

FELA Discussion May 2019

Spelfabet Conference Centre

Ros Neilson

roslyn@roslynneilson.com.au

Mobile: 0421 822 898

What's new about the FELA?

- What's IN
- What's OUT
- ... and why

- As I get older, I realise I still don't fully understand phonological awareness

FELA Background

- Designed with NT Dept. Education
- Aim to check that students have the basic **prerequisites** to good phonics teaching
 - Make all tasks relevant as targets for teaching
- Aim to be useful when Standard Australian English is NOT the first language of the students and possibly the test administrators (EAL/D)
 - Also aim NOT to lower phonemic awareness expectations for at-risk students
 - Applicable to main-stream students as well

What do I mean by *prerequisites* ... ?

- Well accepted: Phonemic awareness and literacy develop interactively
 - Relationship is reciprocal, not simply causal
- I've realised that you can't simply describe phonemic awareness as being included under the phonological awareness umbrella, with the only difference involving the size of the unit (phonemes vs syllables and rime)

Phonological awareness

- Ability to focus on the sound of the speech stream, as opposed to attending to the meaning of what is said
- Continuum: *Implicit to meta-phonological*
 - To what extent do you know that you're thinking about the sound of the speech stream?
 - N.B. I didn't use the word 'sounds' here
- My hypothesis: more explicit, meta-phonological awareness is ideal at school entry

Phonemic Awareness

- Ability to focus on phonemes
- There is a similar implicit-to-explicit continuum
- Phonemic awareness always develops in the context of learning about letter-sound relationships
 - Confirmed on research with adult illiterates
- Explicit PA is intimately involved with letter knowledge
 - Confirmed by Byrne's research

'Advanced' Phonemic Awareness

- Kilpatrick: Ability to do complex manipulations with phonemes quickly
- Well-established that the complex PA tasks are the ones that correlate best with decoding skills
- Problem: PA assessment is normally deeply 'contaminated' by orthographical knowledge
 - Confirmed by Ehri, Stuart, Tunmer
 - Visual strategy most relevant to complex tasks

'Advanced' PA (cont.)

- But Kilpatrick regards evidence of visual 'contamination' as 'error'
 - He maintains that advanced PA involves fast complex manipulations in the *auditory* modality
 - Evidence: Training studies
- Many systematic phonics researchers disagree with this position

So ...Difference between phonemic and phonological awareness

- Explicit phonemic awareness has the added inescapable complication of interaction with orthographic knowledge
- So perhaps phonemic awareness is more accurately defined as ‘the ability to focus on how phonemes and letters are mapped onto each other in systems of orthography’
- Perhaps *meta-phonemic awareness* is necessary when orthography isn’t regular (English)
 - We have to learn meta-phonemic awareness in Phonetics 101

What are the implications?

- In FELA, I've avoided the issue by not including complex phoneme manipulation tasks
 - Not EAL/D language-friendly
 - Not clearly relevant as a TARGET skill
- But you'll see if the student needs more assessment and/or intervention and support in the NW Reading and Spelling subtests
- And ... the debate is far from resolved