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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS, PHONEMIC AWARENESS, AND PHONICS

December 28, 2016

How many times have you heard teachers talking about phonics and speech-language pathologists talking about phonemes — and both groups talking about phonological awareness? This has happened so frequently that sometimes they get muddled up in my brain. Here are the definitions and differences between the terms:

1. Phonological Awareness refers to the development of different phonological components of spoken language (Lane & Pullen, 2004, p. 6). Students who have strong phonological awareness recognize when words rhyme. They notice syllable and word patterns. Having phonological awareness skills is directly related to reading ability. The fact that poor readers have weak phonological awareness skills doesn't surprise me.

Phonological awareness skills include:

- Rhyming (similar word endings)
- Alliteration (similar word beginnings)
- Syllable, Word, and Sentence Segmentation (taking everything apart)
- Onsets and Rimes (beginning and endings of words – “Rime” is not misspelled. It is a term used in reading instruction.)
- Phonemes (individual sounds)

2. Phonemic Awareness refers to the knowledge about a phoneme and an individual's ability to detect, blend, segment, and manipulate individual sounds in words. As speech-language pathologists, we know that a phoneme is just one sound. There are 41 phonemes in English that we use to combine into syllables and words when we speak. While a phoneme is just one sound and is the smallest level of speech production, according to reading experts it is actually the highest level of phonological abilities. They say that it develops after children learn to manipulate words and syllables. Children who lack phonemic awareness will have trouble learning phonics and decoding, especially when they need to sound out and blend letters to form new words.

Phonemic awareness skills include:

- Phoneme blending (putting sounds together to make a spoken word)
- Phoneme segmentation (when given a spoken word, a student can segment it into individual phonemes)



Welcome, Speech Pat

I'm Sarah, a bilingual speech pathologist. I love sharing my knowledge gained from over 10 years working in the schools. I'm Illinois-based, having worked in urban, suburban, and rural settings. I want to help you navigate this profession easily through my blog posts and free and paid English, Spanish, and Bilingual resources available in my store! Ask me any question -- I'd love to talk to you.

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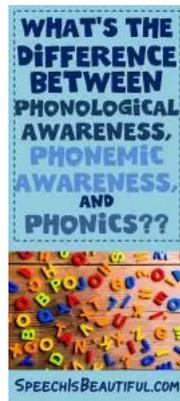


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3. Phonics refers to the teaching of letter-sound associations and the letter patterns used to spell words (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998 p.51). Phonics instruction assumes that the student has phonemic awareness. It also assumes that the student has the alphabetic principle, which refers to understand that there are consistent relationships between letter symbols and letter sounds.

All of these skills are built on a strong foundation of oral language. Wait a second, oral language is my jam as an SLP! That's our core proficiency in our jobs as speech-language pathologists. And we also touch on phonological awareness and phonemic awareness too. I don't do a lot of phonics

So if you ever have a teacher or principal ask you a question about what you do, tell them that you build your students oral language skills so that all of their phonological awareness, phoneme awareness, and phonics skills have a place to put down roots and grow.



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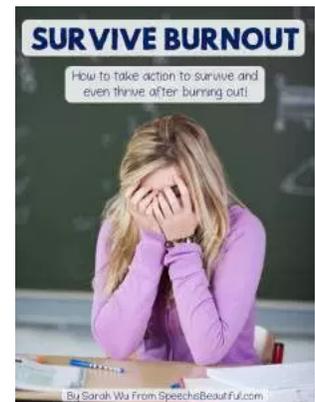
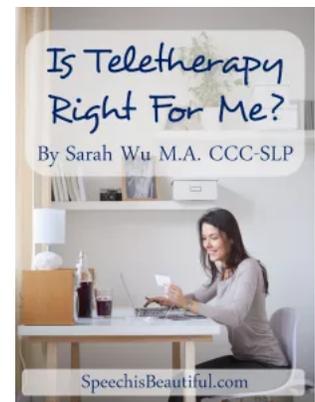
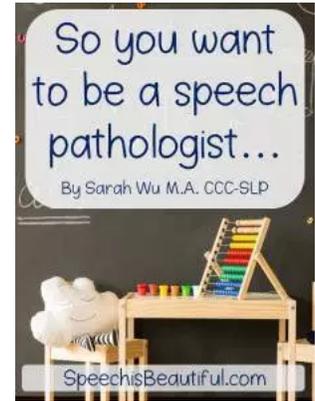
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COMMENTS



Carolina says
January 4, 2017 at 1:35 pm

Wonderful! Thank you!



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susan says

January 4, 2017 at 5:40 pm

Thanks for a great post, Sarah. Many SLPs still don't see reading foundations as an area we "cover," but it is in our wheelhouse. My SLP assessment report template has a whole section devoted to just such distinctions and definitions. They're too important to miss.



Lisette Edgar says

January 4, 2017 at 6:40 pm

Teachers and SLPs often get a bit confused by each other's terminology. Thanks for the recap!