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ABSTRACT

A word attack program that begins with phonics and incorporates various aspects of a linguistics approach is described in this paper. Regardless of the material that is used, there are 13 consonant sounds which are easier to learn than others: b, d, j, f, k, p, t, l, m, n, r, v, and z. W and h would be introduced next because in isolation they make only one sound. The remaining six consonants are different because they consist of more than one sound. The blends should be introduced next, emphasizing that these are letters which go together. Short vowel sounds would follow because they are easily controlled, easier for the students to identify, and require only one vowel rule to be learned. After the short vowels, children would be introduced to the long vowel sounds. After vowel sounds are learned, special combinations are introduced. These combinations are digraphs, diphthongs, "r" controlled, etc. Finally, the second sound the additional six consonants make would be introduced. (WR)

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Word Attack Skills

"Making Phonics Reasonable"

It seems as though there has always been a controversy about the use of phonics in classroom instruction. One aspect of the controversy envolves the issue as to whether phonics or any word attack method should be used at all. More recently, due to the influx of linguistic ideas, a controversy rages as to which of the two (linguistics or phonics) better enables children to attack words. And, still another aspect envolves the order and principles of teaching phonics.

Considering the issue of whether a word attack method should be used, one can quickly answer, "yes" (Heilman p. 245). It is through this means that a child can readily build his vocabulary independently of the teacher. That is, a pure reliance on the "sight word" approach is unreal.

Now that it has been established that a word attack program is necessary, the second controversy regarding the type of program to use, is relevant. Linguistic or phonic? Need it be a choice completely one way or another? First, let us be clear on the fact that linguistics envolves much more than attacking words (Hardbaugh p.178). That is only one small contribution of the linguistics. Thus by choosing a phonic approach to beginning word attack, one does not necessarily negate all aspects of a linguistic program. To the contrary, a phonic program (generally thought of as an isolated sound approach) may work towards a linguistic program (generally thought of as no isolation of sounds because of resulting distortions). Examining factors of both approaches to word attack, it is the authors opinion that a word attack program should begin with phonics and incorporate the good ideas of a linguistic approach where feasible.

Thus we may move to the third controversy regarding word attack - that envolving the order and principles to be taught in a phonic approach. This area, too, has a pro and a con for every issue within it, but it is in the interest of using phonics to it's greatest efficiency that we will herewith present a program of "making phonics reasonable."

There is a general agreement that consonant sounds (Tinker & McCullough, p. 178) should be taught before vowel sounds, the reason being that the initial letter of a word is most often a consonant, thus it often is the key to the word. It is felt, then, that it is the consonant that will most often help beginning readers to identify a word. Proponents of phonics therefore, give an orderly approach to teaching the consonant sounds - whether it is within a textbook series or whether it is within a supplementary series. Unfortunately,

The authors do not give an explanation to the educator as to why that particular order was chosen. They also miss an opportunity to explain to teachers, on a full scale basis, how the letters might sound. Teachers usually discover the order and sounds as they progress through the material.

Regardless of the material that is used, it is here suggested that one follow this reasonable approach to teaching the consonant sounds. First of all, there are 13 consonant sounds which are easier to learn than all others. The sounds are easier to make because the name of the letter and the sound of the letter are similar - a reason why we support the teaching of the names of the letters of the alphabet <u>before</u> sounds are taught. They may be neatly placed in categories according to the sound they make, which is either an "uh" sound, a voiceless (v.l.) sound, or some other sound not within the first two categories. The following chart notes the "Basic 13 Consonants" and their sounds.

BASIC 13 CONSONANTS

"uh"	"voiceless"	some "other" sound
b	f	l
d	k	m
j	p	n
	t	r
		v
		z

Following the instruction of these sounds, the teacher would introduce the sounds of /w/ ("uh") and /h/ (v.l.). These are easy to learn in so far as they make (in isolation) only one sound, but they are harder than the 13 because their name and sound are not similar.

The remaining six consonants (c, g, q, s, x, y) present problems because they are not as consistent as the previous 15 due to various reasons. Generally, it can be said that

they are different because they consist of "more than one" sound or letter. For instruction, the wise teacher will at first teach only the most popular sound of these letters ("c" = /k/("uh"), "g" = /g/ ("uh"), "s" = /s/(v.l.), "y" = /y/("uh"), plus she will not dwell on those that are encountered infrequently in reading ("q" and "x"). At a later time (after vowels, when necessary because of usefulness) the remaining sounds would be taught for these letters. In diagram form the sounds of these "Additional Six Consonants" may be presented as follows:

c	most /k/ ("uh") cat	g	most /g/("uh") goat
	sometimes /s/ (v.l.)		sometimes /j/("uh")
s	most /s/ (v.l.) sun	y	most /y/("uh") yellow
	sometimes /z/ (other)		sometimes ī,ē
	q - always followed by u = qu	x	most /ks/(v.l.) box
			sometimes /z/ (other)

Since the children know the consonant sounds it is easy to draw their attention to the larger unit called "blends." Linquists tell us that a more natural sound occurs when letters are not kept in isolation. Thus introducing blends is in tune with that concept. The blends fall in three major categories:

"l" Blends	"r" Blends	"s" Blends	
bl	br	sc	str
cl	cr	sk	
fl	dr	sl	scr
gl	fr	sm	spr
pl	gr	sn	spl
sl	pr	sp	
	sr	st	
	tr	sw	

It is not necessary to tell children that these are consonant blends. The important concept to remember is that these are

letters which "go together." Learning these in patterns is generally easy for children and less confusing than learning "bl" one week, "gl" another week, etc., a practice often found in basal series.

Next it is advisable to teach the short vowel sounds and the rule which goes with them. Short vowel sounds are easier to control by teachers for instructional purposes, they are also easier for children to "figure out," and only one vowel rule is necessary to be learned. Yes, there are also good arguments for teaching long vowel sounds first, but because of the above statements, it is believed short vowel sounds should be taught first. The key to success is teaching only <u>one</u> sound at a time (using the various modalities) and making sure the children have <u>mastered</u> it before progressing to another sound. There is no particular order of instruction except to advise that short "e" and short "i" sounds not be taught in succession because of the similarity of sounds to many children. The basic rule to be taught is:

If there is one vowel in a word it is usually short.

As soon as the first short vowel sound is taught and the short vowel rule is learned, the children should begin to "mark" words. This is an important step in helping children to <u>use</u> the information that is taught them. If the process of marking words is continued throughout the grades it will become habitual, thus assuring the continous application of phonic principles rather than the mere learning of them for learning's sake.

The steps which are explained children for marking words are the following:

1. Draw a line under the letters that "go together."
2. Mark the vowels.
3. Draw a line under the letters that are left.

Assuming the children have followed the sequence of learning consonants, blends, and now the short "a" with its rule, the word "pan" would be marked as follows:

1. No letters go together . . . . . p a n
2. Mark "a" short (1 vowel in word) . . . . . p a n
3. Line under the letters left. . . . . p a n

The word "flat" would be marked as follows:

1. Letters that go together . . . . . fl a t
2. Mark "a" short (1 vowel in word) . . . . . fl a t
3. Line under the letters left. . . . . fl a t

Drawing a line under letters which go together is good to do because attention to combinations makes the blending process easier.

After the short vowel sounds are mastered, children would be introduced to the long vowel sounds. These are relatively easy to learn because "long vowels say their name." However, to stop there would be deficient because "u" has two long sounds - a fact which is frequently ignored, causing children numerous problems in sounding out long "u" words. The two long sounds are /ū/ (as in cute) and /o͞o/ (as in fruit). With the introduction of the first long vowel sound, the children may learn two useful rules:

1. If there are two vowels in a word, the first one is usually long and the second one is silent.

2. If there is one vowel in a word and it is at the end of a word, it is usually long.

It seems more reasonable to state the rules as above than to follow other systems. Some would rather use two rules for number one above: when two vowels occur together in a word the first may be long and the second silent: they also use, when there is an "e" at the end of a word it is usually silent and makes the vowel before it long (Pescosolido and others p. 62). But why use two rules when one will do? Also, why ask children to work backwards (if "e" at end rule), when we advocate left to right progression?

The second rule, as stated, is not difficult for children although an adult's first reaction might be...if the children were told "one vowel in a word is usually short" and now are told "one vowel at the end is long" won't this be confusing? Not if it is explained carefully with many practical examples. With examples children, may on their own deduct that if the vowel is in the middle of a word it makes it's short sound.

Marking of words continues at this stage. Examples of words marked with long vowels in them are as follows:

c ā m ∮ b ō ∮ t g ō b l ū ∮

After vowel sounds are learned, the teacher may introduce "special combinations." These are also letters which "go together" but they are "special" because they do not follow the vowel rules or make the sound that they look like they should make. In other words, some letters go together to make a special new sound. "Special combinations" are those groups of letters which many refer to as digraphs, diphthongs, "r" controlled phonograms, etc.

There is no specific order of teaching these sounds as there was for consonants, blends, and vowels. The introduction of these sounds is based on the occurance of the letter combination within words the children are using. No sound, at any stage should be introduced if the children do not have words within their listening and reading vocabularies with that sound. One principle, however, does remain, when one letter combination for a sound is introduced (/ow/ for example, in cow) so should the counterpart letter combination for the same sound (/ou/ as in out). This eliminates the problems of children giving words with the "right" sound but the "wrong" spelling of it.

Having taught the vowel rules as presented, one does not have to teach as special combinations letters as "ai," "oa," "ee," "ake," "ill," etc., because each of these within words, most often follows the rules - they therefore are not "special." Among those combinations we would call "special" are:

ph	oo	ar	all	ture	kn
tn	ew	er	ind	tain	wr
wh	oi	ir	ild	tion	gh
sh	oy	ur	igh	sion	ck
ch	ow	or	old		
tch	ou	ay			

Marking of words would continue in the order as originally mentioned. Words with special combinations would look like this:

1. Letters which go together — w i th f ar f l a sh
2. Mark vowels — w i t h ~~f a r~~ f l a s h
3. Letters left — w i t h f a r ~~f l a s h~~ (Nothing more)

By first drawing a line under letters that "go together" the children will be forced to look for them first and then not mismark the vowel. Once a letter has a line under (or over) it, it is considered "marked,"

Thus children would not be tempted to look at "far" and say "one vowel in a word is short" and then mark the word wrongly (f a r).

After the vowels are taught the teacher will also introduce to children the second sound that those "Additional Six" consonants make. These would, as with the "special combinations," be introduced as the need arises. For example, when children noticed that "c" makes an /s/ sound, as in city, bicycle, cent, it would then be appropriate to teach the rule, which goes with the letter "c":

> When "c" is followed by an "e," "i," or "y," it usually makes the sound of an /s/.

The same may be done for the other letters. Their appropriate rules are:

> When "g" is followed by an "e," "i," or "y," it usually makes the sound /j/.
>
> "q" is always followed by a "u" = qu
>
> "s" sometimes makes a /z/ sound as in nose
>
> When "x" is at the beginning of a word it usually makes the sound of a /z/
>
> When "y" is at the end of a word it usually borrows a vowel sound...i at the end of a one syllable word
> e at the end of a two (+) syllable word

By this time children have learned all the basic phonic principles. Yet we may extend the usefulness of phonics by telling them one more hint by sounding out words - thus making the whole process a little more reasonable to them.

		Examples	
1.	Sound the word as marked.	c ŭ m ∅	g ō n ∅
2.	If it doesn't make sense, try the other sound of the vowel.	c ŏ m ∅	g ŏ n ∅
3.	If it still doesn't sound right try the schwa /u/ sound	c ə m ∅	g ə n ∅
4.	If that doesn't work, forget it! It's a sight word - use dictionary.)		g ə n ∅

All of the above information is basic because it applies to one syllable words. It may easily be adapted for use at the advanced level with multisyllabic words.

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