Introduction

Phonics instruction has long been a controversial matter. Emans (1968) points out that the emphasis on phonics instruction has changed several times over the past two centuries. Instruction has shifted from one extreme—no phonics instruction—to the other—phonics instruction as the major method of word-recognition instruction—and back again. Emans also points out that “each time that phonics has been returned to the classroom, it usually has been revised into something quite different from what it was when it was discarded” (p. 607). Currently, most beginning reading programs include a significant component of phonics instruction. This is especially true since the implementation of policies related to the No Child Left Behind Act and recommendations by the National Reading Panel (2000) for the use of both instruction and assessments related to explicit phonics instruction. It is also likely that the U.S. Department of Education’s initiative Race to the Top, funded as part of the Education Recovery Act of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (AARA), will continue to view phonics instruction as an integral component and focus of reading instruction.

Phonics, however, is not the cure-all for reading ills that some believe it to be. Rudolph Flesch’s book Why Johnny Can’t Read (1955), although it did bring the phonics debate to the attention of the public, typifies the kind of literature that takes a naive approach to a complex problem. As Heilman (1981) points out, ‘Flesch’s suggestions for teaching were quite primitive, consisting primarily of lists of words each presenting different letter-sound patterns. Thus, Flesch did not actually provide teaching materials that schools and teachers could use’ (p. 3). Still, this kind of approach, which reduced learning to read to the simple task of memorizing the alphabet and learning its letter-to-sound correspondences through an emphasis on writing, attracted disciples who vigorously carried forth its message.

Teachers must remember that phonics is but one of the major word-recognition methods that also include whole-word methodology and is most effective when it includes skills of contextual analysis, structural analysis, and dictionary use. These methods do not conflict with one another. If one is a proponent of phonics instruction, one does not have to be opposed to learning words via other word-recognition methods. Rather, it should be the goal of reading teachers to develop children’s skills in all these methods for three basic reasons:

1. Children will find some methods more suited to their abilities and learning styles than others. Research has consistently shown that no one method is
best for teaching all children. Thus, each child should be given opportunities to learn and use all word-recognition methods, applying those that work the most effectively for them.

2. Some words are learned more easily by using one method instead of another. For example, it may be more effective to teach an irregularly spelled word through a whole-word emphasis rather than a phonics emphasis. Focusing on word histories—the etymology of difficult words adopted from foreign languages—allows the learner to make deeper connections between the unique usage of the word and its irregular spelling.

3. When children encounter unknown words, they often use the various word-recognition techniques in concert, not as isolated skills having no relationship to one another.

Over the past 35 years, several studies and reports on reading stand out as having made major impacts on present-day phonics instruction. The first-grade reading studies (Bond & Dykstra, 1967) completed during the 1964–1965 school year provided data that have had an important and lasting influence on today’s reading materials. Although the data seemed to indicate that no one method of teaching reading was superior to all others, they did suggest that an earlier and increased emphasis on phonics instruction would strengthen basal reading programs.

After an extensive critical analysis of research that examined the various approaches to beginning reading, Chall (1967) came to the following conclusions:

My review of the research from the laboratory, the classroom, and the clinic points to the need for a correction in beginning reading instructional methods. Most schoolchildren in the United States are taught to read by what I have termed a meaning emphasis method. Yet, the research from 1912 to 1965 indicates that a code-emphasis method—i.e., one that views beginning reading as essentially different from mature reading and emphasizes learning of the printed code for the spoken language—produces better results, at least up to the point where sufficient evidence seems to be available, the end of the third grade.

The results are better, not only in terms of the mechanical aspects of literacy alone, as was once supposed, but also in terms of the ultimate goals of reading instruction—comprehension and possibly even speed of reading. The long-existing fear that an initial code emphasis produces readers who do not read for meaning or with enjoyment is unfounded. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that better results in terms of reading for meaning are achieved with the programs that emphasize code at the start than with the programs that stress meaning at the beginning. (p. 307)

The National Academy of Education’s Commission on Education and Public Policy, with the sponsorship of the National Institute of Education, established the Commission on Reading in 1983 to “locate topics on which there has been appreciable research and scholarship . . . and gather panels of experts from within the Academy and elsewhere to survey, interpret and synthesize research findings” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1984, p. viii).
The Commission on Reading’s efforts resulted in the influential report titled *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. In the foreword to this report, Robert Glaser, president of the National Academy of Education, writes,

> The last two decades of research and scholarship on reading, building on the past, have produced an array of information which is unparalleled in its understanding of the underlying processes in the comprehension of language. Although reading abilities and disabilities require further investigation, present knowledge, combined with the centrality of literacy in the educational process, make the report cause for optimism. Gains from reading research demonstrate the power of new spectra of research findings and methodologies to account for the cognitive activities entailed in school learning. And because, in the schools and classrooms across the country, reading is an essential tool for success, we can hope for significant advances in academic achievement as the policies and practices outlined in these pages become more widespread. (Anderson et al., 1984, p. viii)

The Commission on Reading concluded that phonics instruction should hold an important place in beginning reading instruction and recommended that “teachers of beginning reading should present well-designed phonics instruction” (Anderson et al., 1984, p. 118).

In work supported by the U.S. Department of Education Cooperative Agreement with the Reading Research and Education Center of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Marilyn J. Adams’s work *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* has extended our understanding and knowledge on the issue of phonics and its role in learning to read. After an exhaustive review of pertinent basic and applied research, Adams (1990) concludes,

> In summary, deep and thorough knowledge of letters, spelling patterns, and words, and of the phonological translations of all three, are of inescapable importance to both skillful reading and its acquisition. By extension, instruction designed to develop children’s sensitivity to spellings and their relations to pronunciations should be of paramount importance in the development of reading skills. This is, of course, precisely what is intended of good phonics instruction. (p. 416)

More recently, the National Reading Council’s *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and the National Reading Panel’s (NRP’s) *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000a) provide further support for the importance of phonics in reading instruction. The NRP examined the research literature and concluded that “the meta-analysis revealed that systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read” (p. 9).

Hence, the question regarding phonics instruction no longer appears to be whether it should be included in beginning instruction. Instead, the essential question is one of determining how phonics can be taught most effectively (Manning, 2004; McCardle & Chhabra, 2004; Moats, 2007; Spear-Swerling, 2007).
To assist teachers in teaching phonics effectively, several basic principles should underlie their actions:

1. Phonics must be viewed as a means to an end, not an end in itself. The purpose of phonics is to assist children in systematically decoding words that are unknown to them by teaching them the relationships that exist between letters and speech sounds.

2. Phonics will not work for all children. As with other methods of teaching reading, its effectiveness will run the gamut from ineffective to extremely effective. A challenge for teachers is to determine the proper match between phonics and the individual child and his or her learning style. This includes appropriate teaching responses to the changing demographics of diverse languages and cultural expectations that are now found in classrooms in the United States (Branum-Martin & Foorman, 2010; Byrd, 2008; Chen, 2009; Francis & Mehta, 2010; Genishi & Haas Dyson, 2009; Lane et al., 2009).

3. Phonics helps only if the unknown word is part of the reader’s speaking–listening vocabulary. Since English language learners may not receive the necessary scaffolding for new vocabulary in their home, it is essential to encourage all parents and other caregivers, including teachers, to read aloud daily to beginning readers and provide them with guidance in learning not only the pronunciation of new words but their multiple meanings as well (Fan, 2003; Wallace, 2007). Learning new vocabulary and multiple definitions for new high-utility words is of particular importance in addressing the needs of English language learners whose performance on national assessments continues to be a concern (Carlo et al., 2004). Teachers should pay close attention to the context in which unknown words are found and explain them in terms the learner understands. Take, for instance, the sentence “The boy ran to the slieet.” Although you can venture a guess about the proper pronunciation of slieet, you have no way of knowing whether you are correct because it is a nonsense word and not part of your speaking–listening vocabulary. This process is doubly difficult for English language learners who may not be certain as to whether slieet is a legitimate English word (Adamson, 2006; Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2009).

4. Phonics is a skill that must be used in conjunction with the skills of contextual and structural analysis. Smith (1982) identifies the relationship between phonics and context:

   Phonic strategies cannot be expected to eliminate all the uncertainty when the reader has no idea what the word might be. But if the reader can reduce alternatives in advance—by making use of non-visual information related both to reading and to the subject matter of the text—then phonics can be made most efficient. One way to reduce uncertainty in advance is to employ the mediating technique of making use of context. (p. 147)

5. In learning phonics, children must have the opportunity to see, hear, and say the components they are asked to learn. Initial instruction and practice
in phonics should, therefore, concentrate on oral activities (Jarmulowicz, 2006; Saxton, 2010). To accomplish this goal, teachers need to model continually the correct sounds of letters and words, and children need numerous opportunities to say these sounds and words. It is also important that teachers adhere to a standard of pronunciation that makes learning the sounds of the language consistent, avoiding dialectical markers that might inhibit student learning. Too many teaching materials require students to learn and/or practice phonics in a silent—and therefore ineffective—manner through the use of workbooks and other paper-and-pencil activities.

6. Phonics can be taught by using synthetic (explicit) and/or analytic (implicit) approaches to instruction. Although it must be understood that there is more than one significant difference between the synthetic and analytic approaches to phonics, the most basic difference between the two should be noted. Synthetic programs generally emphasize learning individual sounds, often in isolation, and follow with instruction that teaches children how to blend these individual sounds to form words (a part-to-whole approach). For instance, in the word \textit{bat}, children would first sound out the isolated sounds (/b/ buh, /\text{\`a}/ ah, /t/ tuh) and then blend them together to pronounce \textit{bat}. Analytic programs, on the other hand, begin with whole words and identify individual sounds as part of those words. Teaching reading by starting with a whole word is a top-down approach because frequently the focus of instruction is on the meaning of the word, not on its constituent sounds. Efforts are made to avoid pronouncing letter sounds in isolation (a whole-to-part approach). On this point, the Commission on Reading (Anderson et al., 1984) writes,

In the judgment of the Commission, isolating the sounds associated with most letters and teaching children to blend the sounds of letters together to try to identify words are useful instructional strategies. These are the strategies of explicit phonics. However, research provides insufficient justification for strict adherence to either overall philosophy. Probably, the best strategy would draw from both approaches. (p. 42)

In \textit{Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print—A Summary}, Stahl, Osborn, and Lehr (1990) recommend the use of explicit instruction in phonics:

Because most phonemes cannot be pronounced without a vowel, many programs avoid or limit the use of isolated phonemes in their instruction. This practice often leads to potentially confusing instruction. The advantages of asking students to articulate phonemes in isolation outweigh the disadvantages. . . . Phonemes are the basic sounds that make up words in a language. Because beginning readers frequently have difficulty analyzing the sound structures of words, reading programs should include explicit instruction in blending. (p. 126)

The previously cited NRP report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000a) further supports the inclusion of systematic synthetic phonics instruction:

Systematic synthetic phonics instruction had a positive and significant effect on disabled readers’ reading skills. These children improved
substantially in their ability to read words and showed significant, albeit small, gains in their ability to process text as a result of systematic synthetic phonics instruction. This type of phonics instruction benefits both students with learning disabilities and low-achieving students who are not disabled. Moreover, systematic synthetic phonics instruction was significantly more effective in improving low socioeconomic status (SES) children’s alphabetic knowledge and word reading skills than instructional approaches that were less focused on these initial reading skills. (p. 9)

7. “Phonics instruction should be kept simple and it should be completed by the end of second grade for most children” (Anderson et al., 1984, p. 118).

Through improved instruction, gains in reading achievement will be realized. Yet it has become painfully clear that too many teachers received inadequate emphasis on phonics in preservice course work and lack basic knowledge that would allow them to present well-conceived and effective phonics instruction and be confident of its outcome for the learner (Barnyak & Paquette, 2010; Byrd, 2008; Cunningham, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004; Honawar, 2009; Joshi, 2009a, 2009b; MacDonald Connor, Son, Hindman, & Morrison, 2005; Podhajski, Mather, Nathan, & Sammons, 2009; Pufpaff, 2010; Spear-Swerling, Brucker, & Alfano, 2006).

The following chapters are designed to overcome this limiting factor by providing prospective teachers with a phonics knowledge base and teaching strategies that support it. Both will help teachers provide beginning readers with programs based on well-established principles of effective reading instruction.

CHAPTER 1: PRACTICE

1. Phonics (is, is not) the single most important factor in reading success. (Circle one.)

2. For most children, phonics instruction should be completed by the end of ____________ grade.

3. Phonics is most effective when it is utilized with skills such as ________________ and ________________ analysis.

4. The purpose of phonics is to assist children in systematically decoding words that are unknown to them by teaching them the relationships that exist between ________________ and ________________.

5. Phonics programs that emphasize the learning of individual sounds, often in isolation, and follow with instruction that teaches children how to blend these individual sounds to form words are known as (analytic, synthetic) programs. (Circle one.)
6. (Analytic, Synthetic) phonics programs begin with whole words and identify individual sounds as parts of those words. (Circle one.)

7. Explain the importance of learning high-utility vocabulary words for English language learners:

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

8. Think back to your earliest school experiences. Visualize the methods by which you were taught to read. What role did phonics play?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

9. Why is it instructionally ineffective to have children practice phonics by filling out workbook pages and ditto sheets?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

10. Explain the following statement: “Phonics must be viewed as a means to an end, not an end in itself.”

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
11. Summarize the latest research as it relates to the use of systematic synthetic phonics instruction in beginning reading programs.

POINTS TO PONDER: AN INVITATION TO DIALOGUE

With a partner or with a small group of other educators, discuss the following questions:

12. What is the hardest aspect of teaching phonics for you?
13. When teaching phonics, which aspects do children in your classroom find most challenging?
14. What are some of the effective resources offered by the required reading material within your classroom?
15. How do you integrate meaningful language into your phonics lessons?

For pronunciation standards and additional information regarding definitions used in this text, readers are encouraged to consult Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary at http://www.m-w.com.
Phonics Pretest

This pretest is designed to provide readers with feedback that should assist them in assessing their knowledge of phonics content. An analysis of results will help identify specific content problems and provide a focus as readers work through the text. Each question is coded for easy reference to the text location where additional information related to the content is found. Where itemized lists are cited, the page number and then the list number are cited. For example, “40.20” indicates the information is found on page 40 at list item number 20.

MATCHING

Match the words listed below with the appropriate definitions numbered 1 to 10.

- a. phoneme
- b. digraph
- c. syllable
- d. phonogram
- e. phonics
- f. grapheme
- g. macron
- h. closed syllable
- i. consonant blend
- j. diphthong

1. Two letters that stand for a single phoneme.
2. A letter or combination of letters that represents a phoneme.
3. Any syllable that ends with a consonant phoneme.
4. A method in which basic phonetics, the study of human speech sounds, is used to teach beginning reading.
5. The smallest sound unit of a language that distinguishes one word from another.
6. A letter sequence comprised of a vowel grapheme and an ending consonant grapheme(s).
7. A single vowel sound made up of a blend of two vowel sounds in immediate sequence and pronounced in one syllable.
8. Sounds in a syllable represented by two or more letters that are blended together without losing their own identities.
9. A unit of pronunciation that consists of a vowel alone or a vowel with one or more consonants.

10. The symbol placed over a vowel letter to show it is pronounced as a long sound.

TRUE–FALSE

11. The irregularity of vowel sounds is a basic problem of phonics.

12. The *schwa* sound is generally spelled in a consistent manner.

13. Phonics is the most important skill required for effective reading.

14. Synthetic phonics teaches students explicitly to convert letters into sounds and then blend the sounds to form recognizable words.

15. A grapheme may be composed of one or more letters.

16. Each syllable must contain only one vowel letter.

17. In decoding multisyllabic words, syllabication should precede the application of vowel generalizations.

18. There are approximately 100 ways to spell the 44 phonemes.

19. By the time the average child enters school, his or her auditory discrimination skills are fully developed.

20. The history of phonics shows that a phonics approach to teaching reading has been looked on favorably by most reading authorities over the past 50 years.


22. Changing demographics in the United States makes it highly likely that more than one language will be spoken in your classroom.

23. Changes in technology are significantly changing instruction in phonics.

24. Bilingual children in English-speaking classrooms typically progress at the same level as their peers.

25. Dialogue versus monologue is an effective teaching strategy when working with children learning phonics.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

26. Which of the following is a sound?
   a. grapheme
   b. vowel
   c. digraph
   d. none of the above
27. Which of the following words contains an open syllable?
   a. love  
   b. son  
   c. through  
   d. fire

28. Which of the following words contains a digraph?
   a. fly  
   b. bring  
   c. blond  
   d. home

29. Which of the following words contains letters that represent a diphthong?
   a. low  
   b. meat  
   c. through  
   d. boy

30. How many phonemes are represented by the word *night*?
   a. 1  
   b. 2  
   c. 3  
   d. 5

31. How many phonemes are represented by the word *boat*?
   a. 1  
   b. 2  
   c. 3  
   d. 4

32. Which of the following pairs contains the same vowel phoneme?
   a. book—room  
   b. too—shoe  
   c. wool—food  
   d. none of the above

33. Which of the following letters do not represent phonemes that are identified by their own name?
   a. t and s  
   b. b and d  
   c. y and z  
   d. c and q

34. Which of the following consonant letters are most phonemically inconsistent in representing more than one sound?
   a. b and d  
   b. c and s  
   c. r and t  
   d. m and p
35. Which of the following letter pairs represents a consonant blend?
   a. ch
   b. br
   c. th
   d. -ng

36. Which of the following nonsense words would most likely represent the “soft c” sound?
   a. cint
   b. cule
   c. coble
   d. calope

37. Which of the following nonsense words would most likely represent the “hard g” sound?
   a. giltion
   b. seg
   c. buge
   d. gymp

38. Which of the following consonant letters affects the vowel that precedes it?
   a. m
   b. t
   c. r
   d. none of the above

39. Which of the following words does not contain a consonant blend?
   a. fruit
   b. why
   c. blue
   d. flower

40. Which of the following words contains a closed syllable?
   a. low
   b. doubt
   c. dough
   d. boy

Circle the item in each list below that does not belong. Explain your reason for each.

41. sl tr bl th cl

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Phonics Pretest

42. sh wh st ng ch

43. a y i s w

44. owl out low pound

45. gym gum game goat

The following questions should be answered by using the vowel generalizations that are often taught in elementary schools. Each question requires the vowel pronunciation contained in a nonsense word.

_____ 46. The a in kaic has the same sound as that found in:
   a. art.
   b. may.
   c. map.
   d. None of the above.

_____ 47. The e in clek has the same sound as that found in:
   a. be.
   b. err.
   c. end.
   d. None of the above.

_____ 48. The o in kote has the same sound as that found in:
   a. not.
   b. or.
   c. go.
   d. boy.

_____ 49. The a in psa has the same sound as that found in:
   a. art.
   b. may.
   c. map.
   d. None of the above.
50. The *i* in *sirp* has the same sound as that found in:
   a. in.
   b. girl.
   c. high.
   d. None of the above.

51. The *a* in *woab* has the same sound as that found in:
   a. art.
   b. may.
   c. map.
   d. None of the above.

52. The *u* in *kupp* has the same sound as that found in:
   a. hurt.
   b. up.
   c. rude.
   d. None of the above.

53. The *u* in *nue* has the same sound as that found in:
   a. hurt.
   b. up.
   c. use.
   d. None of the above.

Indicate where the syllabic divisions occur in the following vowel–consonant letter patterns, nonsense words, or real words. Knowledge of syllabication generalizations is essential. There are no consonant digraphs in questions 49 through 52 (C = consonant letter, V = vowel letter).

54. CVCVCC
   a. CVC-VCC
   b. CV-CVCC
   c. CVCV-CC
   d. CV-CV-CC

55. CVCCVC
   a. CV-CCVC
   b. CVCC-VC
   c. CVC-CVC
   d. CV-CC-VC

56. CVCCCV
   a. CVC-CV
   b. CV-CCV
   c. CVCC-V
   d. C-V-CCV
Phonics Pretest

57. CCVCVCC
   a. CCVC-VCC
   b. CCV-C-VCC
   c. CC-VC-VCC
   d. CCV-CVCC

58. intayed
   a. in-tay-ed
   b. in-tayed
   c. in-ta-yed
   d. intay-ed

59. makution
   a. ma-ku-tion
   b. mak-u-tion
   c. mak-u-ti-on
   d. ma-ku-ti-on

60. sleble
   a. sleb-le
   b. sleble
   c. sl-e-ble
   d. sle-ble

61. exanthema
   a. exan-the-ma
   b. ex-an-the-ma
   c. ex-an-them-a
   d. e-xan-the-ma

62. getker
   a. ge-tker
   b. get-ker
   c. getk-er
   d. getker

Reading programs often introduce long and short vowel sounds based on spelling patterns. In the following patterns (V = vowel letter; C = consonant letter), indicate which vowel sound you would expect the pattern to represent (L = long sound; S = short sound).

63. VC
64. VCe (e = final e in word)
65. CVCC
66. CV
67. List three key roles teachers should play while teaching phonics in the multilingual classroom:
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 

68. When diagnosing phonics ability in the classroom, why is it important to consider the cultural background of the learner?

69. How does the process of teacher self-reflection relate to phonics instruction?

70. What evidence is there to support the notion that teacher preparation in phonics instruction at the preservice level needs to be augmented?

CHAPTER 2: PRACTICE

Check your answers against those listed in Appendix A. If you had difficulty, don’t be discouraged. Rather, analyze your results to identify areas that gave you the most trouble. List these problem areas below. As you work through the text, use this information to provide a focus for your study.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
CUMULATIVE REVIEW: CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

1. The major word-recognition methods include phonics, whole-word methodology, ____________, ____________, ____________, ____________, and dictionary use.

2. Generally, the phonics instruction that appeared 35 years ago (is, is not) the same as that taught today. (Circle one.)

3. There (are, are not) significant research data that show the importance of phonics in beginning reading instruction. (Circle one.)

4. According to the latest research, the advantages of systematic synthetic phonics instruction (outweigh, do not outweigh) the disadvantages. (Circle one.)

5. Over the past 50 years, using a phonics approach to teaching beginning reading (has, has not) been consistently looked on favorably by most reading authorities. (Circle one.)

6. Learning letter sounds in isolation and blending them together to form words is an example of (synthetic, analytic) phonics. (Circle one.)

7. Why do most authorities suggest that phonics instruction be completed by the end of second grade for most children?

8. Explain the difference between explicit (synthetic) phonics instruction and implicit (analytic) phonics instruction.
9. From what you know about the whole-language philosophy, do you believe it is compatible with the teaching of phonics? Explain.

10. If an unknown word is not part of a reader’s speaking–listening vocabulary, why will phonics be of little value in the process of decoding?