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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this naturalistic study was to describe and explore issues that emerged from an undergraduate/graduate phonics course for preservice and practicing teachers, certified or licensed to instruct children from kindergarten to eighth grade (K-8). Data were collected through teacher observations of classroom discussions, activities, presentations, and portfolios. The issues that emerged from the research indicated that phonics instruction included letter sound correspondences, segmenting processes, morphemic analysis, structural analysis, grammar, and spelling. The findings suggest a departure from isolated phonics instruction focused on rules, to situational, strategic instruction within real texts. Contains 22 references and an appendix lists course components and instructional activities. (Author/RS)

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Teaching Elementary Phonics:

Instructional Issues, and Activities

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore issues that emerged from an undergraduate/graduate phonics course for preservice and practicing teachers, certified or licensed to instruct children from kindergarten to eighth grade (k-8). The author constructed and taught a phonics course to undergraduate and graduate students to licensure and certification programs ranging from kindergarten to eighth grade. The issues that emerged from the research indicated that phonics instruction included letter – sound correspondences, segmenting processes, morphemic analysis, structural analysis, grammar, and spelling. The findings suggest a departure from isolated phonics instruction, focused on rules, to situational, strategic instruction within real texts.

Teaching Elementary Phonics:

Instructional Issues, and Activities

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore issues that emerged from an undergraduate/graduate phonics course for preservice and practicing teachers, certified or licensed to instruct children from kindergarten to eighth grade (k-8). The phonics course constructed was in response to Revised Code 33.19 issued by the Ohio State Board of Education, and adopted by the General Assembly of the State of Ohio (1996). New licensure requires coursework in the teaching of reading and phonics. Specifically, 3319.24 of the Revised Code requires new phonics courses to focus on matching, blending, and translating letters of the alphabet into the sounds they represent (1996).

According to Morrow and Tracey (1997), phonics involves letter sound correspondences. Phonics instruction can be defined as "ways of teaching children phoneme grapheme relationships to help them 'sound out' words" (Searfoss & Readence, 1994, p. 162). An important reason for teaching phonics in the early and middle childhood classrooms is because there is evidence that students who have been taught systematic phonics tend to score higher on standardized tests (i.e., state proficiency tests) than those children who do not receive such instruction (Heinmann Institute, 1996). One of the building blocks of phonics is the phoneme, the smallest unit of sound in a language that distinguishes one word from another (Heilman, 1998. p. 3). Phonemes are associated with individual letters of the alphabet, although there are more phonemes (44-48) than letters in the alphabet (26) due to situational differences in pronunciation such as the soft c /s/ as in cigar, and the hard c /k/ as in cave (Clymer, 1996). Phonological awareness, one's consciousness that words are made up of phonemes is of paramount importance in

successful reading (Sesenbaugh, 1998). Snider (1997, p. 203), states that phonemic awareness is a "powerful predictor of future success in reading and spelling" among prereaders, and that "...there is a cause-effect relationship between phonemic awareness and reading achievement." Nation and Hulme (1997) found that phonemic segmentation is a more powerful predictor of successful reading and spelling acquisition than onsets and rimes. Further, Stanovich (1986) found that phonemic awareness is a stronger predictor of reading achievement than nonverbal intelligence, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. Given the preponderance of evidence suggesting the positive correlation between phonics instruction and successful reading acquisition, a case can be made for the importance of including phonics instruction in teacher training programs.

This research highlights issues and concerns that emerged from course topics and instructional activities. What issues emerged from the course? Using qualitative inquiry, this research question will be investigated.

Method

Setting

This study took place at a small liberal arts institution situated in a small community of about 30,000 residents in northern Ohio. There are roughly 100 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in early childhood and middle childhood programs at the institution. The department of education places students in a variety of field experiences, student teaching settings, including urban, inner city, multicultural communities, suburban settings, and rural, farming locals.

The parameters of the constructed phonics course included consonants (single letter, digraphs, blends), vowels, (long, short, diphthongs, digraphs, combinations,

irregular vowels), phonemes, onsets, rimes, syllables, accenting words, and strategies associated with each component. Activities included, picture cues, letter tiles, rhymes, morphemic analysis and construction of words, matching, blending phonemes aloud to construct words, phonics bingo, analogies, chunking word parts such as prefixes, suffixes and root words to create new words, sentence, and word strips in which students would construct sentences and words. Spelling patterns were highlighted, discussed and practiced. The course covered basic grammar. It is important to note that terms were defined, examples were given, and students created their own activities that they kept in their portfolios.

Students were assessed through two midterm exams and a final examination in which they defined terms, used phonics applications to produce diacritical markings of word pronunciations, segmentation (into syllables, onsets, rimes, phonemes, primary, secondary and tertiary accents), vowel sounds, and irregular vowels. Students used structural analysis to construct sentences in proper tense, identify sentence word order. Spelling patterns were also discussed and assessed in the construction of content area vocabulary.

The students kept portfolios in which class notes, exams, research reports, and phonics activities were placed. Discussions were ongoing in class, and the participants were aware that they were helping to shape the parameters of the course. In fact, given the nature of the new course requirement, the chemistry of the classroom was enhanced with open communication, and feelings that the participants were contributing to the direction and parameters of the course.

Participants

The participants consisted of the entire class, 14 students in the new course. Five students were graduate students. Three of these students were practicing teachers (k-8) with five to ten years of teaching experience. Two of these students instructed children at kindergarten to third grade. One practicing teacher, the lone male in the study, taught fourth grade. Two international students participated in the research. One graduate student was from Argentina, and one was from Italy. Both international students had experience teaching in their home countries. One of the international students taught in her homeland, and had been an exchange teacher in the area two years prior to returning to the United States for graduate study. She had been an English interpreter for her government and had four years of teaching experience. The second international student was licensed to teach in her homeland, and had two years of teaching experience, but did not have experience teaching in the United States. The graduate students ranged in age from 25 to 36 years of age.

Nine students in the class were undergraduates. These students were working on k-8 teaching certificates. All of the undergraduate students with the exception of one were traditional age students. One undergraduate student was 25 years of age. Four students were seniors and five were juniors during the time of this study. All students were highly motivated because they helped shape the course, and remained in the study.

Procedure

The entire research project was carried out in a naturalistic setting, within the context of the phonics class. Actually, one year before the course was taught, the instructor researched the subject of phonics, and reviewed available texts and materials.

The texts selected were the following: Phonics for the teacher of reading (Hull & Fox, 1998), Strategies for word identification: Phonics from a new perspective (Fox, 1996), and Better grammar in 30 minutes a day (Immel & Sacks, 1995). After selecting and reading the texts for the class, a syllabus for the course was constructed. Each student received a syllabus on the first day of class. The class followed the following progression: consonants (single letter, digraphs, blends), vowels, (long, short, diphthongs, digraphs, combinations, irregular vowels), phonemes, onsets, rimes, syllables, accenting words, and strategies associated with each component. Activities included, picture cues, letter tiles, rhymes, morphemic analysis and construction of words, matching, blending phonemes aloud to construct words, phonics bingo, analogies, chunking word parts such as prefixes, suffixes and root words to create new words, sentence, and word strips in which students would construct sentences and words. Spelling patterns were highlighted, discussed and practiced. The course covered basic grammar.

The data were collected through teacher observations of classroom discussions, activities, presentations, and portfolios. During each class session, the instructor kept field notes including topics that were covered, notable quotes, and feedback from students related to topics of discussion. The instructor wrote out quotes from students during class, and highlighted discussion topics; however; fieldnotes were refined after class, reflecting on what occurred during class, and contextualizing fieldnotes with descriptions of class discussions, activities, presentations, and portfolio work from each class meeting. Both student and teacher feedback were represented in this paper.

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Data Analysis

The data were synthesised from classroom discussions. Within classroom conversations, patterns were highlighted and substantiated through examples from particular participants. Analysis of data took place after the course was completed for the purpose of classroom and content reflection. Indeed, teaching a new class with unfamiliar materials, while taking field notes was both challenging and helpful because it became clear which issues or topics stimulated interest and discussion. The following sections address components and instructional activities of the phonics course (see Appendix for a complete list).

Results and Discussion

Problems Teaching Phonics Rules

According to Searfoss and Readence (1994) there are 38 phonics generalizations. Phonics rules can be taught by posting each rule and providing lists of words that apply to each phonics rule. Often, when the teacher directs the students to a partial list, the students may be instructed to supply a number of additional words to enhance the list, and understand the rule. Students may be given a list and then be asked to examine commonalities among the words and supply the appropriate phonics guideline. Searfoss and Readence (1994) recommend teaching reliable generalizations that have a consistency rate of over 75 to 80 percent; however, 16 of the 38 phonics rules listed clearly fall at or below 75 percent. This leaves 22 generalizations of which four have a reliability range below 80 percent. As a result, there are 18 generalizations clearly recommended for instruction (pp. 166-67).

Student feedback.

The students noted serious problems in teaching phonics rules. One student said, "I can't stay focused for more than two pages in the text because it is based totally on memorizing phonics rules. I mean, I know they give examples first, and then the rule, but I memorized the rule first, and then read the book. The entire class echoed this sentiment, and extended the discussion. "The generalizations lose their importance and meaning because they have so many exceptions. For example, in a one-syllable word ending in e, the [preceding] vowel sound is long. How can I explain exceptions like come, gone, and some?" Another student added, "Yes, she's right, and that's one of the most consistent rules in phonics."

"Is there any point at which we can stop teaching the generalizations?" said a class participant. Another student added, "maybe there should be a cut-off point, based on probability." This student felt that below a certain consistency threshold, phonics generalizations should not be taught.

Teaching phonics rules: A recipe for disaster.

The students felt unanimously that teaching phonics rules first was a recipe for disaster. First, they noted that it wasn't enjoyable to memorize rules, and the effort it took them to remember each generalization, impacted on their ability to make connections between generalizations and supporting word lists.

A graduate student in class presented her view: " When you [the instructor] put[s] a generalization on the board and ask[s] for examples, I have a hard time thinking of words that could apply to the generalization. If I have difficulties thinking of examples, I

can only imagine the problems my children will have thinking of words that go with a rule."

Another student made a brilliant connection during the discussion regarding teaching generalizations first. " This whole approach assumes that children have a sophisticated vocabulary. At this level [k-8], children have a much more developed listening or passive vocabulary. They don't have such a developed speaking vocabulary." Indeed, the procedure of placing generalizations on the board and asking children for examples assumes that these children have sophisticated vocabularies, when in fact, students develop their listening vocabularies before their speaking vocabularies (Searfoss & Readence, 1994). As a result, there may be difficulties allocating one's attention between understanding the generalization, and supplying appropriate examples, as well as problems children experience in processing their listening vocabularies to speaking vocabularies.

Word lists to generalizations.

One approach in phonics instruction is to present students with word lists and have them determine what is common among the words, and then develop a generalization. The participants thought this was a better approach than having children supply their own word lists because children have a limited vocabulary and they could spend their time and attention focused on the task of creating an applicable guideline.

One student said, "the generalization has more meaning if I make it, and discovering the common thread in a word list makes phonics instruction more fun." Another student felt that she could learn and retain more material in this manner than by

presenting or receiving phonics generalizations and then supplying words that follow the rule.

There were some students who were not entirely satisfied with the word list to generalization approach in phonics instruction. One student mentioned, "I have difficulties with the word lists because they are unrelated words, I mean, they don't follow any logical order or tell a story; so sometimes I'm thinking about the list and their generalization, but other times, I think about connections between the words or their meaning. A male student said, "I can tell you, there is no story or meaning from the word lists." The students agreed that isolated words that make up a word list could pose problems to students because their meanings vary, and take away attention from focusing on constructing an appropriate phonics generalization.

Phonics generalizations to word lists.

The students were asked whether presenting a phonics generalization, and word lists for the purpose of discovering a guideline generalization could be used during instruction. One student noted, "I can see a lot more opportunity in using word lists and then asking my students to come up with a generalization, than giving my students a phonics generalization and asking them to supply their own word list." Another student mentioned that she "couldn't find an occasion to use the generalization approach during instruction." Most participants felt that perhaps the generalization approach could be used as a review immediately after the word list was given, their students determined the generalization, and then reiterated the generalization to the teacher who transcribed it on the board. The students could supply words from the list, and try additional words that followed the generalization. However, all the students agreed that they would rarely

implement the generalization approach because of the change of focus from the generalization to vocabulary problems involving meaning among the words from the list. It is interesting that one student mentioned that we were "considering only words, and real phonics instruction is made up of consonants, vowels, phonemes, and word parts."

Onsets and Rimes

Onsets involve one or more consonant letters which precede the vowel phoneme in a syllable" (Hull & Fox, 1998, p. 184). Since onsets are found at the beginning of words, they are pronounced first. For example, "th" in that, "ch" in chat, and "c", pronounced /k/ in cat are rimes. Rimes include "the portion of the syllable including its vowel(s) and any consonant(s) that follow" (Wagstaff, n.d., p.5).

Student feedback.

Three students felt that familiarizing children with onsets is an effective means of phonics instruction. These students noted that word beginnings receive more attention than the rest of the word because "they are seen first and provide important clues for children to recognize a word by guessing or sight." The class felt that identifying onsets through word lists and circling them in text were key approaches for instruction.

Most of the students noted that phonics instruction should include rimes, " the portion of the syllable including its vowel(s) and any consonant(s) that follow" (Wagstaff, n.d., p. 5). For example, "at" in that, "ock" in clock and "ell" in bell are examples of rimes. One student, noted, "in order for children to recognize rimes, they must attend through the word to its ending."

Activities.

The students felt that instruction should include word lists, identifying (circling) rimes in text, and discussion. Children could write onset poetry by having them select an onset to be used throughout the poem, and attaching different rimes to each onset in text to create imaginative poetry.

Word Families

Word families are clusters of letters at the end of a word containing a vowel phoneme, followed by a consonant phoneme; technically they are referred to as rimes. Word families are especially helpful in pronouncing short vowel sounds (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton & Johnson, 1996). The students felt that a successful way to teach phonics was through word families.

Student feedback.

One student shared his experience of observing phonics lessons in a second grade classroom, from an urban, k-6 school located in Ohio. He said, "the teacher targeted words ending in ock, and placed a list on the board – block, clock, dock, lock, and sock. The children pronounced the words together, and there was a discussion about the ock ending." He mentioned that the teacher followed the same procedure with ack, at, et, it, and ick word families. The student mentioned that a targeted vocabulary word from the text was listed and underlined at the top of a word list. The children discussed the underlined word, but not each word comprising the list.

Activities.

Activities include making lists of word families, and making rhymes from words in the list.

Phonemic Awareness and Segmentation

Phonemic awareness is defined as one's realization that words are comprised of individual sounds (Hulme & Nation, 1997; Snider, 1997). In American English there are roughly 44 phonemes (Hull & Fox, 1998).

Student feedback.

The students were very clear on expressing the importance of children recognizing phonemes, and segmenting words into particular phonemes. Four ESL students in the course noted that phonemic segmentation was the foundation for understanding American English. One ESL student said, "I need to attend to every sound in a word because if I mistake one phoneme, the meaning of the word may change, like the word pin, if I hear [a short] e for [a short] i [vowel sound], then the word changes to pen, and I have no idea want the person is saying." A minority student echoed this response by adding, "I rely on context if I don't catch the [pronunciation of a] word, and that can slow down comprehension." Most of the native American English speakers felt that although recognizing phonemes was important in phonics instruction, they "automatically recognized" phonemes in words and agreed that consciously identifying phonemes in words would take attention away from comprehension, which as they said, "is the goal of verbal and written communication."

Activities.

Instruction could consist of using a tachistoscope to identify phonemes. Additional procedures include highlighting targeted phonemes in text, and word lists. The number of phonemes in a word could be counted by students.

Diacritical Markings

Diacritical marks indicate how one pronounces words through the use of phonetic symbols, syllabication and accent marks.

Instructional highlight: Students take charge of diacritical instruction.

One instructional highlight of teaching the phonics course occurred during the first session, which began with an introduction to consonants, vowels and their sounds. As the students pronounced long and short vowel sounds, the instructor began to write diacritical markings to indicate vowel sounds. After writing most of the American English diacritical markings, on the board, two international students enthusiastically rushed to the front of the classroom and asked if they could place international diacritical marks next to those on the board as a comparison. This was an incredible experience because the international students provided differences in diacritical markings, notably the schwa, circumflex and umlaut markings. Further, they explained to the class that they were trained to phonetically pronounce words and felt their ability to communicate, and function as literate members of the college depended on their ability to correctly pronounce words. They mentioned that diacritical marks found in the dictionary helped them build their listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies.

Most of the time, diacritical markings were used during the phonemic, syllabication, and accenting portions of class, while they were rarely used to pronounce word endings and morphemes. It is interesting that the students felt that the use of diacritical markings to determine the pronunciation of nonsense words was not useful because nonsense words had no meaning. They agreed that students would be more motivated to learn all aspects of phonics including diacritical markings if their activities were meaningful and had a concrete purpose. Several students mentioned the use of

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nonsense words was too abstract for them in the phonics class, and felt that their students may see less purpose for such an activity than they expressed.

Activities.

Diacritical markings of vowel sounds were practiced on a list of vocabulary words from a reading text. Specified vowel sounds were marked, and the process was practiced until the children developed their expertise in marking all the vowel sounds from a selected word list. In text, the teacher could instruct the students to mark all the verbs in a selection, or have the children place diacritic marks on the names of characters from a text.

Structural Analysis

According to Heilman (1998), structural analysis is an integral part of phonics instruction and includes the following: morphemic analysis and construction, inflectional endings, syllabication, and accenting or variations in syllabic stress in multi-syllabic words. Rubin (1995) also includes syntax, grammar, and spelling as connective elements to phonics instruction.

Student feedback.

An issue that emerged from class discussions involved the importance of structural analysis to a balanced phonics program. Each component listed above was categorized by the students as important parts of a comprehensive phonics program; however two students felt that grammar drifted out of the realm of phonics instruction, and belonged to the field of linguistics. Indeed, the entire class could see their point, but felt that grammar was too closely connected with inflectional endings, syntax, and morphemes to ignore.

Activities.

One activity that enhances morphemic analysis includes listing words that contain any of the following: affixes, root words (Greek and Latin), or compound words. The class could discuss word meanings, identify, and mark meaningful chunks or morphemes embedded in each word. Constructing morphemes could take place through word web activities in which a root word is placed at the center of the web and circled. Strands are then drawn from the root word to new words made with the root word and morphemes. New word meanings are then discussed and shared in class. Additional strategies include analogies, using familiar words to decode unknown words. For example, a student may use a word already known such as grade to pronounce the following: fade, made, and trade. Rhymes are also effective for improving phonics skills. Word sorts are also an effective activity for highlighting areas (sorting words into similar consonant blends, vowels, onsets, rimes, or any number of targeted means). There are many excellent primary resources for phonics activities including Words their way (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 1996), Phonics they use (Cunningham, 1995), Strategies for word identification (Fox, 1996), and Phonics that work! (Wagstaff, n.d.). Structural analysis is comprised of several components including morphemic analysis, inflectional endings, contractions, and possessives; syllabication and accenting; grammar; and spelling.

Morphemic Analysis

Morphemic analysis involves understanding a word by its meaningful parts such as its root word, prefix and suffix (affixes). These word parts may stand alone as free

morphemes in "playground" or bound, in plurals (s), possessives, and derivatives (Davis & Lass, 1996).

Student feedback.

"Understanding prefixes, suffixes, and root words bridge the gap between pronunciation and comprehension," said one student. Another student noted "word parts like suffixes and root words are like syllables but they also have meaning." A third student questioned the goal of phonics instruction, "I don't think the goal of teaching phonics is just pronunciation, it should include understanding, meanings of words. Indeed, by applying morphological analysis, one can construct meaning through word parts, facilitate pronunciation by decoding word parts, and determine the structure of a word by identifying its prefix, root word, and suffix.

Activities.

In terms of instruction, the class thought that modified cloze procedures and matching affixes to root words were effective instructional activities. In addition, connecting different affixes to the same root word to construct new words, e.g. port (root word), export, import (prefixes added), and portable, porter (suffixes added). One student added, "I think knowing my suffixes could improve my scrabble scores." Indeed, a modified scrabble game could be an additional activity to familiarize students' with morphemes. Students could be given a number of sentences from which they would add the correct affix to each specified base or root word in a sentence.

Inflectional Endings, Possessives, and Contractions

Word endings such as s, ing, ed, y, ly, and est are examples of inflectional endings. Often, they indicate word tense, possession (when used with an apostrophe, or

apostrophe, s), a contraction, (when used with an apostrophe and connective, e.g., she'll, the contracted form of she will).

Student feedback and activities.

The class agreed that the above were parts of phonics, and yet went beyond pronunciation because these factors provided information about word meanings far beyond clues provided by phonemes, the smallest units of sound. The class included modified cloze procedures, matching, and the use of scrabble as activities to enhance awareness about inflectional endings, possessives, and contractions. In text, students could find words that had contractions, particular endings such as "ed, ly, or ing" and words showing possession.

Syllabication and Accent

Syllabication involves sound units within a word. These units can consist of "a vowel alone or a vowel with one or more consonants. There can be only one vowel phoneme per syllable" (Baer, 1991, p. 143). The stress one places on syllables in a word involves its accent. The syllable in a word that receives the strongest stress is referred to as its accented syllable (the syllable with the primary stress in pronunciation).

Student and teacher feedback.

During one class discussion, a student mentioned "I don't see how phonics could be taught without syllabication or appropriate word accents." According to Searfoss and Readence (1994), phonics involves phoneme/grapheme relations, while syllabication and accenting are found in structural analysis, and involve "breaking up longer words into pronounceable units" (p. 162). The student has a point, how can a phonics course be limited to phoneme/grapheme relations? If pronouncing words correctly is the goal of

phonics instruction, then syllabication, and appropriate word accents are vital components of word pronunciation. However, syllabication is controversial because there are a variety of syllabication rules and many exceptions to the guidelines (Fry, Kress & Fountoukidis, 1993). One of the most glaring irregularities stems from the pronunciation of father (fath/er) and mother (moth/er). The guideline of the syllabication is that the consonant digraph "th" goes with the first syllable, while the "r controlled vowel, 'e'" forms a separate syllable. In practical pronunciation, the entire class agreed that they heard father syllabically pronounced fa/ther, they were divided in their syllabication of mother, between moth/er and mo/ther. Yet, the students were aware that if a syllable ends with a vowel, that vowel usually has a long sound (says its name). As a result, there is a questionable correspondence between the rule and actual pronunciation.

Accenting words complicates pronunciation. Consider the following: She has a present for you. The noun present is accented on the first syllable (pres'/ent). However, when present is used as a verb the accent is placed on the second syllable, for example: Please present your writing to the group (pre/sent'). In this case, the syllables differ between the use of "present" as a noun and as a verb. As a result, when children are asked to pronounce words from a list, their pronunciation may differ, based on their schema, mental models, contextual situation, understanding, and previous exposure to words on the list. Given such a potential for mispronunciation, most of the students advocated syllabication and accenting mini-lessons, in the context of real literature, as opposed to isolated, and unrelated word lists. This point is summed up in the words of one student: "It makes sense to integrate phonics in actual reading, because phonics, accenting and syllabication seem situational, and depend on what is being said or read." The students

also agreed that syllabic division and accent clues should be taught as an aid to reading rather than the purpose of reading. In reviewing phonics texts, the students noted that Phonics for the teacher of reading (Hull & Fox, 1998), was very clear in their descriptions of syllabication and accenting generalizations.

Activities.

The placement of index cards into appropriate pockets. Each index card has a two-syllable word or content area word written on it. The student pronounces the word, determines its accent (stress) and places the card in the appropriate pocket marked one or two (indicating stressed syllables). A similar card activity could be done with syllabication by identifying the number a syllables contained in a word, and placing the card in an appropriate pocket. In texts, students found characters in reading selections, and vocabulary words, and divided them into syllables.

Grammar

Grammar involves "patterns of word usage" that provide a framework, syntax or structure for a language. In English, grammar includes eight parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections. In addition, sentence patterns, cases, verb forms or tenses, capitalization, and punctuation are included in English grammar.

Student and teacher feedback.

During the course of instruction, topics within structural analysis such as morphemic analysis, syllabication, accenting, inflectional endings, possessives, and contractions became embedded within phonics instruction. The students felt that grammar instruction was an instructional issue because grammar is a logical extension of

the above, notably inflectional endings in the form of tenses. For example, the verb "receive" has a present participle, (is) receiving; a past tense, received; and past participle, has received. Certainly these word endings have meaning in the time continuum during which an action or event takes place. The students felt that an awareness of pronouns such as subject pronouns (first person, I, or plural, we; second, you; and third person, he, she, it, or the plural, they) were important markers for verbs, e.g., I swim (first person), and he swims (third person).

In addition, sentence patterns were discussed because they build upon subject, verb, object, and noun connections. For example, there is the subject verb sentence, "He landed" in which he is the subject, and landed is the verb. The subject, verb, object pattern, is exemplified by the sentence, "He served lunch" (he is the subject; served is the verb, and lunch is the object). Sentences become more complex with linking verbs and noun completers as in the following sentence: Chris (subject) and Bob (subject) were (linking verb) sailors (noun completer). The fourth sentence pattern is the subject (s), linking verb (lv), adjective completer (ac) pattern as shown in the following: "The lake (s) looks (lv) calm (ac)" (Immel & Sacks, 1995, pp. 66-67). Although the students felt grammar went beyond the definition of phonics, they felt that "knowing the basics, was an essential extension of phonics instruction.

Activities.

Unscrambling sentences for appropriate syntax is an excellent grammar activity. The children are given scrambled sentences or sentence strips. They determine word or phrase positions to construct a sentence. This activity involves syntax or word order, and correct sentence structure. Another activity involves changing the meaning of a sentence

through word order. In this activity, children receive a sentence and are asked to change the word order and punctuation to formulate a new sentence with a new meaning. Older children may write and edit paragraphs or extended texts from a microstructure perspective involving appropriate punctuation, to a macrostructure view including narrative story grammar, or expository writing as in cause and effect, and chronological writing styles.

Spelling

The conventional arrangement of letters to form words, based on letter – sound correspondences, letter patterns, and rules of the English language comprises spelling. It also consists of words that have irregular spelling patterns. For example, the word "rendezvous" is quite irregular in its silent z and s letters, and unconventional sounds of its two "e" letters. This word made its way into the English language from the French language.

Student and teacher feedback.

The students agreed that a course in phonics should contain a section on spelling because pronouncing words appropriately should result in better spelling. It is interesting that the students felt that phonemic awareness was the strongest indicator of good spelling followed by syllabication, and morphemic awareness. They also mentioned that "good spellers memorized the words."

According to Harris and Sipay (1990), good spellers coordinate phonemic awareness and segmentation with orthographic (spelling) patterns, which may be stored in lexical, phonological memories. Larger spelling patterns move beyond individual sounds or phonemes to larger structures including syllables and knowledge of open and

closed syllable patterns; and word parts including those word parts that contain meaning, morphemes. The students felt that knowing root words and affixes enhanced one's spelling and pronunciation of multi-syllabic, compound words. They also thought teaching word families enhanced one's spelling abilities. They advocated using a number of spelling lists, some involving word families, others from content areas, and others from text; however, "most of the words on the list should be meaningful to the child in story books, chapter books, trade books, and subject text books."

Activities.

There are a number of activities that enhance students' spelling ability beyond the word list and spelling test. Word puzzles may raise spelling awareness (and vocabulary knowledge) by providing context or definition clues, and providing the number of spaces or blocks required for the appropriate spelling word. The maze activity can be constructed to focus on important word parts that are difficult to spell in text. Word parts can be the focus of spelling through sentences with affixes, or root words deleted. Students complete this activity by supplying the missing elements in each sentence. Students can construct word banks with spelling words, or combine words from their word banks or lists to form compound words. Teachers can take time to consistently discuss students' invented spellings and use such "teachable moments" to explain conventional spelling patterns, and exceptions to those patterns. It is important to note that initial discussions should focus on the alphabetic principle, that letters have sounds and that letters can be arranged to form words.

Sequence of Instruction

The sequence of phonics instruction may vary according to the needs of the students. However, Rubin (1995, p. 190) has a developmental sequence of phonics instruction including: auditory discrimination, visual discrimination, consonants (initial, final, clusters, blends, digraphs, and silent consonants), vowel sounds (long then short vowel sounds), digraphs, diphthongs, r-controlled vowels, phonograms, syllabication (open, then closed), and accents. Although texts may differ in their instructional sequence; both Heilman (1998), and Hull and Fox (1998), agree that when it comes to phonics instruction, consonants are first, followed by vowels. Structural analysis such as syllables, accents, word endings, onsets and rimes, and morphemes follow consonant and vowel development. Beyond this point, spelling and grammar appear to be logical extensions of phonics instruction, and may require specialized subjects or further concentration across content areas, or interdisciplinary approaches to gain a working knowledge of spelling and grammar.

Student feedback.

It is important to note that the students from the phonics course thought the sequence of phonics instruction was logical, but would vary in the classroom, based on the needs of the students and the way in which phonics instruction was taught. Most of the students mentioned that instruction should take place within literature, including subject area texts, and phonics should consist of mini-lessons that highlight specific points within the text, that is, particular to the text, such as vowel digraphs found in the vocabulary from a story.

In conclusion, phonics instruction involves more than vowel and consonant generalizations; it includes the knowledge of phonemes, onsets, rimes, syllables, accents,

digraphs, diphthongs, diacritical markings, morphemic analysis, and structural analysis. There are many issues that emerge from a course on phonics. A few issues that came to light involved how to teach generalizations, sequencing instruction, appropriate activities, and the extension of phonics instruction into structural analysis, spelling, and grammar. Certainly comprehension should not be neglected, but unfold and develop from words that are pronounced. In this sense, phonics instruction becomes a part of a balanced reading program.

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Appendix

Elementary Phonics Course Components and Activities

Phonics Component	Instructional Activities
Phonics Generalizations	Memorize generalizations; construct word lists following generalizations.
Onsets and Rimes	Circle onsets and rimes in text; word Lists; poetry; onset-rime blocks.
Word Families	Word lists; sentence rhymes; poetry; rhyme blocks.
Phonemic Awareness and Segmentation	Highlight graphemes in text; pronounce, combine, and count phonemes; use tachistoscopes.
Diacritical Markings	Mark vocabulary and characters from text; target and mark specific vowel sounds.
Morphemes	Divide words into meaningful parts; word webs; modified cloze; scrabble.
Syllabication and Accent	Syllabication and stress marks cards; syllabication of vocabulary and characters in text.
Grammar	Unscramble sentences; change sentence meaning; microstructure writing: punctuation; macrostructure writing: narrative story grammar, expository styles; editing.
Spelling	Word puzzles; maze activity; construction of word parts; combining morphemes; nonstandard to standard spelling discussions.

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