

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

A professional learning series presented by David Kilpatrick, Ph.D.

Module 6 Session 3

*Sponsored by the Exceptional Student Services Unit (ESSU) and created in collaboration with
Specific Learning Disability Specialists Jill Marshall and Veronica Fiedler*



COLORADO
Department of Education

Module 6: Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

Session 3: Phonological Awareness and Blending Assessments

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Objective:

Through engagement in this series of 13 on-demand webinars, participants will understand the current research, implications, and the essential elements necessary for assessing, preventing, and overcoming reading difficulties.



ASSESS



PREVENT



OVERCOME

Assessing, Preventing, and Overcoming Reading Difficulties

Webinar Series Modules

Module 1: Reading Research and the Research to Practice Gap

Module 2: Current Approaches to Reading Instruction: Why Many Learners Still Struggle

Module 3: The Simple View of Reading

Module 4: Word-Level Reading

Module 5: Reading Comprehension

MODULE 6: Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

Module 7: Assessing Phonics Skills

Module 8: Assessing Word Identification and Reading Fluency

Module 9: Assessing Reading Comprehension and Related Skills

Module 10: Effective Approaches for Preventing Reading Difficulties

Module 11: Effective Interventions for Reading Difficulties

Module 12: Case Examples of Reading Disabilities

Module 13: Specific Learning Disability Identification

Module 6 Overview

Module 6: Introduction to Reading Assessment; Assessing Phonological Skills

6.1 Introduction to Intervention Oriented Assessment

6.2 Issues in Assessing Phonological Skills

6.3 Phonological Awareness and Blending Assessment

Learning Intentions



Module 6 Session 3: Issues in Assessing Phonological Skills

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Determine what are useful tests of phonological awareness and blending
- ✓ Interpret results of phonological awareness and blending subtests
- ✓ Identify some of the problems with existing assessments of these skills

Phonological Analysis vs Synthesis

- Phonological awareness or “phonological sensitivity” can be broken down into two basic categories: *analysis* and *synthesis*
- **Analysis** means breaking words apart
 - Words can be broken down into syllables, onsets, rimes, or phonemes
 - Classic analysis tasks include: alliteration, rhyming, segmentation, isolation, categorization, and manipulation (manipulation tasks include deletion, substitution, reversal, transposition, Pig Latin, Spoonerisms)
- In my estimation, this is true phonological/phonemic “awareness”
 - Blending (below) is more about “activation” than awareness
- **Synthesis** occurs when parts of words activate the whole word
 - Those parts could be syllables, onsets, rimes, or phonemes
 - The most common synthesis task is blending (but also incomplete words)

Role of Blending and Analysis

- **Blending** is essential for phonic decoding
 - Letter-sound knowledge + phonological blending = phonic decoding
- **Analysis** is essential for spelling and for remembering the words we read (i.e., orthographic mapping; see Module 4)
 - Letter-sound knowledge + phoneme analysis = phonically appropriate spellings
 - Three types of alphabetic orthographies
 - Consistent both ways, consistent one way, consistent neither way
 - Letter-sound proficiency + phonemic (analysis) proficiency = a memory system prepared to remember written words

Considerations Regarding Blending Assessment

- Blending should be assessed separately from analysis (K-3)
- Phoneme-level blending skills develop earlier than phoneme-level analysis skills
 - Because of this, you will find three patterns:
 - Students who are skilled in both phoneme analysis and blending
 - Students who are weak in both phoneme analysis and blending
 - Students who are weak in phoneme analysis but not in blending
 - You are unlikely to find the following pattern:
 - Students who are skilled in phoneme analysis but weak in blending
 - (I have not seen that student in 20 years of trying)

Additional Considerations in Assessing Blending

- The CTOPP-2, PAT-2, and other batteries have blending subtests
 - Be very cautious when including blending and analysis tasks in the same global or composite score
 - The blending score may “neutralize” what the analysis score is telling you
 - I have often seen scaled scores of 10 to 13 on the CTOPP-2 Blending Words but 7 or lower on CTOPP-2 Elision subtest (phoneme analysis)
- Most weak readers can blend phonemes by the end of 2nd grade
 - Most typical readers can by the end of first grade
 - Thus, average or better blending scores do not rule out phonological issues as a source of reading difficulties
 - Weak phoneme blending relative to peers at any level is a strong indicator of a likely phonological problem that affects reading

Task vs. Skill

- Many batteries use multiple tasks
- *Different analysis tasks do not tell us different things!*
- Rather, they are all better or worse at reflecting the underlying phonemic skills needed for reading
 - Analyzing different profiles among analysis tasks is misleading
 - Poor performance on any of the tasks is important information, even if other tasks are average or better
- Phoneme manipulation is best because it incorporates the other tasks (i.e., segmentation, isolation, manipulation, and blending)
 - It is the only task that can assure phoneme proficiency
 - See Module 6.2 for more information

Tests of Analysis and Blending

- Many test batteries now have phonological awareness subtests
- The CTOPP-2 seems to be the best source
 - Also includes working memory and rapid automatized naming
 - It should be supplemented to address the issue of subtest reliability
- The Phonological Awareness Test – Second Edition (PAT-2)
 - May be a useful supplement to the CTOPP-2
 - Only goes to age 9 (CTOPP-2 goes to age 24)
 - Has many inconsistencies between standard scores and percentiles
 - Go with the lower of the two; better a “false positive” than “false negative”
 - False positives quickly resolve themselves, false negatives do not

Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)

- Not to be confused with another PA test with the same acronym
 - The Phonological Awareness *Skills* Test turns up in Internet searches
 - Uses the “task” approach previously mentioned; cannot determine proficiency
- PAST is standardized but not normed
- Functions as a supplement to the CTOPP-2, PAT-2, or other normed test
- Only test directly designed to assess ***phonemic proficiency***
- Free to use
- Requires careful reading of instructions and practice before using
- In a few pilot studies, it correlates with reading similar to or better than the CTOPP-2 Elision subtest
 - They are close cousins—both were derived from the Rosner and Simon *Auditory Analysis Test* (Journal of Learning Disabilities, 1971)

Summary: Module 6 Session 3

- ✓ There are several tests available for phonemic blending and phonemic awareness/analysis
- ✓ Phonological blending and analysis should not be confused or combined
- ✓ Many struggling readers can blend phonemes by late second grade but continue to struggle in phoneme awareness/analysis
- ✓ Phoneme manipulation tasks are best at evaluating the phonemic proficiency that underlies skilled reading



A woman with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored tank top, is shown from the chest up. She is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression, her hand resting on her chin. The background is a dark chalkboard covered with numerous white question marks drawn in chalk. A large, dark blue thought bubble is positioned on the left side of the image, containing white text.

Reflect and Connect:

How have you been assessing phonemic blending and analysis?
If you haven't, what might you do differently?

Wrap Up

What was your biggest takeaway?

What questions do you still have?



Up Next

Module 7.1

Assessing Letter-Sound Skills and Phonics Skills





Thank You

Please visit the CDE Specific Learning Disability Website for more information:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/SD-SLD>