

## PAPER DETAILS

TITLE: American Head Start Preschool Teachers Individualized Phonemic Awareness Coaching

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PAGES: 291-309

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/901999>



## Amerikan Head Start Okul Öncesi Öğretmenleri Bireyselleştirilmiş Fonemik Farkındalık Koçluğu

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### MAKALE BİLGİ

#### Makale Tarihçesi:

Alındı

27.02.2019

Düzeltilmiş hali

alındı

19.12.2019

Kabul edildi

19.12.2019

Çevrimiçi yayınlandı

31.12.2019

#### Makale Türü:

Araştırma Makalesi

### ÖZET

Okul öncesi dönemde fonemik farkındalık eğitimi, çocukların ilköğretimde daha iyi okuyucular olmasına yardımcı olabilir. Ancak, bu konuda Amerika'daki okul öncesi eğitimin kalitesinde tutarlılık görünmemektedir. Özellikle, Head Start programlarında olan çocuklar okuma başarısızlığı "risk altında" ve okul başarısı için fonemik farkındalık becerilerine daha da ihtiyaç duyabilmektedirler. Bu çalışma Batı Pensilvanya'daki bir Head Start okul öncesi programında bulunan üç okul öncesi öğretmeni için, iPad ve ShowMe programını kullanarak fonemik farkındalık koçluğunu araştırdı. Öğretmenler haftalık fonemik farkındalık koçluğu eğitimleri aldı ve ardından öğrencilere öğrettikleri dersi kaydetti ve hafta sonunda derslerin bir yansımasını verdiler. Çeşitli eğitim ve deneyim seviyelerine sahip üç öğretmenin süreç içerisinde fonemik farkındalık sürekliliğinin en az karmaşık seviyesinde öğretmesi mümkün olmuştur. Ayrıca üç öğretmenden ikisinin fonemik farkındalık sürekliliğinin daha karmaşık seviyelerine ulaşmıştır. Bu bulgular Amerika'daki okul öncesi öğretmenleri için fonemik farkındalık konusunda daha profesyonel gelişime ihtiyaç duyulduğunu göstermektedir.

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Anahtar Kelimeler:

Koçluk, fonemik farkındalık, okul öncesi öğretmenleri, ipad'ler, Head Start, okul öncesi eğitim

### Geniş Özet

#### Amaç

Fonemik farkındalık çocukların ileriki yaşlarda, okuma becerilerini olumlu yönde etkileyecek önemli becerilerden bir tanesidir. Araştırmalar bu becerilerin çocukların okumadaki başarılarına katkısının, onların IQ, heceleme, kelime bilgisi ve dinleme becerilerinden daha etkili olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, bu dönem çocuklarında fonemik becerilerin gelişmesinde önemli rol oynamaktadırlar. Bundan dolayı

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öğretmenlerin bu konuda gerekli eğitimler ve öğretim tekniklerine yönelik uygulamalar yapması gerekmektedir. Araştırmalar, öğretmenlerin çocukların fonemik farkındalık becerilerinin gelişimi için doğru geri bildirimler vermesi gerektiğini dile getirmişlerdir (Shanahan, 2005; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). Ayrıca okul öncesi dönemde verilen kaliteli dil bilgisi eğitimi çocukların, konuşma ve yazma becerilerine de etkisi olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır (Lams & McMaster, 2014). Buradan yola çıkarak, bu çalışmanın amacı, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin fonemik farkındalık becerilerinin, öğretmenlik uygulamaları, yeterliliklerini ve çocukların fonemik becerilerindeki başarıların ortaya konulması amaçlanmıştır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışma nitel araştırma desenlerinden durum çalışmasıdır. Çalışmanın verileri yarı yapılandırılmış- görüşme soruları, öğretmenlerin derslerinin ve koçluk sisteminde verilen eğitimde öğretmenlerin tutumlarıyla ilgili cevaplara yönelik verilerin doküman analizi. Ayrıca öğretmenlerin sesli ShowMe programı kullanırken gerçekleştirmiş oldukları sesli konuşmaların analizi yapılmıştır.

Veriler her hafta fonemik farkındalığın devamına yönelik olarak her hafta katılımcı üç öğretmen bu eğitimi verecek olan koçla bir araya gelerek görüşmelere yapmaktadır. Bu görüşmelere öğretmenlerin fonemik farkındalığın farklı derecelerine göre en az karmaşık etkinliklerden en fazla karmaşık olan etkinliklere doğru becerilerini geliştirerek ilerlemeleri desteklenmektedir. Öğretmenler öncelikle fonemik farkındalığın devamlılığın (Chard & Dickson, 1999) en düşük derecesi olan kafiye şarkılar derecesiyle başlayarak her hafta çocuklarla yaptıkları etkinlikleri kayıt ederler. Öğretmenler ShowMe programını kullanarak yapmış oldukları etkinlikleri her hafta kayıt eder ve bu veriler koçlar tarafından değerlendirilmek amacıyla toplanır. Verilerin analizlerine göre eğitim veren koç öğretmenlerin fonemik farkındalık becerilerine göre koçluk seanslarının içeriğini belirlerler. Çalışmanın sonunda koçlar ve bu eğitimi alan öğretmenler çalışmanın sonunda odak grup görüşmesi yaparak öğretmenlerin fonemik farkındalık eğitimi sürecine yönelik görüşleri alınmıştır.

Çalışmanın verileri çalışmanın alt sorularına göre altı farklı konu üzerinde durularak yapılmıştır; 1) Verilere aşina olmak; (2) Kodlama; (3) Tema aramak; (4) Temaları gözden geçirmek ve (5) Temaları tanımlama ve adlandırma. Sonuçlar, araştırmacıların bir konu hakkında uzlaşma sağlandığından emin olunduktan sonra farklı temalar üzerinde çalışıldı.

### Bulgular

Okul öncesi öğretmenlerin fonemik farkındalık eğitimi becerilerinin araştırıldığı bu çalışmada, çalışmanın bulguları dört ana başlık altında toplanmıştır; 1) Öğretmenlerin

başlangıç seviyeleri, 2) Fonemik farkındalık etkinlikleri, 3) Haftalık koçluk eğitimine katılım, 4) Fonemik farkındalık derslerinin gelişimi.

Öğretmenlerin, fonemik farkındalık başlangıç seviyelerine bakıldığında da araştırmacıların öğretmenlerin genel olarak iyi hazırlanmış fonemik farkındalık eğitime ihtiyaç duyduklarını ve bunun öğretmenlerin sınıf aktivitelerinden önce erilerek bu becerilerinin geliştirilmesi gerektiği bulunmuştur. Ayrıca koçluk eğitime katılan öğretmenlerin, fonemik farkındalık becerilerinin süreç içerisinde arttığı saptanmıştır.

Öğretmenlerin fonemik farkındalık eğitimleri incelendiğinde öğretmenlerin eğitimlerinin temel sevide başladığı ve gerekli üst becerileri kazanan öğretmenlerin bir üst seviyeye geçebilmesi için koçların farklı eğitimler verdiği görülmüştür. Veriler incelendiğinde T1 diğerlerine göre daha hızlı bir şekilde üst becerilere sahip olurken T2 bu becerileri kazanmak istemesine karşın T1' a göre daha yavaş fakat T3' e göre daha hızlı bir şekilde bu becerileri kazandığı saptanmıştır. T3 diğer öğretmenlerle karşılaştırıldığında, etkinlikler sürecinde çocuklara fonemik farkındalık konusunda daha az etkili olduğu ve etkinliklere odaklanma, anlaşılır sorular sorma, çocukların ihtiyaçları doğrultusunda dersleri uyarlamada zayıf kaldığı gözlenmiştir.

Öğretmenlerin haftalık koçluk eğitimlerine katılımı becerilerinin fonemik farkındalık eğitimi konusunda gelişmesine, eğitimlerinin günlük yansımalarına, ders kayıtlarına, haftalık eğitimlere katılmalarına göre belirlenmiştir. Veriler incelendiğinde, haftalık koçluk eğitime en fazla katılan öğretmenin hem fonemik farkındalık becerisinin hem de o öğretmenin öğrencilerinde olumlu yönde değişim olduğu saptanmıştır. Veriler incelendiğinde, T1 tüm kriterleri en fazla sağlayan öğretmen olarak gözlenirken, T3 koçluk eğitimin sadece 5 hafta katılmış ve hiçbir ders kaydı yapmadığı saptanmıştır.

Öğretmenler çocuklara vermiş oldukları derslerin etkili olması için teşvik edilmiştir. Her hafta ilgili konu hakkında öğretmenlere fonemik farkındalık kullanılarak daha iyi nasıl yapılır şeklinde beceriler koçluk eğitimi sürecinde verilmiş fakat çalışmanın sonucuna bakıldığında T1 ve T2 bu konuda T3 karşılaştırıldığında çocukların ihtiyaçlarına göre derslerin uyarlanması konusunda zayıf kaldığı gözlenmiştir.

### **Tartışma**

Çalışmanın bulgularına bakıldığında öğretmenlerin lisans derecesinde diplomalarının olmasına rağmen fonemik farkındalık becerileri konusunda temel sevide olduğu bu durumun da bu konuda yeterli eğitim almamalarından kaynaklandığını ortaya çıkarmıştır (An Action Plan of the Learning First Alliance, 1998; Morrow, 2005). Araştırmaların erken dönemde fonemik farkındalık eğitimi alan çocukların bu konuda ilerde daha başarılı olduğunun bilinmesine rağmen öğretmen eğitimlerinde bu konuya daha az verildiğini

saptamışlardır((Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ferguson, 1991; Hindman & Wasik, 2012). Bundan dolayı, bu konuda verilecek olan koçluk eğitiminin okul öncesi öğretmenlere faydalı olunacağı konusunda literatür de yer alan diğer çalışmalarla benzer bulgular olduğu belirlenmiştir (Hammond, & Gibbons, 2005). Ayrıca öğretmenlerin mesleki deneyimlerinin çocuklarda fonemik farkındalık eğitimi verirken olumlu yönde olması ayrıca diğer araştırmalarda da belirtildiği gibi öğrencilerin öğrenme becerilerinde de etkili olduğu bulunmuştur.

### **Sonuç**

Bu çalışma, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin fonemik farkındalık öğretimi becerilerinin gelişiminde bu konuda verilecek olan koçluk eğitimlerinin önemi ortaya koyulmuştur. Çalışmada ortaya çıkan gelişim, öğretmenlerin koçluk seanslarına katılımları, detaylı geri bildirimler ve öğretmenlerin öğretim süreçlerine uygulamalarıyla ortaya çıkmıştır. Buradan yola çıkarak fonemik farkındalık konusunda öğretmenlerin işbirliğinin önemli olduğu ve bu konuda alınacak desteğin profesyonel gelişimlerine katkı sağlayacağı önerilmektedir.



## American Head Start Preschool Teachers Individualized Phonemic Awareness Coaching

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received

27.02.2019

Received in revised  
form

19.12.2019

Accepted

19.12.2019

Available online

31.12.2019

#### Article Type:

Research Article

### ABSTRACT

Phonemic Awareness instruction in the preschool setting can help children become better readers in elementary school. Yet, within the United States there is no consistency in the quality of the instruction within preschool in this topic. Especially, children who are in Head Start programs are “at risk” for reading failure and may need phonemic awareness skills even more for school success. This study explored three preschool teachers in a Head Start preschool in Western Pennsylvania through phonemic awareness coaching via an iPad on an app called ShowMe. Teachers received weekly phonemic awareness coaching sessions and were then to record a lesson they taught to their students and give a reflection of the lessons at the end of the week. All three teachers (with varying educational and experience levels) were able to teach at the least complex level of the phonemic awareness continuum. While two of the three teachers were able to achieve more complex levels of the phonemic awareness continuum. These findings are critical and show a need to have more professional development on phonemic awareness for preschool teachers within the United States.

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#### Keywords:

Coaching, phonemic awareness, preschool teachers, ipads, head start, preschool education

## Introduction

Researchers have found that phonemic awareness skills are the best predictor of future reading skills (Every Child Reading; An Action Plan of the Learning First Alliance, 1998; Hulme, Hatcher, Nation, Bworn, Adams, & Stuart, 2002). Phonemic awareness is a foundational skill that targets a child’s ability to hear individual sounds, or phonemes, in a word, without seeing visual letters (Martinussen, Ferrari, Aitken, & Willows, 2015). Studies show that phonemic awareness is a better predictor of reading success than IQ, spelling, vocabulary, onset-rime awareness, and listening comprehension (Hulme et al., 2002; Kenner, Terry, Friehling, & Namy, 2017; Lam &

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McMaster, 2014). However, there is a lack of research on phonemic awareness with regard to how much preschool teachers are actually teaching, designing, and providing high quality literacy instruction within their preschool classrooms. With this said, the aim of this qualitative study was to describe and develop individualized phonemic awareness coaching sessions for three preschool teachers at a preschool in Western Pennsylvania.

Teachers play a key role in phonemic awareness instruction. They need to model the sounds and the procedures of the instruction so that the students can properly reproduce the sounds (Kenner et al., 2017). The teacher must give corrective feedback to the students so that the sounds are properly produced (Shanahan, 2005; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). The teacher needs to model the proper use of the materials used so that the students know exactly how to use them. Phonemic awareness instruction generally consists of rhymes and alliteration through nursery rhymes, exposure to tongue twisters, oddity tasks such as comparing and contrasting the sounds of words for rhyme and alliteration, counting out the number of phonemes in a word, and performing phoneme manipulation tasks such as adding or deleting a particular phoneme and regenerating a word from the remainder (Yopp & Yopp, 2000).

## **Preschool Teachers**

The quality of preschool instruction is inconsistent based on the fact that the teachers have highly varying levels of education, experience, and certification within the United States (Gong & Wang, 2017; Pianta et al., 2005; Resnick & Zill, 2001). A lack of quality diminishes optimal classroom experiences, while weakening essential foundational skills (Landry, Anthony, Swank, & Monseque-Bailey, 2009). Therefore, it is important to have high-quality professional development, such as coaching, on phonemic awareness instruction for preschool teachers, especially for Head Start programs (Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Lepage, Hammerness, & Duffy, 2005). There are many definitions of the term coaching but for this study the definition of coaching was: master educators provide teachers with individualized guidance which can be repeated over a period of time (Hindman & Wasik, 2012).

High quality literacy instruction increases a child's ability to acquire needed language and literacy skills (Lams & McMaster, 2014). Correlations between teacher effectiveness and student achievement includes factors such as knowledge of subject matter, training and learning, experience, level of certification, and general intelligence (Darling-Hammond, 2000). The quality of a preschool teacher is linked directly to their previous training and self-efficacy as a teacher (Gökyer & Karakaya-Cirit, 2018; Guo, Justice, Sawyer, & Tompkins, 2011). The Pennsylvania Department of Education's guiding goal emphasizes state-wide support in improving all early childhood programs through required teacher preparation standards, funding, program quality requirements through Keystone Stars, and a quality rating system (Stedron, 2010). Even though research has found immense benefits of qualified, and

adequately compensated teachers, most American preschool programs are not required to uphold these standard requirements (Barnett, 2003).

### **Head Start Programs**

Project Head Start was developed within the United States in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson in an effort to overcome what he called “The War on Poverty.” This legislation aimed to decrease the poverty rate in the United States (Office of Head Start, 2018). The program adopted a whole child approach by providing comprehensive services, which included education, health, and parent services (Puma, Bell, Cook, Heid, Shapiro, Broene, & Ciarico, 2010). This legislation has become the largest federal early childhood education program within the United States (Kalifeh, Cohen-Vogel, & Grass, 2011). In 1965, the first program was designed to serve disadvantaged four-year-old children by giving them a “head start” through a free summer educational program (Kalifeh et al., 2011). As the program advanced in America, improvements in quality increased and qualification criteria expanded (Puma et al., 2010). Today, Project Head Start serves all children in foster care, homeless children, children from families receiving public assistances, and any child from a family income below the poverty line and are deemed “at risk” for school failure (Head Start ECLKC, 2018).

### **Instructional Coaching Model**

Research has found many positive impacts related to using coaching (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2010; Cornett & Knight, 2009). Coaching provides an individualized approach to targeting the needs of a teacher, designing appropriate coaching sessions, and giving specific feedback (Killion, 2017). While other forms of professional development increase a teacher’s knowledge base, it does not guarantee the application of knowledge will be effective. Coaching aims to support teachers’ knowledge base, as well as applying it to their instruction. Research has shown that extensive individualized coaching, over an extended period of time, is correlated with teacher efficacy and classroom application, as well as student improvement (Carlisle, & Berebitsky, 2010; Cornett & Knight, 2009; Killion, 2017).

The International Reading Association (2004) has adopted Dole’s definition of a Literacy Coach as someone who “supports teachers in their daily work” (p. 462). With this definition in mind, the conceptual framework for this study revolved around Knight’s (2007) Instructional Coaching model. Within the Instructional Coaching model conceptual framework, Cornett and Knight (2009) state that instructional coaching impacts teaching practices, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. In conjunction with the conceptual framework, the research aimed to increase the pre-school teachers’ practices, efficacy, and student achievement in phonemic awareness.



## Methods

The research design for this study was qualitative in nature (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002; Roy, 2012). The qualitative data that was collected for this study was an initial open-ended interview with notes taken, documents from the teachers of weekly lessons and how their coaching sessions went, a journal of how the teachers were doing kept by the coaches, audio communication via the ShowMe app (Learnbat, 2018) of the week's lesson to the teachers from the coaches, audio communication via the ShowMe app of one lesson from the week from the teachers to the coaches, and audio communication via the ShowMe app to the coaches from the teachers on how their week went with the lesson, and a final focus group.

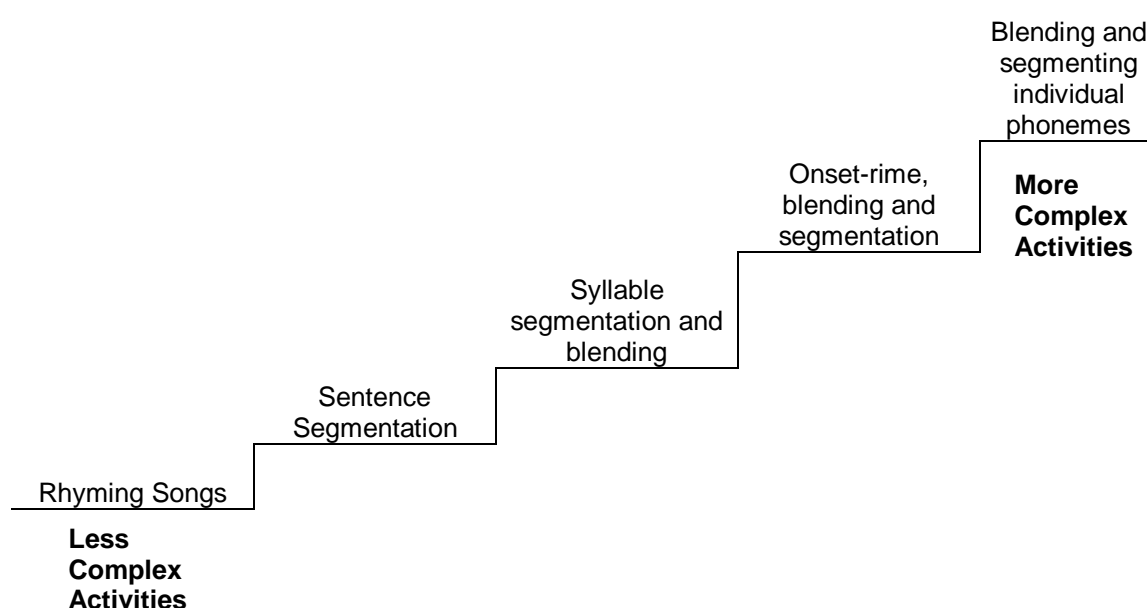


Figure 1. Phonemic Awareness Coontinuum (Chard & Dickson, 1999).

Each of the three teachers initially met with the coaches to sit down and have an open interview to help build a rapport (Ippolito, 2010) and to establish where they felt they should start on the Phonemic Awareness Coontinuum (see Figure 1). All three teachers individually chose to start at rhyming songs with their students. The teachers were given a weekly teacher activity tracking form so that they could track when they did their lesson and how it went. The teachers were then able to use this form while they gave their reflections via the ShowMe application (app) (Learnbat, 2018) at the end of the week. Once per week the teachers were required to audio record a lesson so that the coaches could listen to and could give feedback to the teachers. The first week of the coaching sessions, all three teachers received the same phonemic lesson. Based on the weekly reflection and the lesson from each teacher, the coaches were able to then design individualized coaching sessions for each teacher for the remainder of the study. At the conclusion of the study, both coaches and all three teachers sat down for a semi-structured focus group with some already formed questions.

With students at risk within Head Start programs and the importance of phonemic awareness on later reading achievement, an understanding of practicing teachers phonemic awareness starting point on the phonemic awareness continuum and their phonemic awareness teaching was required. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe and develop individualized phonemic awareness coaching sessions for three preschool teachers at a preschool in Western Pennsylvania. The following research questions were posed to address this aim:

1. What phonemic awareness activity did each teacher feel was a place for their students and themselves to start the study with on the phonemic awareness continuum?

2. Could each teacher get to a more complex phonemic awareness activity on the phonemic awareness continuum after their initial starting point?

3. Was each teacher able to fully engage and follow the weekly lesson that the coaches gave to them?

4. Were any of the teachers able to expand the lesson given to them by the coaches to increase their student learning?

## Participants

This study involved three Head Start preschool teachers: two lead teachers (T1 and T3) and one assistant teacher (T2). See chart below for demographics.

Table 1. Teacher Demographics

Teachers	T1	T2	T3
Position	Head Teacher	Assitant Teacher (T1's Assitant)	Head Teacher
Age	44 Years	27 Years	30 Years
Gender	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Education Completed	Bachelor's Degree in Elemantary & Early Childhood Education	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education	Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education
Yeas of Preschool Experience	11 years	4 years	2 years

## Analysis

The data was analyzed in order get a contextual understanding of the research questions. Thematic analysis (TA) was utilized to identify and analyze themes and patterns in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Patton, 2002). Thematic analysis has six phases: (1) Familiarization with the data; (2) Coding; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Reviewing themes; and (5) Defining and naming themes (Braum & Clarke, 2006). The researchers cross checked themes to ensure that a consensus was found for the results.

## Results

Findings are presented from the following research questions: (1) Teacher starting points; (2) Phonemic awareness activities; (3) Engagement in weekly coaching session; and (4) Expansion of lesson.

### 1. Teacher starting points

All three teachers willingly agreed to an individual meeting to discuss the study prior to starting coaching sessions. This initial meeting established a positive relationship between the teachers and coaches, and influenced the development of the first coaching session. During the meeting with each teacher, they were all given the phonemic awareness continuum visual. Without defining, or alluding to, what phonemic awareness was, each teacher was asked to pick a starting point based on their knowledge of each skill and the needs of the students. Meeting with each participant was very important in determining how to structure the first coaching session specifically to each teacher. The coaching sessions took into consideration that the age range of the preschool students in the center was between 3-5 years of age, instead of the intended 4-5 years of age. The weekly coaching sessions and feedback was adjusted to increase knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices for children 3-5 years of age.

T1 was confident in her understanding of phonemic awareness and ability to provide high quality instruction. She commented that she could teach young children any of the skills listed on the graph, but the majority of her students are still at the beginning level of rhyming songs. She correlated this beginning placement level with the larger population of 3 and 4-year-old children in her room. T1 pointed out that her older students could excel within the more complex skill levels, but none of the children were above the chart. A brief overview of phonemic awareness was provided to enhance T1's existing schema, and to eliminate misconceptions. T1 was given a rhyming song lesson in the first week of the coaching sessions.

T2 lacked knowledge and confidence in all aspects of phonemic awareness and instruction. Due to her lack of knowledge, T2 quickly decided to start her coaching sessions at the least complex skill listed on the phonemic awareness continuum visual. She also determined it to be the best fit for her students. Since T2 was the assistant teacher to T1, she suggested implementing instruction in small groups to provide enrichment for high-achieving students and intervention for low-achieving students. T2's starting point was to first increase competency about phonemic awareness, and then to strengthen her instruction of rhyming concepts within a small-group setting.

T3 was presented with the phonemic awareness continuum visual, and commented that she did not know any information about phonemic awareness. She determined that it would be most beneficial for her to begin with the least complex skill of rhyming. T3 was hesitant in her students' ability to understand the skills listed. T3 identified her lack of confidence in her students' abilities due to a larger amount of 3 and 4-year-old children in the classroom. When asked if any of the students were higher on the chart, T3 confidently remarked that a few of the older students could

accomplish more complex skills, but no child was above the chart. T3's starting point was an overview of phonemic awareness, identical to T1 and T2, and a rhyming song lesson.

Following the initial meeting, the coaches found it most appropriate to provide a well-developed overview of phonemic awareness, supported with quality research, to build a strong foundation before instruction took place. Each teacher received a lesson to implement within the classroom that week. All materials were supplied to the teachers, and the coaches visited the center for a mid-week check in. The week one coaching session provided explicit instructions in how to effectively teach the skill, as well as encouragement to use active reflection to adapt the lesson to the learners.

## **2. Phonemic awareness activities**

The teachers all began with the same target skill, but progressed at various rates (see Figure 2. Teacher Progression of Phonemic Awareness Skills). Introduction of a new concept could only be given if the teacher mastered the skill, provided high quality instruction, and felt that the learners were ready to elevate their understanding. The rate in which each teacher progressed depended on factors such as effort, active reflection, adaptation of lessons, appropriate use of materials, and engagement techniques.

T1 showed the most progress out of all participants involved. As shown in the Teacher Progression of Phonemic Awareness Skills chart, T1 made the most progress. It is important to note that T1 participated in 6 weeks of coaching, which was one more week than T2 and T3. At the beginning of the study, T1 decided to start at the least complex skill of rhyming. By the end, T1 was able to progress to the more complex skill of onset and rime. Every week, T1 completed all of the tasks given by the coaches. T1 often scaffolded children to higher order thinking by having them create their own understanding of the weekly skill. T1 actively reflected upon and adapted each lesson to the students' knowledge level of each specific skill. After trying to teach two skills in one lesson, T1 noticed confusion due to an inability to differentiate between the two skills. T1 immediately refocused the lesson to only one skill, and found higher success. Another factor that increased T1's progress was the ability to engage and manage students. T1 presented each lesson with excitement, energy, and connected it to the students' interests. T1 was supported by T2 through small-group intervention.

As shown in the Teacher Progression of Phonemic Awareness Skills chart, T2 was able to progress over the time span of the study. T2 spent time during each concept refining various skills and instructional strategies. T2 decided to start at the bottom of the phonemic awareness continuum visual. By the end of the study, T2 had progressed to the skill of blending. Every week, T2 completed all tasks given by the coaches. T2 was skilled in adapting the lesson to each child. Since she taught only in small-groups, the targeted students consisted of low-achieving students. T2's ability to scaffold each student each day increased her progression rate. T2 taught with clarity throughout the lesson. Each lesson began with reinforcing the objective. T2 supplemented lessons with personally created materials to appeal to each child's

learning style. T2 was supported through T1 by initially introducing concepts within a whole-group setting. During the week 5 coaching session, T2 was unclear on word families and onset and rime boxes. T2 contacted coaches on day one of the week to have the concepts further explained. T2 was able to gain knowledge about both concepts, and provide high-quality instruction to the students by day two. T2 was very willing to learn from the coaches, and try new strategies, which helped T2 in progressing her knowledge in how to properly teach phonemic awareness skills.

T3 did not progress to more complex skills during the five week coaching sessions. As shown in the Teacher Progression of Phonemic Awareness Skills chart, T3 began with the skill of rhyming and remained at that skill. T3 did not complete all of the recommended tasks, lessons, and advice given by the coaches. T3 lacked the ability to engage and manage students. The lessons instructed by T3 were unclear to students. T3 asked very vague questions, such as “What rhymes?”, after reading an entire page of a book. T3 was unable to provide high quality instruction due to a lack of focus, unclear questioning, and inability to adapt the lesson to the students’ needs. T3 could not build a strong foundational understanding of rhyming, which resulted in the inability to move beyond this skill level.

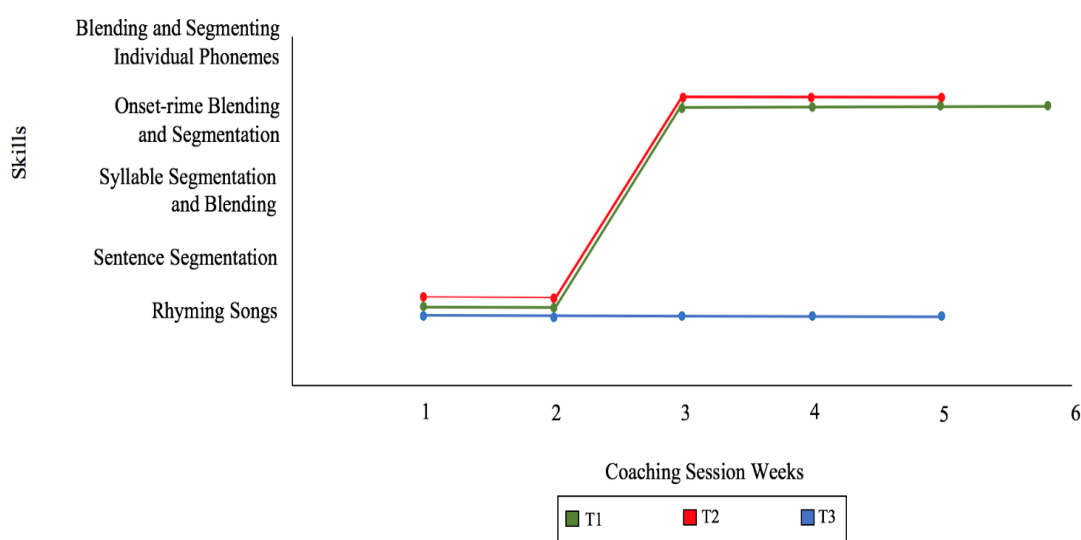


Figure 2. Teacher Progression of Phonemic Awareness Skills

### 3. Engagement in weekly coaching sessions

In this study, the term engagement relates directly to the teacher’s professional development, as well their ability to instruct student successfully. Research has proven that student achievement increases when teachers are engaged in the education process (Karahana, 2010). The data collected in the ShowMe app provided essential artifacts in examining the engagement level (Learnbat, 2018). The teacher’s engagement level in developing their skill set was evident based upon their participation in the daily reflections, recorded lessons, and their end of the week reflections. The more engaged the teachers were in bettering

themselves in teaching the concept, the more accountable they made themselves in ensuring student engagement in the weekly lesson.

T1 was able to fully engage and complete the weekly assignments given by the coaches (see Teacher Task Completion chart). T1 is highly skilled in promoting higher order thinking during whole group instruction. She strengthened her relationships with the students by making concepts applicable to the children's lives and interests. This increased the children's engagement; therefore, reinforcing T1's instructional methods. T1 gave thorough end of the week reflections, which allowed the coaches to tailor the instruction specifically to the students and teacher.

T2 was engaged each week, and followed every lesson provided by the coaches (see Figure 2). T2 collected daily data to chart student progression within her small groups. This held T2 accountable for her improvement in the study and classroom instruction. She utilized the coaches' suggestion of how the lesson should be scaffolded. T2 provided detailed notes in the end of the week summary, which was used by coaches to shape the following weeks coaching session.

T3 was not fully engaged in weekly tasks, and lessons (see Figure 2). T3 lacked competence of the weekly lesson provided by coaches, based on data collected from the audio recordings. T3 did not teach or model rhyming until week five when a coach provided physical coaching within the classroom. T3 did not scaffold students to understand the weekly concept, and asked vague questions. T3's lack of participation in the study is a reflection of why T3 was not able to progress throughout the coaching sessions.

Table 2. Teacher Task Completion

Teachers	T1	T2	T3
Weeks of Study Participation	6 Weeks	5 Weeks	5 Weeks
iPad Coaching Session	100%	100%	100%
Daily Note	100%	100%	100%
Recorded Audio Lesson	100%	100%	0%
End of the Week Reflection	100%	100%	40%
Followed the Lesson Provided in th Coaching Session	80%	80%	40%

#### 4. Expansion of lessons

Throughout the study, the teachers were encouraged to expand the lesson to increase student learning. Each coaching session provided clear and explicit instructions of how to appropriately teach the weekly concept, but emphasized on adapting the lesson to their students' needs. Research has described effective teachers as displaying characteristics, relevant to this guiding question, such as incorporating higher-order thinking, creating a student-centered classroom, and planning activities to engage different learning styles. During the first week, all

teachers kept the lessons scripted to how the coaches modeled. T1 and T2 were both competent in expanding lessons to their students' needs, but T3 was unsuccessful in expanding the lesson to increase her students' understanding of the concept.

Following the first week lesson, T1 attempted to expand the remaining lessons. T1 optimized student learning by either providing additional material to support the concept, or engaged students by applying it to their interests. When T1 expanded the lesson, it allowed the children to connect to the content, which resulted in increased student progress. The coaches determined T1 met a mastery level of instruction when she was teaching the concept effectively, scaffolded students, and then applied the coaching session strategies to their own perception of how the concept could be expanded upon.

T1's first attempt of lesson expansion during the study was during week two. She extended the rhyming song to be altered based on the rhyming words the students choose to incorporate into the song. T1 continued to show proficiency in lesson expansion during week three. The rhyming book was not of interest to the students; therefore, T1 replaced the book with a song. During week four, T1 was to teach a tongue twister lesson to target the skill of alliterations, or beginning sounds. On Monday, T1 followed the lessons example modeled in the coaching session. By the end of the week, T1 had expanded the lesson to enhance the children's higher-order thinking skills by creating their own alliterations. T1 was highly skilled in teaching to the objective, while presenting it in a way most relatable for the students within the classroom.

The study revealed that T2 was more confident in instructing within small-group settings. Since T2 is the assistant teacher, and is in the same room as T1, she had a lot of opportunity to target struggling learners to enhance their knowledge. T2 was successful in expanding lessons because of her ability to scaffold students, implement clear instruction, and understand objectives and the end goal. T2 quickly commented that she would prefer to have a lesson different from T1 to prevent boredom for her students. This decision was key in enhancing learning because it was the initial drive to expand upon their knowledge developed in a whole-group setting.

During week three, T2 was given cards with pictures to work on onset sounds. T2 worked with two students individually to match words that start with the same phoneme. At the beginning of the week, both students tried to rhyme the words, which was not the objective of the lesson. T2 modified the lesson in the middle of the week so that she would display two cards, say the word of the object, say the onset phoneme of each object, then ask students if the beginning sounds were the same. By the end of the week, the two students were able to match most of the cards. T2 held herself accountable for the students' learning by tracking the number of cards correct in the daily tracking sheet. T2 was able to expand three of the six lessons given to her by the coaches to increase her students learning of the skill for that week. T2 extended the lessons by developing games to teach the concepts. In taking

the extra effort to engage children, T2 charted increased growth, as well as elevated cognitive abilities in the selected students.

T3 was unable to extend the lessons over the five weeks of the coaching sessions. This study found that T3's unclear questioning, limited modeling of the targeted skill, and lack of engagement correlated to the inability to extend the lessons and enhance student learning. T3 did not attempt to conduct the lessons as modeled in the coaching sessions. T3 did not progress beyond rhyming during the duration of the study. Evidence from audio recordings revealed that T3 did not directly model what rhyming was, or how to identify rhymes. T3 repetitively asked "what rhymes" following a page in a book. The students would say multiple words they heard in the sentences, however, was unable to tell T3 what rhymed. The audio recorded lesson revealed no attempt in re-teaching the skill. T3 was not able to extend the lessons; therefore, was not able to enhance student learning or progress.

### Discussion

The four original research questions guide the following discussion.

**What phonemic awareness activity did each teacher feel was a place for their students and themselves to start the study with on the phonemic awareness continuum?**

Even though all of the teachers in the study had at least an associate's degree, they still lacked having phonemic awareness instruction within their post-secondary classes. All of the teachers started at the foundational skill of rhyming songs. Research shows that early phonemic awareness instruction can benefit students in literacy skills in early grades and throughout their schooling (An Action Plan of the Learning First Alliance, 1998; Morrow, 2005). Even though the teachers in this study may have had been educated in early literacy instruction in their degree programs in early literacy, they were not specifically targeting phonemic awareness skills within their current classrooms. Their lack of knowledge, self-efficacy in teaching phonemic awareness, or students' current ability level is why they all decided to start at the foundational level of the phonemic awareness continuum.

With that being said, professional development is the key to increasing a teacher's connection with a specific concept. This study supports an individualized coaching approach to professional development (Hindman & Wasik, 2012). The participants in the study preferred a system that incorporated consistent collaboration between coach and teacher and direct specific feedback. These findings highlight the importance of professional development that is relevant to one's own classroom to increase the likelihood of successful outcomes and teacher self-efficacy.



### **Could each teacher get to a more complex phonemic awareness activity on the phonemic awareness continuum after their initial starting point?**

The continuum (see Figure 1) revealed that T1 and T2 progress, whereas T3 made no growth. The continuum encompassed a variety of lessons to teach the broad skills listed on the vertical axis. In this qualitative study, the data displayed on the continuum can be correlated to many factors relating to teacher effectiveness, quality, participation, and knowledge of skill. Only T1 and T2 progressed to more complex skills on the phonemic awareness continuum and this may be due to the fact that T1 had a bachelor's degree and the most experience. T2 likely progressed because she worked in the same room as T1 and had more experience than T3. Research shows that that teacher qualifications and teacher effectiveness are strong determinants in student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ferguson, 1991). In addition, this mentorship that T1 has established for T2 may have helped with T2's effectiveness (Smith, 2011).

### **Was each teacher able to fully engage and follow the weekly lesson that the coaches gave to them?**

T1 and T2 were committed to every aspect of the study and were able to expand their lessons, while T3 struggled to get all requirements completed and could not expand her lessons. This may be due to T3's understanding of phonemic awareness and her educational knowledge of phonemic awareness. Subject matter knowledge has a small large role in teacher effectiveness, so this may have been a factor that influenced T3 (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In addition, T3 may have had less knowledge of teaching and learning from T3's course work (Darling-Hammond, 2000). There is a significant positive relationship between education coursework and teacher performance (Ashton & Crocker, 1987). T3 may not have had enough coursework on literacy, specifically phonemic awareness to be ready to teach such skills or expand on the skills.

### **Were any of the teachers able to expand the lesson given to them by the coaches to increase their student learning?**

A teacher can more effectively impact a child's understanding of the world once they are able to reflect on the situation and differentiate instruction to meet a variety of needs and learning styles. A successful teacher constantly makes evidence-based decisions to implement greater instructional modifications (Gettinger, & Stoiber, 2012). T1 and T2 were successful in expanding the lesson because of

their ability to immediately modify the lessons to individualized learning preferences. T3's inability to expand a lesson is contributed to factors such as a lack in differentiation, limited engagement in coaching sessions and lessons, and unclear objectives.

The encouragement and reinforcement of expanding lessons within the coaching sessions promote teacher self-efficacy and ownership of instruction. In order to expand the lessons, modifications and scaffolding must be constant. T1 and T2 scaffolded students to understand new connections to concepts, and individually internalize the skills, while T3 lacked the ability to expand her students' learning capacity. These results solidify the importance in providing explicit instruction throughout the coaching of how to scaffold students to expand the initial objective of the week (Hammond, & Gibbons, 2005).

### Conclusion

The impact of this study supports the intervention of phonemic awareness coaching sessions within the preschool setting to elevate the quality of instruction and the teacher's self-efficacy. Success is directly related to the effectiveness of the coaching sessions, specific feedback, and the amount of teacher participation. Educators are becoming more aware of the positive impacts coaches are making throughout educational programs, and more specifically literacy instruction. Phonemic awareness must be taught in a sequential process that develops skills from least to most complex. The exposure to these skills at a young age will strengthen a child's literacy foundation to increase future reading success. A teacher should possess an extensive background of content knowledge and appropriate instructional techniques to guide students in achieving the identified objectives. This study contributes to the supporting evidence that collaborative phonemic awareness coaching sessions, over an extended period of time, is a powerful form of professional development.

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