

## Term Project: Phonological Awareness

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The ability to read well is directly related to future success in education. There are five main components of reading: phonics, fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonemic awareness. “Phonological awareness is critical for learning to read in alphabetic languages like English. Phonological awareness is the phonological processing ability most strongly related to literacy. It encompasses phoneme awareness, the ability to manipulate individual sounds in words, and rudimentary phonological skills, such as judging whether two words rhyme. Basically, individuals who have difficulty detecting or manipulating sounds in words will struggle with learning to read” (Anthony & Francis, 2005. p. 255). “Phonemic awareness is the deepest level of phonological awareness and the most crucial to success in reading and spelling” (Lonigan, Burgess, Anthony, & Barker, 1998). Based on this information I have completed two lesson plans on phonological awareness that include phonograms and phonics, as well as segmenting and blending of initial, medial, and final sounds in words. I was able to administer these lessons as part of my daily routine in my first-grade classroom. I chose Nala because I believe that she is a hard-working and attentive child that is willing to learn and has a strong desire to become a better reader.

***(Standard III) Knowledge of literacy learners’ understandings, skills, strategies, interests, values, and aspirations to design effective literacy learning experiences.*** I met Nala this year as an incoming first-grade student. Nala is a very

quiet, attentive student that gives her best with all classroom activities. Nala lives with her mother and two other siblings that are under the age of eighteen. Nala is the youngest child. I do not have much contact with Nala's family. I have occasional contact with her older sister, and I am able to relay messages to her mother through her. She is eligible for free lunch, due to the fact that the household income is less than \$10,000 each year. The highest grade in school that her mother completed was the ninth grade.

After looking through Nala's cumulative folder and reviewing her Kindergarten report card I learned that Nala struggled in many areas of reading. Not only did Nala struggle with basic sight words, she also had problems with decoding and letter-sound recognition.

One of the tools used to assess Nala's academic progress in Kindergarten was the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). DRA "is a series of leveled books and recording sheets designed to allow teachers to determine students' reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension levels. DRA data are collected at the end of each grading period (cycle) to determine student progress. Students are determined to be near, at, or above grade level, below grade level, or significantly below grade level based on their performance on the assessment relative to their grade level status"

(<https://studata.sandi.net/research/dra/index.asp>). Based on the Developmental Reading Assessment, Nala was a level three (our school prefers a level 4 for promotion to first grade). She did benchmark on her Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills (DIBELS). DIBELS measures phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (<https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>). Although Nala benchmarked, she still received a "D" in reading. Nala's primary language is English.

She currently is in regular education and has no Individual Education Program (IEP), 504 plan, or Special Education classification status.

Nala attends an after-school tutoring program that is available at our school. In this program, first-grade standards are re-taught and homework assistance, as well as arts integration, is offered. The teacher-student ration is considerably lower than our school's average class, being one teacher to fifteen students. Nala also attends a local church program that helps her with any homework and studying needs.

Each day Nala is pulled for small reading group lessons with our first-grade reading support specialist. In these lessons phonemic awareness is emphasized and a daily Bonnie Kline story is covered. Bonnie Kline stories are included in the Project Read program by Language Circle ([projectread.com](http://projectread.com)). Some afternoons, when room is available, Nala is sent to a second lesson with the specialist. During this lesson information that was learned earlier in the year is re-taught, including a review of previous Bonnie Kline stories that focus mainly on differentiating vowel sounds.

***(Standard IV) Ability to establish a caring, stimulating, inclusive, democratic, and safe literacy learning community where students take risks and work independently and cooperatively.*** In my classroom I do my best to promote a comfortable learning environment where children feel safe in giving correct and incorrect answers. I emphasize that right and wrong answers are both important parts of the learning process. If we answer something, whether right or wrong, we will learn from it. If we answer incorrectly we can search and discover the correct answers. There are times when I admit to my children that I am unsure of an answer. I then explain to them that there are resources available to us to help us gather the information to answer our

questions. The Internet, dictionaries or textbooks are just a few of the tools that we discuss in the classroom that can help us gather more information on a topic.

At the beginning of the year Nala was very quiet and hesitant to answer questions in a whole-group setting. I attribute this to her being below level academically, and therefore unsure and nervous of a possible incorrect answer. Over time and with my emphasis on learning from correct answers, as well as incorrect answers, Nala has increased her participation a great deal.

Each day during our reading block, students are pulled to work in small groups. In a small teacher lead group they work with me on reading fluency, phonics, grammar, phonograms, and story writing. Some students are also sent to work with our reading specialist that covers many of the same things, but often includes a review or previously covered material. Other students are allowed to work at small centers that include a computer reading program, reading at a listening center, file folder games related to current classroom standards being covered, as well as individual or partner reading in the classroom library. The children feel comfortable and enjoy working in these small groups and are used to the routine. I felt that working in a small group for lesson two would not make Nala uncomfortable because it is commonplace in our daily activities.

Before I began my initial testing with Nala I explained to her that I am also in school and that I needed her help. I asked if she would be willing to help me with my college class work. I explained to her that she would not be graded on correct or incorrect answers. I also explained that she would be helping me learn new things, while helping me to become a better teacher. She told me that she understood and that she was willing to help me, and that we would be helping each other.

*(Standard V) Ability to select, adapt, create, and use rich and varied assessment and instructional resources that enhance students' literacy achievement.* Last year I was introduced to a phonics program that incorporates the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. This program is a combination of many aspects of successful reading programs including, Project Read, Spaulding, and Open Court.

I was fortunate to be able to observe Ms. Lazard, a teacher with a Master's degree in Urban Education with a reading specialist endorsement, teach for the first semester of the school year. During this time I was able to learn the basics of the program. I was also able to gather program materials that would be needed such as Bonnie Kline stories from Project Read, Open Court alphabet cards and motions (see attachment 12), and Spaulding phonograms (see attachments 13-15) that were used to make phonogram cards.

I felt prepared to implement the program this year. I would hope for the same dramatic results that my students showed last year. Out of twenty-six students, with the exception of one child, all were reading on a DRA level sixteen (grade-level) or higher. The exception was one student reading on a level twelve DRA, which is approaching second-grade level. In my previous two years of teaching first-grade, I had little experience teaching a successful reading program. Many of my students were unable to read a DRA level 16, which is the desired level for promotion to second grade.

According to last year's report card, Nala struggled with decoding, letter-sound recognition, and segmentation. I decided the best approach would be to assess Nala's phonemic awareness. I chose to administer the Michigan Literacy Progress Profile (MLPP) Phonemic Awareness Assessment, MLPP Letter/Sound Identification

assessment, the Yopp-Singer Test of Phonemic Segmentation, and a reading record to assess DRA level.

After the initial assessments it was confirmed that Nala had difficulty segmenting phonemes. For example, on the first assessment (see attachment 1) Nala segmented the word dog as /d/g/, the word keep as k/ee/k, and the word fine as i/n/. She also was unable to segment the words pat, mean, or fight (see attachment 4). Nala had problems giving rhyming words when given a word. One example from the Rhyme supply assessment showed that Nala was unable to give rhyming words for the words head and bed, fun and run, got and hot, rug and bug, be and me, and mill and will (see attachment 3). Nala struggled with letter/sound identification. She stated that the letter o made the /i/ sound, the letter u made the /y/ sound, and the letter y made the /w/ sound (see attachment 5). With onset and rime Nala blended /d/ /og/ as gog and /m/ /ouse/ as house (see attachment 2). With rhyme choice and rhyme supply she was unable to determine if words rhymed or not (see attachment 3). Nala also scored below level on her running record. She scored a level A/one for DRA. After analyzing this information I decided that the combination of programs I was taught last year would offer a successful avenue for remediation and instruction, not only for Nala, but also for my entire class.

***(Standard II) Knowledge of curriculum content and grade-level performance expectations to set informed and purposeful goals that facilitate students' literacy achievement and enable them to use literacy as a tool for learning across disciplines.***

We began with a daily lesson that would target phonemes and phonograms (see lesson 1, attachment 6 & 7). We would practice letter-sound recognition by hand gestures and movements based on Open Court chants and motions. Upon completion of the alphabet

we would move on to cover phonograms from the Spaulding reading program. After we reviewed the daily phonics and phonograms, we would cover a daily Bonnie Kline story from Project Read. The words from the story would be segmented into beginning, medial, and final sounds. As the sounds were given, students would record them in their notebooks. After writing new or difficult words from the story we would cover the daily story with a read-aloud. I began by first reading the story to the children. Then, the children would cover the story along with me. Finally the students would read the story as a class without much assistance from myself. Each day they were asked to take the story home for further practice.

With this lesson we were able to move, dance, laugh and learn together. The children felt comfortable because the lesson was fun and everyone was involved. Children were not singled out, if they do not know a response because they are instructed to repeat after me. In order to make the most of this lesson for Nala, I made sure to arrange her seat near the front of the classroom, as well as in the middle. Most of my phonics instruction and phoneme instruction takes place near the front and center of the classroom.

The second lesson was completed in a small group. I based this lesson on the [readinga-z.com](http://readinga-z.com) lessons twenty-one through thirty (see attachments 8, 9, & 10). This lesson had a much stronger focus on blending and segmentation. When the children first met in a small group we covered phonogram cards for review. I then gave examples of words and how they should be blended or segmented. Students worked together segmenting and manipulating phonemes. Finally, students practiced using their own words and came up with their own examples to share as a group.

The grade level expectations that were focused on and incorporated in my lessons included:

- Demonstrate understanding of phonics by recognizing base words and their inflectional forms (e.g., suffixes, -s, -es, -ed, -ing, -est, -er) (ELA-1-E1)
- Demonstrate understanding of phonics by reading one- and two- syllable words with short- and long-vowel sounds spelled with common spelling patterns (ELA-1-E1)
- Demonstrate understanding of phonics by identifying and reading words from common word families (ELA-1-E1)
- Demonstrate understanding of phonics by reading high-frequency, grade-appropriate nonphonetic words with automaticity (ELA-1-E1).

***(Standard I) Knowledge of learning and child development theories and the processes of reading and writing to inform literacy assessment and instruction.***

“Phonological awareness is a sensitivity to the segmental nature of speech, an explicit understanding that spoken language comprises discrete units ranging from entire words and syllables to smaller intrasyllabic units of onsets, rimes, and phonemes. Phonemic awareness is the deepest level of phonological awareness and the most crucial for success in reading and spelling” (Lonigan, Bruggess, Anthony & Barker, 1998. p. 294-311). By using cards, hand gestures, and sound segments, students are better able to make sense of phonics. “The use of associated pictures, manipulatives like counters, and visual cues such as squares representing the number of segments in a word can help reduce demand on working memory and make phonological awareness task more concrete (Troia, 2004. p. 2).



Another benefit these lessons included is that “deliberate, systematic instruction in phonological awareness profits many children with and without disabilities” (Troia. 2004. p. 2). “Individuals who have difficulty detecting or manipulating sounds in words will struggle with learning to read (Francis & Anthony. 2002. p. 255). These lessons helped the entire class, not only children that were advanced, but struggling students as well.

Both lessons included phonemes and letter sound knowledge. “Students... have demonstrated that phonological awareness training, especially when combined with instruction in letter knowledge, leads to longstanding improvements in phoneme awareness, reading and spelling” (Francis & Anthony. 2005. p. 258). Much of the instruction of phonics was very explicit. The students received daily review and practice from modeling of phonics and phonograms.

***(Standard VI) Ability to use a variety of approaches and activities, derived from high-quality research, to help students improve their literacy skills.*** These lessons on reading instruction made a significant, meaningful contribution to Nala’s overall progress. She made excellent progress when comparing the first assessments to the second assessments, and even showed more progress when comparing the second assessments to the third assessments. She made excellent progress overall. Her scores on all assessments increased (see final assessments on attachments 1-5). Nala also showed improvement with her reading running records. Although her scores were not high enough to move to the next reading letter, she showed much improvement. Nala increased her over all percentage of correct words per minute or the number of words read increased.

In order to support Nala's success during the lessons I continued to make sure that she was seated at the front of the classroom. I also made sure that all graded papers for the week were sent home along with a progress report. This way, her family would be aware of the areas she was struggling in, as well as areas in which she was making progress.

Nala also continued to attend the small reading group outside of the classroom. This was beneficial because much of the lesson was repeated from what I had taught earlier in the day. Often the story was a review from the story we read earlier that day, or a review of a story from earlier in the year. Nala also continued to attend her after-school tutoring and church tutoring.

Some critical moments for me when making decisions regarding what lessons to teach occurred after the initial assessments. These assessments showed that Nala struggled in many areas of reading. Therefore, I tried to include as many parts of phonemic awareness and letter-sound recognition into the lessons as possible. Another critical moment was when I viewed Nala's cumulative folder. She had many difficulties with reading and it is my duty to do my best to prepare her for the second-grade.

If I were given the opportunity to re-teach these lessons I would definitely reteach them. There are just a few things I would change. The next time I would be sure to assess every child with the MLPP Phonemic Awareness Assessment, the Yopp-Singer Test of Phoneme Segmentation, and the MLPP Letter-Sound Knowledge Assessment, in addition to DRA testing and running records. Based on the number of children that needed the same remediation, I would alter my instruction. If most students needed similar instruction, I would teach both lessons in a whole-group setting. The students that

would not need this specific instruction could be placed in a group to work with the reading support specialist. Perhaps a lesson on fluency or comprehension could be integrated during the small group lessons with the Reading Specialist.

Another adjustment I would include would be to learn the American Sign Language signs to represent the words that we use for phonogram examples from lesson one. One example would be using the American Sign Language symbol for pink when covering the phonogram –ink, or the hand gesture for the word father to represent the /a/ sound.

For the second lesson I would make sure to allow students use of their own white board to display the newly created words from lesson two. This would allow them the ability to share not only orally, but visually as well the words that they blended and segmented. I also would allow for students to use the letter blocks that were used in the original reading-a-z lessons. This would allow for a more hands on approach that I feel would benefit visual and hands-on learners.

One new technique that I was able to use to better my lessons includes the assessments. I am interested in including them in my classroom for a quarterly assessment. These assessments are easy to administer and understand. I feel that they would definitely complement my regular use of running records and fluency assessments. These new assessments will allow me to pinpoint the specific areas where my children struggle. Therefore I am able to adjust my lessons to meet the individual needs of each student.

Another technique that I found very helpful was becoming more aware of phonics instruction and lesson plans. By reading the assignments for this course, I learned many

helpful tools where phonemic awareness is concerned. I learned to take research and use it to benefit my instruction. I improved my ability to search for specific tasks and lessons that would prove helpful in my current instruction. I also found new resources on currently used websites, one specific website is [readinga-z.com](http://readinga-z.com). I have been using this website for almost two years. I use it mainly for running records and students' weekly take-home books. As I searched for ideas on lesson plans to help with small instruction, I came across numerous pre-made lesson plans on this website. I was able to utilize them and alter them to fit my students' and instructional needs.

Overall I enjoyed this project. I was able to not only learn new techniques, but gather new information as well. I grew as a professional, while helping my students' reading ability. My target student, Nala showed great progress throughout our phonemic awareness lessons. I cannot help but believe that all of my students grew in one way or another; if not in reading or academic progress, but by having a more prepared and knowledgeable teacher to help them on their journey to become willing and able readers.

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