

TEACHER'S CORNER – AUGUST 2018

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR TRUE BEGINNERS

The term *literacy* refers generally to a person's ability to read and write. (Though *literacy* is also used more broadly for describing critical knowledge and productive ability in other things, such as financial literacy, media literacy, and cultural literacy, in this Teacher's Corner, we'll refer to reading and writing skills). When teaching beginner-level students, it is important to provide effective literacy instruction to ensure that students learn to read and write well. This month in the Teacher's Corner, we will discuss five different components, or skills, that make up literacy. Each week, we will present different instructional strategies and classroom activities that help students develop these skills in meaningful ways.

The National Reading Panel in the United States identified five key components of effective literacy instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and text comprehension (2000). Each of these areas is defined below.

Phonemic Awareness refers to the ability to understand that words are made up of sounds. More specifically, phonemic awareness includes identifying and manipulating sounds in words. For instance, when students hear the word *bat*, phonemic awareness allows them to break the word into its three phonemes, or sounds: /b/ /a/ /t/. Phonemic awareness skills would also allow students to swap out sounds in the word *cat* to form new words such as *mat*, *cap*, *cut*, etc.

Phonics concerns the relationship between the sounds and written letters in a word. That is, when students hear a word, an understanding of phonics allows them to think about the letters used to spell it. Phonics also allows students to see a word in print and decode it based on their knowledge of letter-sound relationships.

Fluency deals with a student's ability to read text quickly and accurately. Fluent readers recognize words with automaticity; they do not struggle to sound out words while reading.

Vocabulary Development supports students' ability to recognize and recall the meaning of words they hear or see in print. Most vocabulary is learned indirectly through conversation and reading, but some words must be explicitly taught (Armbuster et al., 2006). Therefore, teachers must provide a vocabulary-rich

environment for students who are developing early literacy skills. While this certainly means teaching vocabulary directly, it also means giving students opportunities to interact in the language and to hear language through conversation or literature that is read aloud.

Text Comprehension refers to readers' ability to understand the content of what they are reading as they read it. Text comprehension includes skills such as setting a purpose before reading, asking oneself questions or summarizing during reading, and reflecting and synthesizing information after reading. Teaching students to use these reading behaviors can help students develop these skills and increase comprehension.

To support students' literacy development, teachers must plan thoughtful instruction that addresses each one of the elements defined above. This month's activities can be used to help beginner-level students acquire the skills necessary to start reading or to continue developing their reading skills.

References

Armbuster, B., et al. (2006). *Put reading first: the research building blocks for teaching children to read*. Bethesda: The National Reading Panel and The Partnership for Reading.