

# **A Review of the Research on Effective Phonics Instruction:**

## **How Evan-Moor's *Daily Phonics* Supports Sequential Skill Development in Decoding**

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# A Review of the Research on Effective Phonics Instruction: How Evan-Moor’s *Daily Phonics* Supports Sequential Skill Development in Decoding

## Introduction

Despite a controversial history, most educators and educational researchers agree that phonics instruction is a critical component of early literacy instruction. At its most basic level, phonics instruction helps children attend to parts of words, including individual sounds and syllables (Lapp & Flood, 1997). According to the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), phonics teaches a system for remembering how to read words, a “mnemonic device” for accessing words (2001). When students know the relationships between sounds, individual letters, and letter combinations and can apply them accurately and efficiently, they have “cracked” the alphabetic code and are on the road to becoming proficient readers.

Although there are several specific ways to teach phonics effectively (i.e., synthetic, analytic, embedded, etc.), research has shown that two general characteristics produce the best results with the most children: *systematic* and *explicit* instruction (Chall & Popp, 1996; NRP, 2000; NICHD, 2001). Systematic instruction follows a predetermined, developmentally appropriate sequence. Sounds that are easier to learn or more likely to be encountered in beginning text are taught first. For example, initial consonants are taught before progressing to *r-controlled* vowels (Core Knowledge Foundation, 2010). Explicit instruction means the teacher clarifies the lesson’s exact goals, drawing attention to the important features of an example or demonstration (Five Essential Reading Components, 2004).

Evan-Moor’s *Daily Phonics* series provides teachers with a systematic and explicit format to teach students fundamental phonics skills. To ensure solid skill acquisition, *Daily Phonics* provides multiple practice

opportunities for students to use what they have just learned by decoding and encoding words and, gradually, connected text. These daily activities will supplement and/or reinforce any core reading curriculum.

This white paper reviews current research on the essential components of phonics instruction, how phonics supports reading skills, and how *Daily Phonics* is a practical application of early literacy and phonics research.

## ***Daily Phonics* Series**

Evan-Moor Educational Publishers’ *Daily Phonics* series provides emergent, early, and early fluent readers in grades 1 through 6 with systematic and explicit phonics instruction designed to complement any core reading program. Each grade level workbook includes a 32-week scope and sequence, which introduces phonics skills in a developmentally appropriate, clear, and logical order. To provide additional clarification, a page entitled “How to Use This Book” highlights the general layout of the student books and includes basic tips for working with English Language Learners (ELL), presenting the information in a user-friendly and efficient format.

Each week’s phonics lesson includes a teacher page with daily teaching tips and scripting that provide explicit instruction to introduce the focus skill and guide students through the activities. Daily student pages provide simple rule statements and examples as well as listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities, giving students multiple opportunities to learn, practice, and apply phonics skills. Illustrations support vocabulary development and provide context for phonics skills. Each page concludes with a dictation activity for further practice.

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Systematic and explicit phonics instruction is completed within a daily 15- to 20-minute time frame, flexibly complementing any core reading program.

## Phonemic Awareness & Letter Recognition

The development of young children's phonemic awareness and letter recognition skills are important prerequisites to phonics instruction and decoding skills. Phonemic awareness is defined as the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds of language; letter recognition is defined as the ability to recognize and label the symbols of the alphabet reliably and accurately (DeBruin-Parecki, 2008). According to the National Reading Panel, instruction in both phonemic awareness and letter recognition are the two best school-entry predictors of children's reading ability during the first two years of instruction (2000). Furthermore, both skills yield the best results when children are told clearly what they are doing and understand that these skills are important in order to become successful readers (NELP, 2009). Children who have obtained these prerequisite skills find the task of learning phonics, reading, and spelling easier (Chall & Popp, 1996; Molfese, et al., 2006).

Phonemic awareness and letter recognition skills are primary features within Evan-Moor's *Daily Phonics* series. Lessons begin with an introduction to the focus skill (e.g., letters and letter combinations) and corresponding sounds. The teacher directs students' attention to the individual letters and models the letter names, corresponding sounds, and word pronunciations; then, students are asked to repeat the letters, sounds, and words. Throughout the teacher-guided practice and activities, students are presented with multiple letter and sound discrimination tasks, requiring letter recognition, letter formation, and the segmentation of individual sounds within words to reinforce phonemic awareness skills.

## Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction, defined as the teaching of the predictable relationships between letter symbols and sounds, has been proven to be more effective when teaching children to read words than no phonics instruction (Chall & Popp, 1996; Glazer, 1998); however, the execution of this instruction can be interpreted very broadly. Based upon extensive research, the type of phonics instruction that is considered to be the most impactful is *systematic* and *explicit* (Chall & Popp, 1996; NRP, 2000; NICHD, 2001). Systematic instruction refers to the scope and sequence. In other words, it addresses the instructional content and the order in which it will be presented. General guidelines regarding the order of phonics instruction are listed below (Chall & Popp, 1996).

- Consonants precede vowels
- Short vowels precede long vowels in words with a final silent e
- Long vowels with silent e precede vowel combinations
- Syllabication usually follows vowel combinations

Explicit instruction refers to the lesson delivery or methodology the teacher uses when presenting the content. A teacher implementing explicit phonics instruction clearly communicates the focus of the lesson; shows students how to acquire skills through listening, speaking, reading, and writing activities; provides multiple opportunities for students to practice reading words; and incorporates review as a means of assessment (Mesmer & Griffith, 2005; Five Essential Reading Components, 2004).

A strong systematic and explicit phonics program assists both teacher and student. Because of its clarity and structure, the teacher does not have to infer whether students are learning the content or if he/she has taught the skills thoroughly. Similarly, less inference is required on the part of the

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student because connections between the skill and its many applications are made often by the teacher throughout the lesson, thereby reaching a greater range of students (Chall & Popp, 1996). In a systematic, explicit phonics program, soon after a new phonics skill is introduced, students apply the skill to reading new words. With consistent practice, mastery is likely to follow, giving students a mechanism for decoding new words (Vail, 1991).

Evan-Moor’s *Daily Phonics* series provides systematic and explicit phonics instruction aligned with research in the following ways:

- The 32-week scope and sequence follows the recommended guidelines for the order of phonics instruction.
- Focus statements, read by the teacher, are included at the top of each lesson, ensuring that lesson objectives are communicated.
- Teachers model the focus skill and demonstrate how it can be used to read frequently used words.
- Daily teacher-guided activities require students to listen, view, speak, read, and write in order to acquire the focus skill.
- Daily practice activities provide frequent review for students as well as an informal assessment tool for teachers.

### **Dictation (Encoding)**

Similar to phonemic awareness skills, an integral part of effective phonics instruction is not only learning to decipher the alphabetic code in order to read but also to reproduce the alphabetic code in order to reinforce reading, writing, and spelling skills. As stated by the Core Knowledge Foundation, “Reading and writing—decoding and encoding—are complementary processes that ensure mastery of the written code” (2010). Studies have shown that kindergarten and 1st grade children who receive systematic phonics

instruction recognize words and spell better than those who receive nonsystematic or no phonics instruction (NICHD, 2001; NRP, 2000). Effective phonics programs provide opportunities for children to practice letter-sound correspondences through both reading and writing (NICHD, 2001; NRP, 2000; Vail, 1991). Upon acquisition of these skills, both reading and spelling are completed with greater confidence and accuracy (Chall & Popp, 1996).

In order to provide an additional level of practice, Evan-Moor’s *Daily Phonics* series includes daily dictation activities aligned with the recommendations for effective phonics programs. As a conclusion to each lesson, the teacher reads individual words and, later, sentences aloud. At the bottom of each page, students are presented with space in which to write the words or missing letters of the words, thereby applying the focus skill. Through these activities, students immediately use the newly acquired letter-sound correspondences in their writing and practice encoding (spelling) skills. For the teacher, this final activity provides an additional way to reinforce the focus skill, as well as a practical, informal assessment tool.

### **Conclusion**

Evan-Moor’s *Daily Phonics* series provides research-based, comprehensive phonics instruction delivered in an easy-to-use, efficient format. The 32-week scope and sequence follows a research-based model, ensuring students receive standard and systematic instruction. Scripted teacher pages ensure that instruction is thorough, explicit, and aligned with the best practices for phonics instruction. Practice activities incorporate a variety of phonics skills, while using a multisensory approach to effectively reach all students. Throughout these activities, teachers can monitor student progress to ensure students are acquiring accurate decoding skills for the development of reading accuracy and automaticity.

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