

Phonics for Spanish Speakers

Well-designed and well-implemented phonics instruction should be a component of . . . reading programs for pupils whose initial reading instruction is taught through the medium of Spanish just as it is for English reading programs. Reading any alphabetic writing system requires proficiency in connecting print with speech. Programs for Spanish speakers are similar to and different from those for English in specific ways:

- ◆ In both languages, phonic knowledge is essential. Spanish lends itself to phonics instruction more naturally than English does because it is more predictable in its spelling patterns.
- ◆ Although both languages should employ systematic, sequential teaching of sound-symbol relationships, the sequence of Spanish instruction is different. It makes sense to teach the five vowels first, then consonants and open syllables. In English consonants are taught first, then short vowels (usually), and then closed syllables. The order of instruction is based on the properties of each language and what children find easiest to learn.
- ◆ If children have difficulty with syllable units in Spanish, they should then receive direct instruction in the individual speech sounds and their symbols; phonemic awareness must be sufficient to support learning to read with syllable units.
- ◆ Direct, explicit instruction in sound-symbol relationships is more effective with more children than are incidental or imbedded phonics approaches.
- ◆ Phonics instruction must use familiar words and culturally appropriate language for speakers of each language. Dictations from that language are useful for practice.
- ◆ Phonics instruction in either language needs to be active, verbal, and interesting. It should not be relegated to silent, independent seat work.
- ◆ Children who speak either language need guided practice of skills and many opportunities to apply them in meaningful reading and writing activities. .
- ◆ Development of proficient phonics and other word identification skills is essential and necessary for skillful reading, but success in reading also depends on vocabulary, reasoning ability, background knowledge, and appreciation of the written word.
- ◆ Thematic unity between the English and Spanish reading programs enables them to be used side by side in the classroom or school.

References

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