



EDUCATION FIRST

Serious about learning

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Tony Hollins is the founder and director of the Education First Learning Centre in East Gosford. He has a masters degree in education, and has been an educator since 1982 at all levels from pre-school to university.

Pre-school Literacy Program

This program aims to prepare young children for school in such a way that they will be full of confidence in themselves as learners. The program is open to children who will be starting school the following year. The program is suitable for children who are advanced for their age, as well as for those whose development is age-appropriate or a bit below average. If you are unsure whether to start your child at school, this program will help you to make a good decision.

The program is conducted in small groups of six to eight children. This provides the environment in which children can develop confidence in speaking to the group, the ability to be polite and take turns and to follow the teacher's instructions.

Children attend one sixty-minute session each week during school terms 3 and 4. Parents should try to attend some of the sessions, as this will help you to help your child. Parents need to be involved in reading to your child, joining in and helping with the weekly activities and making sure that the activity folders are brought to the session each week. A student activity folder and bag are provided. Children also borrow a picture book each week from our library.



a as in apple

Level One of the program covers the following in ten weeks:

- the English alphabet
- the sounds made by each vowel and consonant
- identifying beginning, middle and ending sounds in words
- rhyming words

Level Two of the program covers the following in ten weeks:

- revision of level one knowledge and skills
- reading and writing letters
- blending sounds together to make words
- a short list of basic sight words
- reading short stories

An initial assessment is conducted for all children before starting the program. This covers language, phonemic awareness, visual and auditory perception skills and concentration, so that any possible barriers to learning can be identified and addressed well before starting school.

Education First use only fully trained and experienced teachers. Motivation and positive reinforcement play a major role in all our teaching as we aim to help your child to achieve his or her true potential. You can trust your child to our care from pre-school through to the HSC.

Possible problems for early readers

If your child has difficulty in several of these areas it would be wise to obtain a professional opinion about the extent of the problem. We can refer you to a speech therapist, occupational therapist, behavioural optometrist or paediatrician.

Symptoms of language problems

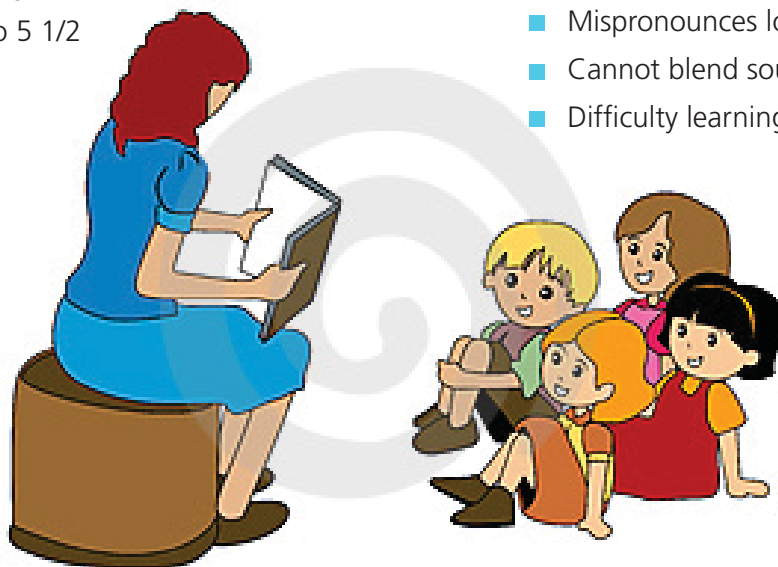
- Poor articulation when speaking
- Poor comprehension
- Unable to sequence ideas
- Difficulty finding words to express ideas
- Unable to follow instructions

Symptoms of concentration problems

- Easily distracted from activities
- Unable to persevere with tasks
- Inattentive, drifts off into a dream world

Visual perception problems

- Does not enjoy jigsaw puzzles and construction toys
- Avoids drawing, painting and craft activities
- Unable to copy basic shapes
- Cannot copy own name by 5 to 5 1/2 years of age



Poorly developed body awareness

- Unable to identify parts of the body
- Awkward and clumsy, poor balance
- Confusion with left and right

Poor integration of body movements

- Did not crawl on all fours before walking
- Cannot use hands and feet together
- Difficulty in learning to swim

Confusion with knowledge and sense of time

- Uncertain of meanings of 'yesterday', 'tomorrow', 'now', 'before' and 'after'
- Poor grasp of the seasons and important times of the year
- No idea of daily routines

Poorly developed sequencing skills

- Great difficulty organising himself or herself
- Poor sense of rhythm
- Difficulty learning dance steps
- Unable to memorise word patterns
- Mispronounces longer words
- Cannot blend sounds to make words
- Difficulty learning by rote memory

Learning to read part one

– whole language or phonics?

As a young teacher in the early 1980s, I had it drummed into me “Phonics is boring. You will turn children off reading by teaching them phonics.” The “whole language” approach to teaching reading was in full swing. All I had to do was immerse the children in literature and let the reading begin. “The children will learn phonics along the way,” I was told.

Any program designed to teach young children to read cannot be based wholly on the whole language approach. It needs to include phonics – teaching children to sound out words. As an educator for twenty-five years and the director of a learning centre, I have used phonics to teach hundreds of school aged and pre-school children to read well.

It is not possible for many children to learn to read properly the “whole language” way because they have one or more of the following symptoms:

- a vision system that is not developed fully
- an ongoing or intermittent hearing loss
- a delay in language processing
- some difficulty in concentrating

The many children that have come to my learning centre with a reading problem usually have low self-esteem as a result. They are in danger of dropping out of education altogether.

Readers use three “cueing systems” to help them “decode” or extract meaning from print:

- Semantic cues – how the world works
- Syntactic cues – how the language works
- Graphophonic or phonics cues – how the letters and sounds of the alphabet work.

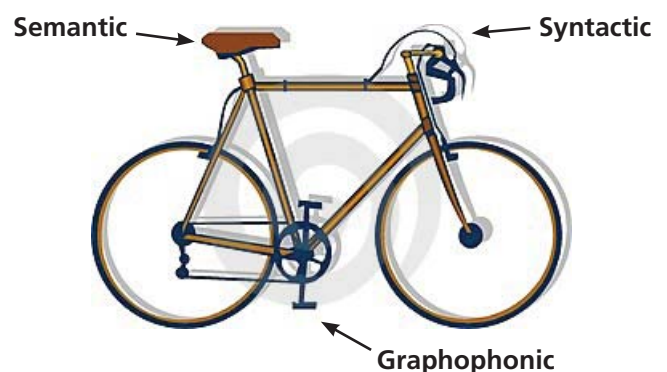
The weakness of the whole language approach has been an overemphasis on the semantic cues and learning words by sight, and a reduced emphasis on the graphophonic cues. Children have been encouraged to look at the pictures, to guess what the word

might be, and, as a last resort, actually look at the letters in the word and try to sound it out.



Whole language v Phonics

I see the three cueing systems operating like the parts of a bicycle. Like the handlebars, our knowledge of how the world works guides us through most of what we read. Like the seat, our knowledge of how the language works makes the reading comfortable. And like the pedals, which help us to go faster, and even uphill, our knowledge of how the letters and sounds work helps us to read words with which we are not yet familiar.



Unfortunately, many children have been given a bike that does not have pedals.

Remedial reading programs that do not emphasise phonics are not effective. I have lost count of the number of children I have taught to read after they have already had two failed runs through the reading recovery program (whole language in a one-on-one setting).

But isn't prevention better than cure? Why not teach phonics to children to prevent reading problems developing. Phonics does not turn children off reading – poor teaching does. Phonics taught well empowers children to read well.

To see how the cueing systems interact, try to decode the next word in this sentence:

I got on the _ _ _ _ _

The syntactic cues tell me the next word should be the name of something. The semantic cues tell me it could be something I can get on, like a bike or a ladder. I read on ...

I got on the h _ _ _ _ _

The graphophonic cues now tell me it cannot be a bike or a ladder, but it could be 'hay', 'horse' or 'handlebars', and my syntactic cues tell me it cannot be 'his', 'here' or 'however'. I read on ...

I got on the h _ _ se

Now the graphophonic cues tell me it could be a house, a horse or maybe a hose. I read on ...

I got on the h _ _ se and rode off into the sunset.

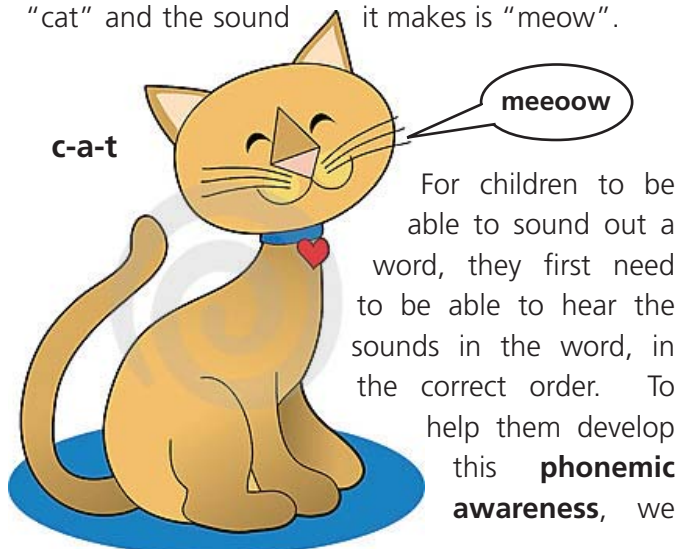
Okay, the semantic cues have convinced me it's a horse.

Of course, if this text were in a picture book, a child would have already seen the horse.

Phonics the fun way

In the last article I described how many children are unable to learn to read without explicit instruction in phonics. Phonics was discarded by many supporters of the "whole language" approach to teaching reading because it was seen as too boring. All that is needed is to present phonics in an enjoyable way.

Children need to learn the name of each letter of the alphabet and the sound it makes. If they have difficulty understanding this concept, draw a picture of a cat and tell them the name of the animal is "cat" and the sound it makes is "meow".



need to use exaggeration. Tell the children to listen for the beginning sound of the word "fish". Say the word as "fffffish". Ask them to say the word in the same exaggerated way, and to feel the sound that first comes out of their mouth. It is "fffff". Ask if they know any other words that begin with "fffff", and say these the same way, e.g. "fffffinger", "fffffat", "fffffunny".

This process can be used for all beginning sounds, especially those with a continuous sound like the consonants f, h, l, m, n, r, s, v, z. To teach beginning sounds that are finite such as "b", it is necessary to repeat the sound. In the word "bat", say "b-b-bat". This will help with the consonants b, c, d, g, j, k, p, t, w, y.

Ending sounds should also be introduced using a continuous sound. Say "bus" as "b-u-sssss". Later children will be able to hear the ending sound in a word like "top", "t-o-p".

Vowel sounds should be introduced as beginning sounds, even though vowels are most often found in the middle of a word. The name of the vowel is its long sound, and each vowel has a short sound ("a"

as in “apple”, “e” as in “egg”, “i” as in “igloo”, “o” as in “orange”, “u” as in “umbrella”).

Visual discrimination is developed by studying what each letter looks like. Children will confuse letters like “b”, “d”, “p” and “g” because their vision system is still developing. Just point out the interesting features of each letter each time they are confused.

I spy is a good game for introducing beginning sounds. Gather about five household items and put them on a table. Decide what each item is called (is it a cup, a glass or a mug?) and exaggerate the beginning sound. Then say “I spy with my little eye something beginning with “mmmmm”. If they say “it’s the book”, respond with “book begins with ‘b’”, and get them to say “book” again to hear the “b” sound. Keep going until they get the right object. The children can then have a turn of saying “I spy ...”. You can also make a card for each letter being used in the game, so that the objects can be matched with the beginning letter.

Sound hop is played by putting a set of objects such as toys in a line along the floor, about one metre apart. Say “which one begins with ssssss”, and let the child hop along to the correct object. Letters can be placed with the objects, or just put the letters out with no objects.

Bingo can be played by writing nine letters in a 3 x 3 grid. The child can place a counter or Lego block

on the letter as you say a word beginning with that sound.

Picture search is fun if you have some old magazines. Look for pictures of items beginning with a certain sound. The child can cut them out and paste them on a sheet of paper labeled with the letter. These sheets can then be made into a booklet. Alternatively, write four different letters on the paper and search for one item for each letter. You can play I spy with these pictures.



Later you can play these games with ending sounds.

Matching cards is played by putting a set of cards out and asking the child to put the same letters together.

Be aware that middle sounds are the hardest for children to identify. Use cards to make the word “cat” and spread the cards out so that the child can touch them one at a time as you both say “c – a – t”. It is then easy to point at the middle sound. Once children can do this, they are reading what we call “c-v-c” words (consonant-vowel-consonant). Phonics gets harder beyond this level, but well-developed skills at the “c-v-c” level provide a solid foundation.

If you make all these activities enjoyable and pressure-free, your child will be keen to do them.

For information about the next levels of the phonic hierarchy, contact Tony by phone on 4324 0252 or email – admin@educationfirst.com.au

The Education First pre-school literacy program begins in July each year for children starting school the following year. The program for school-aged children who have missed out on a solid foundation in phonics runs all year.