 syllables, and the number of individual sounds or phonemes in words (d/o/g) – 3 phonemes. Phonological awareness is important because it is a strong indicator of future reading success and an essential skill for phonics and spelling, and it must be taught.

When working with young children, it's important to use read-aloud books, nursery rhymes, riddles, songs, and poems that play with language and manipulate sounds. For example, text with rhymes will help children notice the ends of words. Once children are aware of word endings, it makes sense to teach them alliteration using text like *Silly Sally* (Wood, 1992) to teach them that beginnings of words also can sound alike. Clapping, marching to the beat of a song, and using hand motions can all be used to teach phonological awareness.

Phonological awareness includes phonemic awareness, rhyming, and working with syllables in spoken words. Additionally, working with onsets and rimes (yes the spelling is correct) is part of this category. Onsets and rimes are parts of spoken language that are smaller than syllables, but larger than phonemes. An onset is the initial consonant(s) sound of a syllable (the onset of *bag* is b-; of *swim* is sw-).

A rime is the part of the syllable that contains the vowel and all that follows it (the rime of *bag* is –ag; of *swim* is –im.) (Put Reading First, National Institute for Literacy.)

Phonemic Awareness: Phonemic awareness is under the umbrella of Phonological Awareness and is one of the essential components of reading. According to the National Institute for Literacy, phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes. The phoneme is the smallest part of sound in a spoken word that makes the difference in the word's meaning. (A letter between the slash marks shows the phoneme, or sound, that the letter represents and not the name of the letter. For example, /m/, /a/, /p/ represents 'map'. On the other hand, a grapheme is the smallest part of written language that represents a phoneme in the spelling of a word. For example, the written letter Z is a grapheme. It is important to note that digraphs have two letters that represent one sound such as the ph that represents the /f/ sound. Vowel digraphs have two vowels, but the lead vowel carries the sound (lead had ea and the long /e/ sound.

Phonemic Awareness can be taught and learned. Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds in spoken language using the following:

Phoneme isolation: children recognize individual sounds in words. For example, the first sound in dog is /d/.

Phoneme identity: children recognize the same sound in different words, such a six, sun, and sat. The first sound /s/ is the same.

Phoneme categorization: children recognize or identify the word in a set that doesn't belong or has the odd sound. For example, which word doesn't sound like the others – dot, big, doll? (big)

Phoneme blending: A more difficult task, children blend a series of orally presented sounds to form a word. For example, blend /k/, /a/, /t/. The child should say 'cat'.

Phoneme segmentation: children isolate and identify sounds from the beginning or end of a word. For example, what sound do you hear at the beginning of the word 'pig'? The child says /p/. Sounds in the middle of a word can also be segmented and counted. For example, what are the sounds in 'pig'? How many sounds do you hear? The child says, /p/, /i/, /g/, 3 sounds. (Note: the middle sound is the short i.)

Phoneme deletion: children remove a sound from an oral word. Remove the /k/ sound from 'cat', what word/phoneme do you have left? (at)

Phoneme addition: children add a sound to an oral word. Add the /t/ to rain, what word do you have now? (train)

Phoneme substitution: children remove one sound and replace it with another. For example, take the word 'cat', take away the beginning sound /k/ and replace it with the new sound /h/, what word do you have now? (hat)

Concepts of Print

Concepts of print and print knowledge/awareness refer to the ability to recognize print and understand that it works in specific ways. It is the knowledge of reading terms, rules, and procedures such as the distinction between words, pictures, and letters. It is also the understanding that the direction of print goes from left to right and top to bottom in a book. It is the knowledge the title is found on the cover of the book. Concepts of print are important because it motivates the learn-to-read process and is a marker of literacy experience. Collecting and labeling pictures, writing captions (text) under children's drawings, and having children identify environmental words are ways to teach concepts of print.

Phonics

Phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. It teaches students to use these letter/sound relationships to read and write words. This is sometimes referred to as letter-sound relationships, letter-sound correspondences, and sound-symbol relationships. Regardless of the label, the goal of phonics instruction is to help children learn and use the alphabetic principle – the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Knowing these relationships will help children recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and 'decode' new words.

Alphabetic Principle

According to the University of Oregon, the alphabetic principle is composed of two parts.

Alphabetic Understanding: Words are composed of letters that represent sounds.

Phonological Recoding: Using systematic relationships between letters and phonemes to retrieve the pronunciation of an unknown printed string of letters or to spell words. Phonological recoding consists of the following categories: regular word reading (decoding), irregular word reading, and advanced word analysis (common vowel/consonant spelling patterns and affixes). When teaching advanced word analysis, words are identified through meaningful units such as prefixes, suffixes, and root words. The smallest meaningful part of a word is a morpheme. For example, the word unhappy has two morphemes, *un* which means 'not' and *happy* which means 'joyful'. This overlaps with and is usually considered to be a part of vocabulary instruction.

Teaching Phonics

There are several approaches to phonics instruction. Research supports the need for explicit, systematic phonics instruction. Systematic phonics instruction is the direct teaching of a set of letter-sound relationships in a clearly defined sequence. The instructional set includes the major sound/spelling relationships of both consonants and vowels. The program also provides materials that give children substantial practice in applying knowledge of these relationships as they read and write. These materials include books or stories that contain many words that children can decode by using the letter-sound relationships they have learned and are learning. These programs might

also provide children with opportunities to spell words and to write their own stories with the letter-sound relationships they are learning.

Explicit phonics instruction is an instructional practice where the teacher makes it a regular practice to model skills and strategies that students need to use to decipher and decode new and unknown words. The teacher explains the reason(s) and importance of learning the new phonics skill or strategy. The teacher also guides the students in their acquisition of the phonics skill or strategy.

Fluency

Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. This practice of reading accurately with speedy word recognition is known as automaticity. Although the terms automaticity and fluency are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Automaticity is the fast, effortless word recognition that comes with a great deal of reading practice. Automaticity refers only to accurate, speedy word recognition, not to reading with expression. Therefore, automaticity is necessary, but not enough, for fluent reading.

Fluent readers group words together to help them gain meaning from what they read. In other words, they divide the text into meaningful chunks. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Reading with expression is known as prosody. To read with expression, readers must be able to divide the text into meaningful chunks. The fluent reader reads with expression that aligns with the message of the text, provides emphasis and inflection, and attends to punctuation. Attention is paid to pausing at commas, periods, and other punctuation and appropriate pausing is evident. The reading of a fluent reader sounds natural. Readers who have not developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Their oral reading is choppy and plodding. The disfluent reader decodes words slowly and with considerable effort.

Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means. They can make connections among the ideas in the text and between the text and their background knowledge. In other words, fluent readers recognize words and comprehend at the same time. Less fluent readers, however, must focus their attention on figuring out the words, leaving them little attention for understanding the text. Struggling readers will exhibit slower fluency rates when they are reading unfamiliar materials with which they lack background knowledge and when reading texts that are above their instructional and independent reading levels. Independent reading levels are when the student knows and recognizes with automaticity 95-100% of the words in the passage or text. Instructional reading levels are materials at which the student accurately recognizes 90% of the words with automaticity.

Research on fluency instructional practices have been extensive over the past 15-20 years. Students who read and reread passages orally with guidance and/or feedback become better readers. Repeated oral reading substantially improves word recognition, speed, and accuracy, as well as fluency. Repeated oral reading improves the reading ability of all students throughout the elementary school years, and influences comprehension. However, a fluent reader does not miraculously acquire comprehension skills and strategies through reading aloud alone. Repeated oral reading also helps struggling readers at higher grade levels. Traditional round robin reading where students take turns reading only small amounts of text is proven to be ineffective. Also extended periods of silent sustained reading is not

effective instructional practice for fluency development. Sustained silent reading is not an effective instructional strategy.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. Oral vocabulary refers to words that we use in speaking or recognize in listening. Reading vocabulary refers to words we recognize or use in print. Vocabulary plays an important role in learning to read. As beginning readers, children use the words they have heard to make sense of the words they see in print. Beginning readers have a much more difficult time reading words that are not already part of their oral vocabulary. Vocabulary is also very important to reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean. As children learn to read more advanced texts, they must learn the meaning of new words that are not part of their oral vocabulary.

Children learn the meanings of most words indirectly, through everyday experiences with oral and written language. Children learn vocabulary indirectly when they hear and see words using in many different contexts. Children learn word meanings indirectly in three ways:

Engaging daily in oral language: through conversations with other people, especially adults. Listening to adults read aloud: especially when the reader pauses to define/explain unfamiliar word(s) and discusses the words in context.   Reading extensively on their own.

Although a great deal of vocabulary is learned indirectly, some vocabulary should be taught directly. Direct instruction helps students learn difficult words, such as words that represent complex concepts that are not part of the students' everyday experiences. Direct instruction includes: providing students with specific word instruction and teaching students word-learning strategies. Teaching specific words before reading helps both vocabulary learning and reading comprehension. Extended instruction that promotes active engagement with vocabulary improves word learning. The more students work with the new, specific words, the students are more highly engaged and master the words more readily. Repeated exposures to vocabulary in many academic contexts aids word learning. The more students see, hear, and work with specific words, the more likely they are to learn, use, and understand the words.

Word learning strategies enable students to have skills that provide a basis for determining the meaning of unknown words, but not directly taught. Effective word learning strategies are: how to use dictionaries and other reference aids to learn word meanings and deepen the knowledge of word meanings; how to use information about word parts to figure out the meanings of words in a text; and how to use context clues to determine word meanings. For example, using word parts such as common prefixes and suffixes (affixes) help students apply the meaning of the affix to a root or base word. Latin and Greek word parts are commonly found in content-area subjects, especially in science, math, and social studies. Teachers should teach word roots as they occur in texts the students are reading and focus upon the roots the students will see often. Words that have multiple meanings across academic content, such as product for math and social studies, and are important to comprehend a concept should be explicitly taught.

The school climate uses specific types of vocabulary. First, there is social vocabulary. Social vocabulary are the words and phrases that are common to a social setting that includes friends and relatives. Social English consists of phrases, slang, text, emails, and casual language. Academic language is the language used in textbooks, essays, assignments, class presentations, and assessments. Academic language is used at all grade levels, although its frequency increases as students get older. Academic language refers to the key words and phrases used to connect the subject matter vocabulary. Academic terms include transitional phrases, such as 'even though', 'as a result', or 'based on the data' but are also words like 'product', 'determine', and 'experiment'. Content-area focused vocabulary terms are often referred to as academic, but they are domain-specific or content area vocabulary words. Words that are specific to the subject area concept and content area might be precipitation, transpiration, evaporation, etc. when describing the water cycle.

Comprehension

Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading. A student can 'word call' or say each word correctly but not comprehend, struggling with language comprehension. As they read, good readers are both purposeful and active. Purposeful readers have a specific purpose for reading. Active readers think actively to make sense of that they read. Active reading is complicated. The integration of the student's experiences and world knowledge, vocabulary knowledge and language structure, and reading strategies combines to make sense and get the most meaning from the text. Good readers know when they have problems with their comprehension and know how to resolve their problems as they occur.

Text comprehension can be improved and developed by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies. Comprehension strategies are conscious plans or steps readers use to make sense of text. Comprehension instruction helps students become purposeful, active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. Metacognition is the "thinking about thinking" that good readers use to think about and control their reading. Before reading, a good reader might clarify their purpose for reading and preview the text. During reading, they might monitor their understanding, adjust their reading speed to fit the text difficulty, and "fixing" any comprehension problems. After reading, they check their understanding of their reading. Comprehension monitoring is a critical part of metacognition.

Effective instruction helps readers use comprehension strategies flexibly and in combination. Although it can be helpful to provide students with instruction in individual comprehension strategies, good readers must be able to coordinate and adjust several strategies to assist comprehension. Multiple strategy instruction teaches students how to use strategies flexible as they are needed to assist their comprehension. For example, in a multiple strategy instruction called "reciprocal teaching," the teacher and students work together so the students are learning four comprehension strategies:

Asking questions about the text they are reading;
Summarizing parts of the text;
Clarifying words and sentences they don't understand;
Predicting what might occur next in the text.

Text comprehension strategies can be taught through explicit instruction, cooperative learning, and by helping readers use strategies flexibly and in combination. Explicit (or direct) instruction is an

instructional practice where the teacher makes it a regular practice to model skills and strategies that students need to use to find information quickly, mentally organize new information, and understand how the author presents information in the order of importance (modeling). The teacher explains the reason(s) and importance of learning the new comprehension skill or strategy (direct explanation). The teacher also guides the students in their acquisition of the comprehension skill or strategy (guided practice). Effective strategy instruction includes cooperative learning opportunities for students to work together as partners, in small groups, and on defined academic tasks. The teacher monitors groups/pairs for understanding, misconceptions, and opportunities for feedback. The students learn to apply the strategy to their reading and can apply it independently (application).

Informal Reading Assessment

On-going reading assessments must be a part of an effective reading program. Informal measures of reading such as reading inventories, miscue analyses, and running records yield useful information about student performance that can be used to inform and guide instruction. An informal assessment does not compare the performance of a test group or individual to a normative population. Rather, informal assessments are given throughout the school year to individuals or groups for specific instructional purposes. One of the best uses of informal assessments is to evaluate how students interact with print in oral and silent reading situations. Results of informal reading assessments help the teacher identify and target reading areas in which students need additional support, re-teaching, or have gaps or misconceptions.

The informal reading inventory (IRI) is an individually administered reading test. It usually consists of a series of graded word lists, graded reading passages, and comprehension questions. The passages are used to assess how students interact with print orally and silently. An analysis of reading miscues helps to determine the cueing systems that students rely upon or have deficits. Then the student can be paired with appropriate intervention materials and at instructional levels that meet the reading proficiency of the individual student.

Informal reading assessments are available for letter/sound identification, phonics, concepts of print, phonemic awareness, alphabet recognition, and vocabulary. Fluency can be assessed separately or in conjunction with comprehension as with the IRI described above or a running record. A running record, originally developed by Marie Clay (1985), is an assessment system for determining student's oral reading fluency and word identification skills and strategies. With a running record, the teacher calculates the percentage of words the student reads correctly and then analyzes the miscues for instructional purposes. The running record allows the teacher to evaluate the reading level difficulty, group students, monitor the individual progress of students, and observe the difficulties of struggling readers. Separately, fluency can be informally assessed. Many basal reading series have fluency passages and other informal assessment measures and the Florida Department of Education provides assessment materials and instructional activities through the Florida Center for Reading Research. The DIBELS (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) include a series of oral reading skill assessments. These short measures are used to monitor early literacy skills and provide feedback to inform instruction. The various measures include: letter naming fluency, initial segmentation fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, non-sense word fluency, oral reading fluency, and an optional oral reading retell and word use fluency.

Sources:

Armbruster, et. al. *Put Reading First: Kindergarten Through Grade 3*, third edition. National Institute for Literacy, 2000.

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