Teaching Phonics to Adult Students Using Job Relevant Reading Materials

Andrea R. Stridiron

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TEACHING PHONICS TO ADULT STUDENTS
USING JOB RELEVANT READING MATERIALS

Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Committee of the
Department of Education and Human Development
State University of New York
College at Brockport
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Education

by
Andrea R. Stridiron
University of New York
College at Brockport
Brockport, New York
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Abstract

When adult students make the decision to return to school after being away a year or more, they may have forgotten many skills, rules and/or generalizations of reading that will be crucial for their success in the workforce. One of these is phonics.

Many students have forgotten basic phonics rules. This has prevented them from reading for pleasure, but more importantly, it has kept them from being successful on the job. It keeps them from reading and following simple instructions or understanding written memos from their supervisors or fellow workers. Lack of following directions can lead to accidents and unproductivity, and may eventually cost them their job.

This study asked the question: Will teaching phonics to adult students help improve their comprehension skills so that they might better perform their responsibilities while on the job?

Phonics instruction was given daily to a study group of 13 women and 1 man from an inner city ABE/GED program.
Prior to instruction, the study group was administered the pre-test of the Bader Reading and Language Inventory phonics subtest and the TABE comprehension sub test. Instruction lasted for a period of seven weeks. Job relevant materials such as the classified ads in the local newspaper were used because it helped to keep the students motivated. (Most of these students will be entering the job market in the next year or two). After seven weeks of phonics instruction, the study group was administered phonics and comprehension post-tests.

A control group from another inner city ABE/GED program was selected consisting of 11 women. The same pre-tests were administered. This group did not receive any phonics instruction.

There was no statistical difference between the study and control groups on the pre-tests. When administered the post-tests, both groups made gains, however, the control group performed somewhat better than the study group.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitions of Terms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need For Study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Review of the Literature</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word Recognition</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics Instruction in the Nation</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics Instruction in Rochester, NY</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy and the Adult Learner</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Phonics to Adults</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Design of the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials and Instruments</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Purpose</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tests of Adult Basic Education</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bader Reading and Language Inventory</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Purpose</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Further Study</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Adult Literacy Programs</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to seek information that would determine the value of phonics instruction in an ABE/GED program.

Research Questions

1. Does teaching phonics improve the scores on the phonics test of the Bader Reading and Language Inventory?

2. Does teaching phonics improve the reading level of adult student as measured by the TABE test (comprehension subtest)?
DEFINITIONS

**ABE:** (Adult Basic Education) for students who fall below the test scores for the GED ready. ABE is designed to try to raise a student's level of competency to where the GED is obtainable. Students study independently or in a classroom setting.

**GED:** (General Education Diploma) preparation. Work is focused on passing the test that will earn the student a high school diploma equivalency. Students can study independently or in a classroom setting.

**Phonics:** The association of sounds with letters and letter combinations so that an unknown word can be pronounced at sight.

**TABE:** (Test of Adult Basic Education) administered when a student enters a GED program. There is a locator test which is given first. The locator diagnoses the potential successful completion of the given TABE test. There are four levels of competency; E (easy), M (mediate), D (difficult), and A (advanced).
Need for the Study

Many adults who do not have their high school diploma will be entering the job market in greater numbers because of new welfare reforms. They have been out of school for many years. In addition, they may not have been successful when they were in school. When they begin a new job, they will be required to read various documents as well as communicate with fellow employees and employers. Illiteracy and aliteracy are definite factors in American low productivity and are a threat to the well being of this country (Jones & Medley, 1987).

When reading has not been a high priority, having to read the classifieds in the newspaper or filling out applications can become a difficult task. After obtaining a job, keeping it becomes a challenge because now the adult has to read directions. If they cannot follow directions because they are unable to read, unemployment will be the next step, and it will become increasingly harder to find a good paying job.

There are not many jobs that don’t require some reading, so adults who are unable to read are faced with low paying,
backbreaking jobs. They will go from job to job within a short period of time until they finally give up.

Until recently, these adults could depend on welfare, but with tough new laws going into effect, many adults will not have welfare to fall back on.

Being able to read will play an important role in whether or not an adult succeeds in the world of work. More than ever, it will be increasingly important for adult educators to make sure that they are sending out prospective employees who will be able to read. They should be equipped with the skills they will need to follow written instructions.

Why choose job relevant materials? There are basically two reasons why they are chosen. [1] Adults learners who read poorly do not read for enjoyment, so choosing materials that would motivate them is essential. [2] Since the emphasis in adult education in Rochester and the state of New York is on school to work, there are no better materials to use to prepare adults for the workforce.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Nature of Reading

What does it mean to read? According to Weaver (1994)

Underlying some approaches is the implicit notion that first and foremost, reading means identifying words. These approaches tend to emphasize phonics (letter/sound relationships for identifying words) and/or emphasize the recognition of words as wholes. Underlying other approaches is the implicit notion that first and foremost, reading means constructing meaning, and using everything you know to do so. (pp. 1 & 3)

Reading is receiving communications; it is making discriminative responses to graphic symbols and decoding those symbols to speech, and it is getting meaning from the printed page (Gibson, 1985).

Reading is also making sense of print and of language that has been written down (Johns & Lenski, 1997), and it involves the orchestration of many different skills and types of knowledge (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997).
How does the process of reading occur? In addition to obtaining information from the letters and words in a text, reading involves selecting and using knowledge about people, places and things, and knowledge about texts and their organization (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985).

According to Gillet and Temple, (1990) one of the most important areas related to success in reading is the ability to manipulate phonemes (sounds). This skill enables the reader to use letter-sound relationships in reading and writing (Thistlethwaite, 1994).

At most times during the history of reading, some attention has been given to phonics. At most times too, however, the question “Should phonics be taught?” has been asked.

For teachers of beginning readers, arguments result in a bewildering list of choices about what to do; [1] should students learn sounds before they learn the alphabet; [2] should students be able to identify a sound for each letter in a word, blending the sounds and identify the word, or identify the word as a unit;
Word Recognition

Word recognition strategies are organized into systematic ways to determine the identity of unfamiliar words. The strategies are developed over time in a reasonably predictable sequence that begins long before children read storybooks and long before they go to school (Fox, 1996). Stanovich (1986) identifies this same strategy as awareness, in the first of three stages in word recognition, where readers develop a conceptual knowledge of the nature of written language and its relationship to speech.

In the second stage, accuracy, according to Stanovich, (1986), the emphasis is on accurate decoding of words where the acquiring knowledge of words and sound-symbol correspondences are strategically applied to unlock simple tasks.

The third stage is automaticity, and it is where the reader begins to develop automatic word-recognition skills so that the
process of recognizing words is transparent and the reader can concentrate fully on the text (Samuels, 1985).

Samuels (1985) also states that the size of the visual unit used in recognizing words might change depending on the task.

When the task is proofreading for spelling errors, the unit is probably the letter, whereas when reading for meaning the unit is probably the word.

**Phonics**

When children read more, they have opportunities to grow in vocabulary, concepts, and knowledge of how text is written. However, children who do not learn to decode will not get this same opportunity. It can be compared to the "rich get richer" and the "poor get poorer" - a child improves in reading if he/she learns to decode early, but a child who does not, falls behind in his/her reading ability as he/she progresses in school (Stanovich, 1986). So it is that an adult can go through school not learning to decode.

In phonics programs, the emphasis is on the mastery of sound-symbol correspondences, with less attention given to
meaning (Maggart & Zintz, 1992). The underlying assumption is that if the words are pronounced, then meaning will automatically follow.

The value of teaching phonics depends on how many correspondences there are between the letters and sounds of English. A correspondence exists whenever a particular letter (or sometimes a group of letters) represents a particular sound (or absence of sound) (Smith 1978).

There has been a lot of research conducted concerning the utility of phonetic generalizations taught to students. Clymer (1963) identified 121 phonetic generalizations that appeared in four basal reading programs. After combining overly specific generalizations and deleting overly general ones, he ended up with 45 generalizations. Of the 45 generalizations, 17 had a utility rate of above 75% with 6 found to be extremely nonfunctional as they had only a 35% utility figure (Carnine, Silbert & Kameenui, 1997).

Similar studies have been conducted by Emans (1967), Baily (1967), and Bürmeister (1968). The findings were not exact because of the variations in the words studied. The
results of these studies point out the need for teachers to have a specific knowledge of phonic generalizations so that they may delete or modify ill-founded generalization appearing in commercial programs (Carnine, Silbert, & Kameenui, 1997).

Students who have failed to learn to recognize and spell words have a belief that they cannot learn to read and spell. To further complicate the matter, approximately 28% of the words in beginning reading and spelling texts cannot be spelled phonically (Thomas, & Nagel, 1985). In response to this situation, they have developed a creative visualization approach for adults and children who have not learned with traditional instruction. In a pre-assessment phase, students’ eye movement patterns as they are related to visually remembered material are calibrated. Over the next five days activities include accessing pattern, practicing blinking responses, picturing new words on the forehead or chest of a favorite hero and spelling new words backwards, then forwards. Words are reviewed; and color is used in the visualization. The students practice the visualization methods with difficult words, then practice
visualization with “chunks” of the words with which they have difficulty (Thomas & Nagel, 1985).

There are two major opposing viewpoints as to how phonics should be taught: holistically or phonetically (Vail, 1991). Both proponents want children to read and write easily, accurately, and joyfully. However, this on-going debate has led to confrontations and extreme positions, instead of united action on behalf of our children.

The first viewpoint is that of Jean Chall. Chall puts reading in stages. At Stage 1: initial reading and decoding (ages 6 and 7), the child learns the relation between letters and sounds and between printed and spoken words. The child is also able to read simple text containing high frequency words and phonically regular words. Using skill and insight, the child will be able to “sound out” new one-syllable words (Chall, 1988).

Stage 2: confirmation and frequency (ages 7 and 8), the child reads simple, familiar stories and selections with increasing fluency. This is done by consolidating the basic
decoding elements, sight vocabulary, and meaning context in the reading of familiar stories and selections (Chall, 1988).

By Stage 3: reading for learning the new (ages 9 through 13), the child is reading to learn new ideas, gain new knowledge, experience new feelings, and learn new attitudes (Chall, 1988).

The second viewpoint is that of Kenneth Goodman. Goodman claims that the role in phonics in reading, in learning to read and in reading instruction, is probably the most widely misunderstood and misrepresented aspect of language education today (Goodman, 1993). Throughout his book *Phonics Phacts*, Goodman emphasizes that teaching phonics alone is a mistake because although complex, English phonics is not random nor capricious. There are rules; the trouble is they are not simple, and they vary from one dialect of English to another (Goodman, 1993).

The controversy over how to teach students to read is still raging among educators, public school administrators and other decision makers (R. B. Spalding & W. T. Spalding, 1986). Nationwide, pressures have forced many administrators and
teachers to choose either whole language or phonics (Vail, 1991).

We do know that it is important to attain decoding skills early because it accurately predicts later skills in reading comprehension. There is strong and persuasive evidence that children who get off to a slow start rarely become strong readers (Stanovich, 1986).

Phonics Instruction in the Nation

There are many systematic approaches to phonics instruction. Phonics is taught to many beginning readers by way of major published reading programs. The purpose of phonic instruction is to get across the alphabetic principle, the principle that there are systematic relationships between letters and sounds.

The English language uses codes that involve a system of mappings between letters and sounds. A person is said to have “broken the code” once he or she has learned those mappings. That individual can now apply that knowledge of mapping to
figure out plausible pronunciations of printed words (Beck & Juel, 1993).

The basic idea in phonics instruction is to help the immature reader learn the connection between letters or letter groups and their speech sounds (Fry, 1995). Each symbol or letter in our writing system would represent one speech sound and, in turn, every separate sound would have a single representative symbol. Fry suggests that phonics instruction should begin in kindergarten under the guise of reading readiness activities (playing with letters, coloring them, and mentioning their sounds), and under the guise of speech correction (poems that emphasize different speech sounds). Furthermore, he suggests that regular phonics lessons should be taught at the first grade level and continued until the third grade. At the third grade level and beyond, phonics should be taught using repetition and remedial lessons. In phonics, as in everything else, you start where the student is and then you test, teach, test again, and teach some more (Fry 1995).

At its most basic level, the alphabetic principle is the notion that letters in words may stand for specific sounds.
(Stahl, Duffy-Hester & Stahl, 1998). It is recommended that letter sounds be taught before letter names. Although young children are often taught the alphabet as an initial reading skill, knowledge of letter names is not as useful in beginning reading as a knowledge of letter sounds (Carnine, Silbert & Kameenui, 1997).

Early research by Barrett (1965), de Hirsh, Jansky and Langford (1966), Bond and Dykstra (1967), and Dystra (1967) found that letter-name knowledge to be the best single predictor of first grade reading. Contrasting research by Jeffrey and Samuels (1967), Johnson (1969) and Ohnmacht (1969) state that letter-name knowledge does not seem to have any beneficial effect on reading. However, there is evidence that letter-sound training does have a positive effect (Samuels, 1971).

In phonics instruction, the emphasis is on the mastery of sound-symbol correspondences, with less attention given to meaning (Maggart & Zintz, 1992). The underlying assumption is that if the words are pronounced, then meaning will automatically follow.
The aim of phonics instruction is to provide readers with rules that will enable them to predict how a written word will sound from the way it is spelled (Smith, 1978). Again, we have the two schools of thought on how to teach phonics.

Chall tells us that direct instruction in letter-sound relations (phonics) and practice is how Stage 1 of reading development is acquired. At this stage, reading of simple stories using words with phonic elements are taught along with words of high frequency (Chall, 1988).

Stage 2 is acquired by direct instruction in advanced decoding skills while wide reading (with instruction and independently) of familiar, interesting materials will help promote fluent reading (Chall, 1988).

As the stages progress, less emphasis is put on decoding. Chall says that by Stage 3 (ages 9 through 13) reading of textbooks, reference works, trade books, newspapers, and magazines that contain new ideas and values is how this stage is acquired (Chall, 1988). This stage is also acquired by learning unfamiliar vocabulary and syntax, systematic study of words
and reacting to the text through discussion, answering questions, and writing (Chall, 1988).

Whole language teachers think that phonics is important, but they do not think it is the only language system on which to focus (Thistletwaite, 1994).

Goodman’s own view of learning to read builds on Piaget, Vygotsky and Halliday:

I see children constructing their understanding of the world and their responses to it in the context of the culture they belong to. And I see them as actively inventing language as they need it, but doing so in the context of the language of their home and community. Children who grow up in a literate environment (most children in the modern world) have begun to become literate long before they come to school. The dynamic dialectic between personal invention and social convention is the dominant force in language and literacy development, as it is in all learning. (1993, pp. 82-83).

Goodman sees reading from a holistic point of view. He believes that learning to read and write is a matter of learning to comprehend written language which involves learning to apply the psycholinguistic strategies already learned in listening, with orthographic rather than phonological input.

According to the Commission on Reading, Becoming a Nation of Readers (1985) there are two types of phonics instruction, explicit and implicit. Explicit phonics instruction blends isolated sounds of letters to produce words. For
example, a teacher may point to each letter and ask the children to say the separate sounds, /s/ /i/ /t/. Then the model is blended by extending the sounds /ssiit/. Finally, the sound is collapsed into sit.

In implicit phonics instruction, the sound associated with a letter is never supposed to be pronounced in isolation as it is with explicit. Instead, a list of words on the board might read, sand, soft, slip. Students are asked what all the words have in common and eventually s is indicated as the beginning letter. From this the teacher would point out that the word begins with the sound for s, or have the students think of other words that begin with the same letter (Commission on Reading: Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985). Implicit phonics is designed to have readers use known words to discover strategies for decoding unknown words (Tierney, 1990). Implicit phonics instruction is the most used instruction in the United States (Commission on Reading: Becoming a Nation of Readers, 1985.)
How does phonics instruction help learners understand what they are reading? It is agreed that children who are taught phonics at an early age get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. When there is strong emphasis on phonics, children tend to do better on tests of sentence and story comprehension (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

Unfortunately, data on the long-term effects of phonics instruction are insufficient. In one of the few longitudinal studies, children in kindergarten and first grade, who had received a considerable amount of phonics instruction, did much better on word identification tests and comprehension tests by the time they had reached third grade (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). By the time this group had reached the sixth grade, they were still doing better on word identification-tests than those children who had not received phonics instruction. However, the advantage in comprehension had disappeared. This leads researchers to believe that early phonics emphasis has less influence on comprehension as the years passed, probably due to the increasing importance of
knowledge of the topic, vocabulary, and reasoning ability on advanced comprehension tests, (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985).

Phonics should not be considered as a method for teaching reading; rather, it is only one cue system used in identifying words (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). However, the teaching of only phonics is still widespread in many schools. In fact, there are some professionals who think that there is a conspiracy in inner city schools by ultra-conservatives forces who tend to promote the traditional conservative agenda of maintaining a stratified society, through both the hidden and overt curriculum (Weaver, 1994).

1. Students from nonmainstream homes, typically lower socioeconomic and minority children, are often judged unready for school, lacking in the experiences and therefore the skills that will ensure success - specifically, certain emergent literacy skills already developed by many mainstream children (P. Shannon, 1985, 1989b, 1992; Giroux, 1983).

2. Nonmainstream students, especially those in so-called lower ability groups or tracks, typically receive authoritarian instruction that serves to socialize them into subordinate roles.

3. For such students, the overt curriculum - in language arts and reading, particularly - consists more of completing worksheets on isolated skills, such as phonics, than of reading and constructing meaning from connected texts.

4. Because education in our schools depends so heavily upon the ability to read, these less successful readers typically are offered a less challenging education than their more advantaged mainstream counterparts. Ultimately, they tend simply to receive less education: they drop out of school.

5. Having received less education, such students typically must settle for lower-paying lower-status jobs.

6. Thus, they in turn are likely to raise families that are non-mainstream, at least in economic terms. And their non-mainstream children all too often go through the same cycle (pp. 299).
Furthermore, students who seem most likely to be condemned to such authoritarian and stagnating instruction are those taught in compensatory Chapter 1 programs for the disadvantaged, and those called learning disabled (Weaver, 1994). The implication is that the teaching of phonics will create people who cannot think for themselves.

Phonics is a brief subject. Its goal is to apply phonics knowledge rapidly, below the level of consciousness, for real reading (Albert, 1990). A steady diet of phonics and sight-word worksheets removes reading from the act of communication (Brockman, 1994).

Phonics Instruction in Rochester, NY

Since the majority of the students involved in the present study would have been in elementary school during the 70s and 80s, it is important to know what was being taught as far as reading was concerned in the nation as well as in Rochester, New York.

Mary L. Burkhardt, former Director of Reading K-12 in
the Rochester City School District (1974-1983) says that in the first year of teaching in a high school, she found that many of her students had previously been told that reading just wasn't their thing, that they should just keep working and try not to worry about their reading problem. At that time, only "look and say" was used in the schools (Flesch, 1981). When tested, most of the students were found to have a decoding problem. They were spending more time guessing at words rather than being able to sound them out. They were not reading fluently, confidently decoding the more difficult words, reading complete phrases and thus reading for meaning (Flesch, 1981). The reading instruction in Rochester used during Burkhardt's tenure was the Open Court Reading Program and DISTAR.

From around 1985 until the summer of 1997, Rochester used a variety of different basals such as DC Heath and Silver Burdett that relied heavily on phonics. Not all teachers were using the books in the same way, even across grade levels.

There was a two-day workshop for K-6 grade teachers. The goal was to get all teachers and staff familiar and trained with the Houghton-Mifflin series in addition to providing children with the same instruction, the same stories and activities no matter what school they attend. If a child moves frequently, he/she will be able to continue with the same reading instructions as in his/her previous school.

**Literacy and the Adult Learner**

In 1985, the Texas Adult Performance Level Study found that of the 57 million American adults who could not adequately perform basic tasks, 34 million were able to function, but not proficiently. At the same time, literacy demands appear to be increasing, reading and writing are required in 90% of all occupations, and the difficulty levels of work-related reading material are frequently at the high school level or above (Fink & Devine, 1993).

In 1988, Kitz (1988) found that there were 23 million adults in the United States who were unable to read a newspaper or fill out a job application. For many of these
Americans, illiteracy represents a barrier to employment and personal fulfillment.

While there is a long-term tradition in elementary and secondary schools to lure students to read that which they might not have ordinarily chosen themselves, there has been, unfortunately, no such tradition in adult reading. Instruction often remains a rehash of previously unsuccessful skills building and strategies teaching exercises. Adult learners are reading materials that are of no significance to them or that appeal to them.

Perhaps, because of welfare reform, reading can be of more interest to adult learners. If they know that they have to get a job within a prescribed number of months or years, the instructor can help by motivating the adult learners to read the classifieds, fill out job applications, and prepare resumes. The instructor, therefore, will be able to bring to the adult learners reading materials that will have more impact on their lives.

Many adult students come into ABE/GED programs unable to read or write very well. Their comprehension skills are poor. Many have dropped out of school before the 10th
grade for various reasons. Teaching phonics to adults poses a challenge because by now, if they are reading poorly, they have been doing so for many years.

Unwin (1989) found that approximately ninety percent of students in an ABE/GED program indicated that they did not like to read for recreation, nor did they like to write. Some of the reasons given were that reading is too boring or reading has nothing to do with their own lives. Yet they must be able to read, whether it is the newspaper, job applications or labels on medications.

The adult learner who cannot read will decline offers of job advancement because of feeling unable to fulfill the reading requirements of a promotion.

Teaching Phonics to Adults

Can adults be taught reading using phonics? Unless you pick your words carefully, simple phonic rules can turn into a difficult problem. For instance, it is not possible to define the sounds of “a” as only long or short. This is one of the reasons many adults have difficulty when attempting to follow phonic
rules for decoding words (Palmatier, 1996). Even so, research has indicated that they can benefit from phonics instruction.

Just as there are disagreements on how to teach children to read, adult educators disagree on what reading instruction is beneficial to adult students (Kitz, 1988). Currently there are three instructional models, according to Stanovich (1982), which dominate the reading field: meaning emphasis, interactive, and code emphasis (Kitz, 1988).

Diehl and Mikulecky (1980) state that some adult educators advocate a model that emphasizes higher level contextual skills. The meaning emphasis approach does not stress the phonological analysis of words. Advocates for this approach contend that a phonological analysis takes away from the real purpose of reading. They argue that the experiential background of adult learners makes them more able to use contextual clues to decode unfamiliar words (Kitz, 1988).

According to Lieberman and Shankweiler (1985) supporters of the code-emphasis model advocate the teaching of the phonological analysis of words because they believe that
knowledge of phonology enables learners to more accurately decode words (Kitz, 1988).

When teaching adult learners, Podhajski (1995) supports emphasis on synthetic phonics instruction, instruction which is highly structured, sequenced and rule-based.

Finally, Fingeret (1984) says the interactive model combines strategies from meaning emphasis and code emphasis. Reading is viewed primarily as a process of gaining meaning from the text, and phonic analysis is used as one of several tools for decoding unknown words (Kitz, 1988).

There are those whom advocate whole language because it seems more “adult” than traditional methods of learning phonics (Brockman, 1994). Materials are provided which depict the types of texts adults are likely to encounter in their lives. Using authentic material gives the adult learner a taste of what will be expected of him/her when entering the workplace.

When confronted with an unfamiliar word, adults must read not only from left to right, but also from right to left to decode that unfamiliar word (Mazurkiewicz, 1976).
Most competent adult readers do not need to apply their knowledge of the mapping system consciously to recognize the words they encounter. If they do encounter a word they have never seen before, they are able to bring their knowledge of the code to bear in a deliberate and purposeful way (Beck & Juel, 1993). But what if they never learned or they don’t remember how to apply that knowledge of the code?

Is phonics important for an adult to learn to read?--Yes! Phonics is the language system that deals with letter-sound correspondences, and when it is integrated with other language systems, learning takes place faster (Thistlethwaite, 1994).

How do you teach an adult to read? You teach an adult to read by helping him/her to learn the relationship between the printed words and their meanings (Fry, 1995):
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to seek information that would determine the value of phonics instruction in an ABE/GED program.

Research Questions

1. Does teaching phonics improve the scores on the phonics test of the Bader Reading and Language Inventory?

2. Does teaching phonics improve the reading level of adult student as measured by the TABE test (comprehension subtest)?
Methodology

Subjects

Participants that began this research were: study group – 18 women and 2 males from Roberto Clemente School #8, and control group – 11 women from Chester Dewey School #14.

Participants that completed this research were study group – 13 women and 1 male and control group – 8 women. Reasons that participants did not complete research: study group: (1) received GED; (1) obtained a job; (1) moved; (2) health; and (1) unknown. Control group: (1) obtained a job; (1) moved; (1) unknown. The students' ages range from 21 to 36 in the study group and 18 to 32 in the control group. Out of the 22 students from both the study and control groups 54% were African-American, 41% were Hispanic and 5% were other. The population served was low-income with 82% on Social Services; 14% on partial assistance, and 4% on Social Security. The reading levels range from 3.6 to 12.9 in the study group and 4.8 to 12.9 in the control group.
Materials and Instruments

Students in the study and control group took a pre- and post-test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). After the TABE test, the students were given a pre and post phonics test from Bader Reading and Language Inventory.

The New Reader’s Press Focus on Phonics (Reading Level: 2 – 4) was used with the study group because it covered all phonics elements.

Since one of the major goals of adult education is to prepare students for jobs, students in the study group used job readiness materials such as newspapers, magazines and school-to-work workbooks.

Procedures

The ABE/GED program runs from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. five days a week, except Wednesday, (9:00-2:15).

Phonics instruction was completed in a seven-week period. Every Monday, for approximately 45 minutes, a Phonics Workshop was conducted. Additional instruction time occurred between 10:00 - 10:25 a.m. Tuesday through Friday in which
skills learned in the workshops were practiced. Weekly spelling tests were given. Materials were covered over a seven-week period.

Instruction

**Part One:** Before the actual teaching of phonics, students made alphabet books for their children. It was a hope that through this activity, parents would get involved in their children's education, especially reading. This also gave the instructor some clues as to how well the student knew the alphabet.

**Part Two:** Phonics instruction continued with short vowel sounds. These vowels were best taught first because they make up about 62% of all English syllables. They were taught paired with single consonants.

**Part Three:** Syllables were added by making pairs of letters using one vowel, then one consonant. This was the time to talk about consonants and to relearn their sounds. Next, pairs were reversed and finally vowels were sandwiched in between two consonants.
**Part Four:** Consonant digraphs were taught next because they represent sounds not included in the alphabet.

**Part Five:** Next, consonant blends were taught. Students who are able to sound out words successfully are able to blend the sounds associated with letters into a meaningful whole.

**Part Six:** Long vowel sounds and vowel digraphs were the last to be taught.

**Part Seven:** Review of phonics generalizations. Spelling words, based on job preparation, were given each week. The purpose of the spelling words was to demonstrate sound-symbol relationships, extensive practice with prefixes, suffixes, homonyms, compound words, and syllabication.

Instruction sometimes depended on modifying materials from Focus on Phonics to match that of the six steps (Parts 2-7).
Analysis of Data

The study and the control groups were administered a pre-test of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and a pretest on phonics' inventory of the Bader Reading and Language Inventory. Only the study group received phonics instruction during a seven-week period. After instruction was completed, the study and control groups were administered a post-test of the TABE and phonics inventory. The data were analyzed with a series of t tests.
CHAPTER IV

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to seek information that would determine the value of phonics instruction in an ABE/GED program.

FINDINGS

The analysis used was the paired T-TEST. It returns the probability associated with a student's T-Test. T-TEST was used to determine whether two samples are likely to have come from the same two underlying populations that have the same mean.

Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)

Students from both the study and control groups were administered pre and post TABE tests, (comprehension sub test). Scores are based on grade equivalents. Grade equivalents are intended to indicate achievement levels related to typical education structures, elementary and secondary schools. These scores do not have comparable meaning in non-graded
programs, particularly programs that focus on the education and training of adults. Nevertheless, grade equivalents are commonly understood reference points for adult learners and teachers and can facilitate organization of instructional groups and selection of appropriate instructional materials.

The scale for grade equivalents ranges from .0 through 12.9, representing the thirteen years of school (K through 12) and the ten months in the traditional school year. A grade equivalent represents the grade and month in school of students in the California Achievement Tests (CAT) E and F norm group whose test performance is theoretically equivalent to the test performance of a given TABE examinee.

According to the TABE pre-test, there was no statistical difference between the study and the control group.

From the information gathered, subjects from the study group and the control group showed significant gains (Tables 1.1 and 1.2). However, the control group, which did not receive phonics instruction, showed more increase in improvement than the study group (Table 1.3).
### Table 1.1

**Post Test**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>StDev</th>
<th>SE Mean</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study Group</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-1.093</td>
<td>0.966</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>-4.23</td>
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</table>

### Table 1.2

<table>
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<th>StDev</th>
<th>SE Mean</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
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<td>-0.638</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.277</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
<td>0.027</td>
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</table>

### Table 1.3

**Two Sample T-Test and Confidence Interval**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>StDev</th>
<th>SE Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>-1.093</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>-0.638</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

95% CI for mu Study Group – mu Control Group: (-1.25, 0.34)

T-Test mu Study Group = mu Control Group (vs not =): T= -1.20  P= 0.25  DF= 17

### Bader Reading and Language Inventory

Pre and post-tests of the Bader Reading and Language Inventory phonics subtest were administered to both the study and control groups. The phonics tests included forty-six (46) initial single consonants, consonant blends, and consonant digraphs; twenty-four (24) short vowels, long vowels and vowel digraphs, and twelve (12), for a total of eighty-two (82) responses.
According to the phonics pre-test, there was no statistical difference between the study and the control group.

Information gathered indicates that the study group and the control group improved significantly (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). Again, however, the control group showed a more significant increase over the study group (Table 2.3).

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post Test</th>
<th>T-Test of the Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test of $\mu = 0.000$ vs $\mu &lt; 0.000$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Group</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-Test of the Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test of $\mu = 0.000$ vs $\mu &lt; 0.000$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3

| Two Sample T-Test and Confidence Interval |
| Two sample T for Study vs Control |
| N  | Mean | StdDev | SE Mean |
| 14 | -2.21 | 2.99   | 0.80   |
| 8  | -3.12 | 3.44   | 1.2    |
95% CI for $\mu$ Study Group – $\mu$ Control Group: (-2.23, 4.1)
T-Test $\mu$ Study Group = $\mu$ Control Group (vs not =): $T = 0.63$, $P = 0.73$, $DF = 13$
Summary

The study group, which received seven weeks phonics instruction, did better on both the TABE and phonics inventory post-tests. However, the increases were not significant enough to say that phonics instruction had an effect. The control group also showed significant increase averaging better than the study group.

The reading levels of the participants who completed the research were, study group, 5.2 to 12.9, and control group, 6.3 to 10.6.
CHAPTER V

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to seek information that would determine the value of phonics instruction in an ABE/GED program.

CONCLUSION

The control group did better on both post-tests than the study group, which was not the expected outcome. This could have been contributed to the fact that each group was instructed by a different teacher. Each teacher’s method of instruction could have been a factor. Poor attendance by some students and lack of interest could also have been a factor.

The phonics method does not meet the need of every learner, nor perhaps all the needs of even one student. When phonics was taught in isolation, learners got frustrated, or thought it was too simple. So it was important that instruction utilized the job preparation materials to keep the students motivated.
Up until this research, the study group received instruction with whole language with little or no phonics taught.

The students in the study group did improve in phonics as documented in the Bader's phonics test, but the control group also improved. This researcher cannot explain this outcome. Both the study and control groups improved in the TABE comprehension sub-test. This is an expected result, but it is not certain whether the study group improved because of phonics instruction. They were in a program where their expected outcome was to improve.

The question now is whether or not phonics instruction benefited the adult learners. These learners have been out of school for a long time. When they were in school, they may not have had much success, especially in the area of reading and writing. Many of these learners were labeled "special education" when in fact they just had different learning styles.

Teaching implicit phonics to adult learners using job relevant materials does have value when it has a meaningful purpose.
Implications for Further Study

Further research is needed in the area of teaching phonics to adult students. It would have been a help to this research if a larger population had been served.

Subjects who went down in their scores may have needed additional instruction for another couple of weeks.

There were two major disadvantages to this research. The first was the loss of several students during implementation of research through moving, health and other problems. Related to this problem were students who came in the middle of the research.

The second disadvantage was subjects in both the study and control groups were all on different grade levels because they were part of a Family Literacy program run at two separate sites. This research may have served a better purpose if it could have been administered where the students were all on the same level, whether ABE or GED.
Implications for Adult Literacy Programs

Many of the students' language were underdeveloped, so the possibility of passing on poor language skills to their children is increased.

Since the study group was a Family Literacy program in an inner city school district, it is recommended that phonics be taught. It is a tool that parents can use not only to help themselves, but also to help their younger children to read better.

Recommendations

If this research is to be done again, it is the recommendation of this researcher that both the study and control groups be taught by the same teacher. If using different teachers, the same curriculum should be followed.

This research would have been served best if students were beginning readers such as students learning the English language or students below a second grade reading level.
References


Appendix A

Samples from New Reader’s Press Focus on Phonics
Focus on Phonics 2b

This level gives intensive practice, through the use of written and auditory exercises, with beginning and ending consonant blends; the digraphs sh, ch, th, wh, gn, and nk; and the r-controlled vowels er, ir, ur, ar, and or. Students learn to read and write whole words and meaningful sentences in the regular blends practices. Other exercises give help with compound words and harder two-syllable words.

Students should be very familiar with consonant and short vowel sounds before beginning this level. (Blend words with long vowel or other vowel sounds are covered in later Focus On Phonics books when those vowel sounds are introduced.) Students using Laubach Way to Reading should complete Skill Book 2 before beginning Focus on Phonics-2b.

This workbook is likely to be your resource for consonant blends regardless of what materials you are using in your program. That’s because many students have particular difficulty with blends, and most materials on the market do not cover blends in much detail.

Students learn to read and write sentences in the regular blends practices.

Student Workbook 2b covers consonant blends in more detail than most materials on the market.
Students will read words with long vowel sounds and identify their spelling patterns.

The student will learn to generalize from a few words he/she knows to many new words.

You will be able to review words and vowel sounds with your students to reinforce recently learned skills.

Focus on Phonics 3

Focus on Phonics 3 helps students read words with long vowel sounds and identify their various spelling patterns, mastering one long vowel sound at a time.

Like previous Focus on Phonics books, this one uses a word-family approach in most practices to reinforce the sound-symbol relationship students are learning and to help them generalize from a few words to many new words. Before students start this book, they should have a good knowledge of consonant sounds, consonant blends, and short vowel sounds.

In part 6, students may contrast long vowel sounds with similar sounds. Or they may be introduced to common homonyms. A one-page review concludes the sections on each long vowel, and a final section of five practices covers words with irregular spellings. There is also a review of rules for adding and deleting the endings -ks, -ed, -ing, -y, -er, and -est.
Focus on Phonics 4

Focus on Phonics-4 is truly a transition book which helps students progress to more difficult words and harder materials. They get practice not only with one-syllable words in word families, but also with words of two or more syllables. The long u sound is introduced in this book, where it is compared to similar sounds.

In many practices, students continue to learn common homonyms. The teacher’s edition contains reference lists for homonyms, confusing words, compound words, and words with final syllable le, which teachers can use to make up additional exercises.

Throughout the book, usually at the end of each section, are several practices that give extensive work with many endings and prefixes. Their meanings are explained, and words are used in meaningful phrases or sentences. Students review the endings -s, -ing, -ed, -er, -est, -y, and -ly, as well as the rules for doubling the final consonant and changing final y to i before adding an ending. The prefixes re-, un-, dis-, im-, in-, non- and suffixes -ful, -less, -ment, -ness, -able, and -al are introduced. Several sample Focus on Phonics-4 practices follow.
Appendix B

Samples of vocabulary words
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Preparation</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>employment</td>
<td>resume</td>
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<tr>
<td>preparation</td>
<td>appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>first impressions</td>
<td>cover letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promotions</td>
<td>creativity</td>
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<tr>
<td>reliability</td>
<td>contribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>analyze</td>
<td>critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reaction</td>
<td>relocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nervousnous</td>
<td>qualified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>referral</td>
<td>candidate</td>
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Food Service

food service restaurant
waitresses orders
kitchen register
hygiene uniform
meals guests
glassware utensils
setup napkins
saucer satisfy
menus diners
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Office Jobs</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ar/range</td>
<td>legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>med/i/cal</td>
<td>banking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>real e/state</td>
<td>outgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fax machine</td>
<td>type/writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>data processing</td>
<td>computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>keyboard</td>
<td>appointments</td>
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<tr>
<td>stationery</td>
<td>accuracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specialize</td>
<td>efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conference</td>
<td>punctuation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OFFICE JOBS

retail recepti onist
telephone messengers
packages mail clerks
polite trans ferring
memo inference
receive customers
 correspondence complaint
sincerely materials
word processing revising
OFFICE JOBS

instructions interpret

diagrams manuals

graphs charts

specifications proposals

classified job search

strategy teamwork

human resources computation

estimate maintain

negotiate identify
## JOB PREPARATION

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Job Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>secretary</td>
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<td>enthusiasm</td>
<td>effectiveness</td>
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<td>compose</td>
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<td>demonstrate</td>
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<td>transcribe</td>
<td>supervision</td>
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<td>promotions</td>
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<tr>
<td>qualify</td>
<td>perform</td>
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