



Synthetic Phonics with Phonemic Awareness explained - in the context of a complete Literacy Program

*Strategy.
Action.
Results.*

Teacher education in the spotlight from Sound Waves and Sound Stories author, Barbara Murray

Synthetic phonics is based on well-developed phonemic awareness of all 43 sounds we use in our spoken English. A working knowledge of phonemic awareness **MUST** be achieved before synthetic phonics can be successfully introduced.

However, phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics are just skills. They do not form a literacy program. Phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics skills are to literacy as counting and recognising and writing numbers are to maths. Nobody would say that they form a complete maths program.

Phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics are the skills students need to quickly and efficiently decode words when reading and encode words when writing. The alphabet letters form the code for encoding and decoding words.

Students need to understand that spoken words are formed with various sounds and those sounds are represented with various letter combinations when writing. Once they can readily use this knowledge for decoding and encoding, they become free to develop word recognition, fluency when reading and to move on to higher level literacy skills and thinking patterns for comprehending and composing spoken and written English.

Phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics play a central part of a literacy program in the early childhood years until the students are proficient with the decoding and encoding skills that lead to reading fluently with meaning and writing accurately also with meaning.

Further up the educational path, phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics skills are very useful when decoding and encoding words that contain more sounds and more complex letter combinations [graphemes] to represent the sounds.

Phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics are skills for life as more complex and less familiar words are encountered when reading, writing, comprehending and composing.

Throughout primary school practising the phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics skills is a worthwhile activity as recognised by educators around the world. Schools that report success with the literacy aspects of the NAPLAN assessment usually have a well-organised and well taught whole school phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics component in their literacy program.

However, phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics are basic skills. They are just a small part of a complete literacy program. People who think phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics are the program are mistaken. All the tried and true valuable teaching methods from the past cannot be replaced with phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics.

Just the same, to create a literacy program without including phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics is like teaching maths without teaching numeration.

I wonder how much experience people who argue that phonics is unnecessary, have in teaching a literacy program using phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics in primary school classrooms.

If you have used direct teaching of synthetic phonics with a phonemic awareness approach, you would know how quickly students attain the skills to read and write successfully which allow them to move on to the higher-level thinking activities.

People who properly include synthetic phonics with phonemic awareness in their teaching have nothing but praise for the results.

However, the amazing success that can be achieved by including synthetic phonics with phonemic awareness in a literacy program, depends on teacher expertise with direct teaching methods and a full understanding of synthetic phonics with phonemic awareness themselves. Sadly, this is not always part of teacher education.

To read more information on phonemic awareness and synthetic phonics visit <https://www.barbaramurray-author.com.au/blog-news>

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