



Cocoplum Caregiver Connect

The *Natural* Development of Academic Skills

11/19/2025 @ 9:30AM and 6PM

## Part 1: How does learning happen? (20 min)

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES

- What are your memories of learning how to ride a bike or pump your legs on a swing?
- What are your memories of learning how to read or learning algebra?
- What do your personal experiences with learning tell you about the development of new skills?

### LEARNING

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAIRXlckfMA&ab\\_channel=devusingh](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAIRXlckfMA&ab_channel=devusingh)

### DISCUSSION

- What were some of the emotions you experienced (felt and witnessed) watching *Piper*?
- When did you notice the following: modeling; coaching; discovery; practice?
- What role did motivation play?
- What was the role of learning readiness?
- What can we take away from this short film about the process of learning?

## Part 2: How reading skills develop (15 min)

The science of reading:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2HHrKpjlYM&ab\\_channel=HillLearningCenter](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2HHrKpjlYM&ab_channel=HillLearningCenter)

Key Terms & Concepts	Reactions	Questions

- 5 basic skills excerpted from Dept of Education article (handout attached)
  - Phonemic awareness (not alphabet letter names)
  - Phonics
  - Vocabulary
  - Fluency (learning to read → reading to learn)

- Comprehension

### Part 3: How writing skills develop (15 min.)

#### SHARE

- Share with the group a memory of your child drawing or writing something.
- What is your earliest memory of your own writing?
- What are the most important purposes of writing?

#### STAGES OF WRITING DEVELOPMENT

- Writing development: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-writing-develops>

### Part 4: How mathematical skills develop (15 min.)

#### SHARE

- What do you remember about math class in elementary school?
- Did you then, and do you now, think of yourself as a mathematician?

#### LEARNING

- Math Development: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWLqem\\_q2fY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWLqem_q2fY) (6:00-18:30)

### Part 5: Keep the playful learning at home! (15 min.)

#### SHARE

- ☐ What do reading and writing look like in your home?
- ☐ Where does math naturally exist in your home?

Cocoplum tips for keeping the learning at home playful and full of joy:

- Read together for pleasure every day
- Games (check out Peacable Kingdom games and Zingo!)
- Notes to each other and others (like in the lunch box!)
- Shopping lists and budgeting
- Cooking and baking that requires measurement
- “I spy” with phonemes (e.g. something that starts with the mmmm sound)
- Rhyming songs and rhyming games
- Making patterns with bead necklaces, shells at the beach, articles of laundry
- Reading together while cooking, building things

## **5 Basic Skills of Reading**

A handout to accompany Cocoplum Caregiver Connect: Natural Development of Academic Skills

Excerpts from *A Closer Look at the Five Essential Components of Effective Reading Instruction: A Review of Scientifically Based Reading Research for Teachers* (2004), by Learning Pointed Associates, Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED512569.pdf>.

### **Phonemic Awareness**

Phonemic awareness is commonly defined as the understanding that spoken words are made up of separate units of sound that are blended together when words are pronounced. However, it can also be thought of as skill at hearing and producing the separate sounds in words, dividing or segmenting words into their component sounds, blending separate sounds into words, and recognizing words that sound alike or different.

#### *What Are Phonemes?*

Phonemes are the sounds that make up spoken words. They are the smallest segments of sounds within spoken language. For example, the word no is made up of two phonemes: /n/ and /o/. We hear them as a single word because we blend the individual phonemes into a unit as we pronounce the word. Phonemes are represented in written language by graphemes. Graphemes may be single letters (a, t, k, e, or n) or clusters of letters that represent single sounds (th, sh, oo, ough, or ck). Think of phonemes not as “the sounds that letters make” but as the sounds of speech that can be represented by letters.

### **Phonics**

Understanding phonics and the purpose of phonics instruction involves thinking about how written language was created. Spoken language had existed for a very long time before the need for written communication brought about the invention of various alphabets. When people began inventing the letters of an alphabet to represent the sounds of their spoken language, they eventually saw the need for a set of rules to make spelling consistent from word to word. That is, they understood it would be important for the same letter or letters to be used each time a particular sound was represented. The rules they created to establish consistency in how speech sounds are represented in print are what we now call phonics rules.

Therefore, we define phonics as a set of rules that specify the relationship between letters in the spelling of words and the sounds of spoken language. For the English language, these relationships are predictable, but not completely consistent. However, they are consistent enough to be very useful to young children in helping them learn to decode unfamiliar words.

#### *What Is the Purpose of Phonics Instruction?*

Phonics instruction is intended to help young readers understand and use the alphabetic principle. This principle says there is a systematic, if sometimes irregular, relationship between graphemes (letters and letter combinations) and phonemes (individual speech sounds). Effective phonics instruction enables children to use these relationships to read and spell words accurately and rapidly. Phonics instruction also serves as a memory aid that helps students remember and apply rules and generalizations for matching sounds and letters.

### **Fluency**

Years ago, fluency was understood to mean rapid word recognition that freed up space in the reader's working memory for use in comprehending the message of the text. That is, fluent readers need to put less effort into word recognition and therefore have more available for comprehension. Later studies of fluency (Rasinski, 1990; Hooks & Jones, 2002) expanded this understanding by clarifying that fluency can also involve grouping words within a sentence into phrases that make what is read easier to comprehend. Grouping words into meaningful phrases and reading with expression helps the reader understand the text by making what is being read resemble natural speech. Therefore, we now understand that fluency is recognizing the words in a text rapidly and accurately and using phrasing and emphasis in a way that makes what is read sound like spoken language.

By definition, automatic behavior of any type occurs without having to be directed by conscious thought. The kind of automatic behavior that is part of fluent reading is no exception. The processing of words in print, the accessing of the correct meaning and pronunciation from the reader's oral vocabulary, and the transfer of that information to working memory all take place without the conscious direction of the reader.

### **Vocabulary**

The term vocabulary refers to words we need to know to communicate with others. There are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and speaking vocabularies are sometimes referred to collectively as oral vocabulary.

#### *Four Types of Vocabulary*

Listening: words we understand when others talk to us

Speaking: words we use when we talk to others

Reading: words we know when we see them in print (sight words and words we can decode)

Writing: words we use when we write

Vocabulary is important in word recognition. Young readers use the pronunciations and meanings of words in their oral vocabulary to help them recognize words they see in print. When children sound out an unfamiliar word, they use the trial pronunciation they have created to search their oral vocabulary. If they find a match and it makes sense in the sentence, they resume reading. If the word is not in their oral vocabulary, they will have a

difficult time recognizing that word in print even if they are able to produce an accurate pronunciation by decoding. Vocabulary also plays an important role in comprehension. Much of the research dealing with the effects of vocabulary instruction on comprehension has involved children in upper-elementary grades and above; however, the findings have implications for improving comprehension in younger children as well. Additionally, vocabulary is important for reading to learn as well as learning to read.

**Comprehension**

Comprehension involves constructing meaning that is reasonable and accurate by connecting what has been read to what the reader already knows and thinking about all of this information until it is understood. Comprehension is the final goal of reading instruction. While fluent decoding is an essential component of skilled reading, (Block & Pressley, 2002) it should be considered a prerequisite to strong comprehension rather than an end in itself.