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For the Love of Reading

Fact Sheet #1

Speaking the Reading Language

by Tony Trott

We all learn to read in different ways. What remains consistent, however, are the words that reading teachers use when talking about reading instruction and student progress. I know this because I am one of them. So this fact sheet will list some of the less-familiar terms used in reporting reading progress and give them easy-to-understand definitions.

Emergent Literacy - The early stage of literacy development. People in the emergent stage of literacy development will generally rely on others when trying to read; for example, an emergent reader gets help with unfamiliar words or concepts when reading with a more accomplished reader. Sometimes an emergent reader will not even read text but will simply *read* the pictures, turn the pages, or even just listen.

Orthographic Awareness - The knowledge that letters represent the spoken language.

This means that text is made up of letters, the letters correspond to sounds and words, and text is read from left to right across the page. Reading interesting books with words and pictures to children raises their orthographic awareness.

Phoneme - The smallest unit of speech that is represented

by a letter. The word *dog* contains three phonemes: the *d*, *o*, and *g* sounds. A single letter may represent more than one phoneme in different words; the *a* in *call* has a different



sound than the *a* in *cake*. Sometimes a single letter will represent multiple phonemes in the same word; for example, the word *ox* has only two letters but it has

three phonemes, the *o*, *k*, and *s* sounds.

Phonemic Awareness - The knowledge that a word, whether spoken or written, consists of a sequence of phonemes.

Decoding - The skill that a reader uses to translate given symbols (e.g., letters of the alphabet) into recognizable and meaningful words and phrases. A person's decoding skills generally progress with reading ability.

Word Attack - Strategies that help a reader become better at decoding. Two good strategies are: 1) using the context of the words around the unknown word to figure it out; and 2) breaking the word down into smaller parts that may be known. (Examples: *anti* in the word *antinuclear* means *against*; *re* in the

*“Reading is a
basic tool
in the
living of the
good life.”*

Mortimer Adler

word *restart* means *again*; *logy* in the word *biology* means *the study of*).

Semantic Substitution - Substituting a word similar in meaning, but different phonetically, for the original word (e.g., substituting *sweater* for *jacket*).

Comprehension - How well a reader understands the meaning of words. Some emergent readers may not be able to decode written words, but are better at understanding something that is read aloud or spoken. Other readers use word attack skills to better understand what has been written.

Fluency - How a person reads, speaks, or writes easily, smoothly, and with expression. A reader with fluency skills can see the *big picture* rather than reading word for word. Readers can improve fluency by daily reading at a level that they consider easy to read.

Text Level - There are three main levels of text: easy, instructional, and frustrational. If text is at an easy level, a student can read it independently or with minimal assistance (from a parent, dictionary, etc.). If text is at the instructional level, a student can read it without major problems but may require outside assistance (parents, teachers, etc.) to understand what is being read. If a text is frustrational, it is too difficult to provide

instructional benefit so a student should not be required to read it independently. Forcing students to read text at this level may do more harm than good because it can discourage a student from reading altogether.

Phonics - There are many different definitions of the word *phonics*. Some people say it is a teaching method that stresses the relationships between letters and the sounds they make; others say that it is not a teaching method but an understanding of the relationship between letters and sounds.

While these definitions are by no means “set in stone,” hopefully they will help to get everyone on the same page when discussing reading. The definitions are meant to provide a framework for understanding your child’s reading instruction.

The definitions here are adapted and compiled from the following online resources:

- <http://www.readingpath.org/glossary1.html>
- http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/reading/ltr-cec/ltr7-cec.html
- <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/sor/sor-5.htm>
- <http://www.mtsu.edu/~dyslexia/Terms/terms.html>
- <http://www.lindamoodbell.com/definitions/index.html>



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