**07 – PIL - Systematic synthetic phonics – introduction**

TRANSCRIPT

When students enter formal schooling, they may have already acquired some early literacy skills. They may have some knowledge of the concepts of print, know the names of the letters, the order of the alphabet, and they may have some phonological awareness skills, such as being able to identify rhyming words.

Phonological awareness, and particularly phonemic awareness, are foundational skills that are necessary for reading success. Phonemic awareness involves attending to, thinking about and intentionally manipulating the individual phonemes, or sounds, within spoken words and syllables.

When teaching students to read, we must explicitly teach the phonemic awareness skills of blending or bringing sounds together to build words, segmenting to pull apart the word into its sounds and manipulating, that's adding or deleting sounds in words. While verbal phonemic awareness skills are important, the research tells us that when we teach phonemic awareness with letters attached, we have a bigger impact on reading outcomes.

Phoneme-grapheme correspondences, sometimes referred to as sound to letter links or phonic code knowledge, are where we teach students how to match a sound in our language, a phoneme, to its representation on paper, a grapheme. Sound to letter links are not the same as phonemic awareness, although the two are sometimes confused. Sound to letter links are an important early step in learning to read and spell as they set the foundations for phonics instruction.

Decades of research has established explicit, systematic phonics as the most effective and inclusive approach to teaching children to read and spell words. Phonics instruction should provide opportunities to decode or read, and encode or spell words. Knowing the letters and letter combinations that represent the sounds of language is a crucial skill required for students to decode words as they read.

Phonics instruction is systematic when it teaches sound to letter links in an ordered sequence. Synthetic phonics is the process of synthesising or blending sounds and letters to decode words, and segmenting of sounds and letters to encode words. It requires a part to whole word approach.

Students are taught to start at the smallest meaningful part, the individual sounds and the letters that represent them. And to then combine those sounds to read whole words. This process provides students with a reliable strategy for decoding unknown words and discourages guessing.

It is through this process that students develop mental graphemic representations of words, also known as sight words. Sight words are words that a student can read instantly. A word is a sight word when the student reads it automatically. They don't have to sound out the word and then blend the sounds back together to read it every time they see the word. Students learn sight words by linking the phonemes or sounds in the word to graphemes, or letters that represent the sounds in the word, and the meaning of the word. For example, in the word cats, we link the sounds in the word /c/ /a/ /t/ /s/ with the letters that represent those sounds 'c' 'a' 't' 's', and then link these with the word's meaning.

We know that the word cats means fluffy pets with whiskers. We also know that there are more than one because we say the word with a plural /s/ on the end. This is important knowledge about language that children bring to learning to read.

High frequency words are words that occur often in both spoken and written language. These include words like is, the, and like. High frequency words are taught as needed to support reading of decodable texts and build students' early self-confidence and self-perception as a reader.

When learning to read, systematic synthetic phonics instruction includes instruction in both the initial and advanced phonic code. This includes the common and alternative letter and letter combinations that represent all 44 sounds in English.

When engaging in systematic synthetic phonics instruction, students are first taught the initial code, which includes the common sound to letter links. Students are taught to segment, blend and manipulate sounds and letters in the initial code to read and spell words.

As students become more proficient in the initial code, the advanced code is introduced. The advanced code includes more complex sound to letter links and increasingly complex word structures. Students are again taught to segment, blend and manipulate sounds and letters in the initial and extended code to read and spell increasingly complex words.