

Research Report

Phonics for Reading is a research-based program that reflects the findings of the major national documents on reading, including *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (Anderson et al., 1985), *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow et al., 1998), and the *National Reading Panel Report* (2000), which summarized research on numerous topics, including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. In addition to these reports, the design of **Phonics for Reading** was informed by the research on beginning reading (Honig, Diamond, and Gutlohn, 2008), the research on reading interventions for older, struggling readers (Archer, Gleason, and Vachon, 2003), the research on explicit instruction (Archer and Hughes, 2011), and the research on literacy and cultural diversity (Morrow, Rueda, and Lapp, 2009).

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness refers to the understanding that words can be segmented into constituent sounds or phonemes. Students must understand that the words they say can be segmented into sounds so that they can map letters (graphemes) onto those sounds (phonemes) and use those letter-sound associations to decode unknown words (Chard and Dickson, 1999; Erhi and Roberts, 2006). A lack of this understanding is the most common cause of children's early difficulties in acquiring accurate and fluent word recognition skills (Torgesen, 2002; Torgesen, 2004). Students with strong phonological skills will likely become good readers, and students with weak phonological skills will likely become weak readers (Blachman, 2000). In fact, phonemic awareness has proven to be the best early predictor of reading difficulties (Adams, 1990) and is more highly related to learning to read than are tests of general intelligence, reading readiness, and listening comprehension (Stanovich, 1994).

Research clearly indicates that phonemic awareness can be developed through instruction, and that doing so accelerates students' reading and writing achievement (Ball and Blachman, 1991; Lane and Pullen, 2004). When

phonemic awareness is taught, it enhances the reading acquisition of young students as they move into first and second grade (Foorman et al., 1997) as well as the reading gains of older, struggling readers. Torgesen and Mathes (1998) concluded that phonemic awareness training would accelerate the reading growth of all children, but is particularly vital for at least 20 percent of children to acquire useful reading skills.

Because of its importance to beginning reading acquisition, phonemic awareness activities are included in **Phonics for Reading**. Consistent with the recommendations of the National Reading Panel (2000), the authors incorporated a limited number of phonemic awareness tasks into the program. As a result, students become familiar with the tasks, allowing them to direct their cognitive energy to the content rather than the tasks. These tasks focus on blending and segmenting, which are the phonemic awareness skills that have the greatest benefit to reading and spelling acquisition (Snider, 1995). In the blending activities, students hear the sounds in a word and say the whole word. In the segmenting activities, students put up a finger as they say each sound within a word. Torgesen et al. (1994) concluded that phonemic awareness training for at-risk children must be more explicit and intense than that for other students. For this reason, the program provides explicit modeling of these blending and segmenting tasks and daily practice with increasingly difficult words.

Phonics

Phonics is the study and use of letter-sound associations to pronounce (decode) unknown words and to spell (encode) words. In the past, students were taught that there were three equal cueing systems that could be used to determine the pronunciation of an unknown word: the phonological cueing system (letter-sound associations), the semantic cueing system (context and pictures), and the syntactical cueing system (word order). However, research has shown that good readers rely on letters in a word rather than context or pictures to pronounce familiar and unfamiliar words (Ehri, 1994).

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Six Minute Solution

What is Six Minute Solution?

Six Minute Solution is a reading fluency program that may be used as a supplement to a school's core reading program or as an intervention. The goal of the program is to help teachers provide students in grades K-9 with concentrated practice on phonetic elements, sight word vocabulary, and expository passage reading in order to build overall reading fluency and boost achievement. *Six Minute Solution* is based on the research of repeated readings and peer-assisted learning strategies, and partner reading is the primary activity of the program. Once an instructional reading level is determined by assessment and teachers have trained students in the partner reading procedure, it takes only six minutes of instructional time per day. Fluency lessons are easily extended and adapted to incorporate extra work in phonics and comprehension. *Six Minute Solution* lends itself to flexible use in a variety of settings and can be used with the entire classroom where students work in pairs, during small group teacher-led instruction, with cross-age pairs, and with students working individually.



Assessments of letter sound knowledge, phonetic elements, high frequency words, and graded oral reading fluency passages are included in the instructional manuals of *Six Minute Solution*. Teachers use the assessments to determine the oral reading fluency rate and instructional reading level of each student in order to form appropriate, closely matched pairs. The pairs are referred to as student partnerships, each consisting of Partner 1 and Partner 2. Each student partnership has a fluency folder that contains two copies of the fluency sheet of phonetic elements, high frequency words, or reading passages, two copies of the fluency record, and a fluency graph or the partner points sheet. Whether the fluency folder of a student partnership contains fluency practice sheets of phonetic elements, high frequency words, or fluency passages is determined uniquely by assessment. To begin the instructional week, students review their new fluency building sheets or practice passages by whisper reading and underlining unknown words without being timed, while the teacher monitors and assists with identifying unknown words. After this, the six minute instructional format involves the teacher announcing that it is fluency time. Partner 1 reads the fluency sheet or passage and continues reading until the timer rings, while Partner 2 listens, marks errors and then gives feedback after the one minute reading. Partner 1 listens to the feedback, pronounces the misread words, and then records this information on the fluency graph. Finally, the students switch roles and begin the same process. Throughout the week, each student receives 3-5 opportunities to read the fluency sheets with phonetic elements, words, or the practice passages. At the end of the week, students turn in their fluency sheets or practice passages for new sheets to be read and practiced the following week. Only by teacher review and an assessment of oral reading fluency, can the reading level of the practice passage be changed.

Six Minute Solution consists of three instructional manuals: Primary Level, Intermediate Level, and Secondary Level. The manuals are clearly written, user-friendly, and contain all the necessary information for implementation of the program including assessments, partnership management information, an explicit instructional

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