Teaching phonics using Wilson reading system

(Sounds cards, student readers, workbooks)

The English alphabet has 26 letters but those letters can represent 44 sounds (because some letters have more than 1 sound). Mastery of these sounds and the structure of words enable the reader to become fluent and pronounce unfamiliar words. Speed and accuracy improve, allowing for comprehension and retention of what is read.

Some of our students do not know all the letter sounds or rules of phonics. We need to help them “break the code” by teaching them phonics using a direct, systematic approach.

Consonant sounds

We’re going to begin by talking about consonant sounds. (pass out mirrors)

Use your mirror and watch what your mouth is doing as you say these sounds after me:

/t/ /k/ /s/

Notice your tongue, lips and teeth. Can you feel how they obstruct the air coming up from your lungs and passing through your mouth? These are “unvoiced” consonants.

Now say /n/

This time the air is actually coming out through your nose and you can hear your voice and feel your vocal chords vibrating.

How about /d/? If you say /t/ and /d/ while looking in your mirror, you will see that your tongue and lips are in the same position for both sounds - the difference is your voice. (refer to slide #119 in binder)

I’d like to run through each of the consonant sounds to make sure we all have the correct pronunciation. Sometimes people forget to “clip” the sound and actually elongate it. We don’t want to teach our students any bad habits! (Go through consonant sounds demonstrating “clipping” the sound)

Teaching consonant sounds

The best way to introduce and practice sounds is by using your sound card deck. You may also want to use a mirror so your student can see the shape his/her mouth makes with the different sounds.

Get a volunteer to be “student” and give him/her mirror for demonstration.

I will begin by teaching the consonant *s*. Hold up *s* card for student to see. The name of this letter is *s*. The sound it makes is /s/ as in the keyword snake. For every letter we learn, we are also going to have a keyword to help you remember the sound.

Have volunteer “student” repeat s, snake, /s/ and look in mirror. Ask him/her to trace the letter with his/her finger. Now brainstorm with student a bit. “Can you think of other words that start with the sound /s/?” If your student cannot think of any, you will provide a few and have him/her repeat and listen for /s/ sound.

Have your student write the new letter sound into his/her notebook (it’s helpful to have a section for sounds). Enter name of letter, sound and keyword and have your student repeat it a few times. Then you can make your student a sound card to take home so s/he can practice the sounds s/he has learned each week.

Let’s get into pairs and practice teaching a consonant. (Practice letters *n* and *f*)

Teaching vowel sounds

Vowels are much more complicated than consonants because although there are only 6 vowels, they can represent many sounds.

What are the vowels? a, e, i, o, u, y

Look at your mouth in the mirror and say the short sound of the letter *a* which is /a/. is that sound stopped or open? (open) Voiced or unvoiced? (voiced)

Vowels are open-mouthed, unstoppable sounds, which are voiced. They form a bridge from one stopped sound (consonant) to the next.

Look at the *a* card from the sound deck. How many different sounds can *a* make? 4

Can we produce them now? Use keywords to help. Use your mirror and notice your mouth. (write on board all the sounds for letter *a* and say them together with class)

Now let’s try the sounds for letter *e*. Go through same exercise with i, o, u, y and schwa.

You have already learned how to teach a consonant and its sound. The same technique is used for teaching short vowel sounds. Remember, using the Wilson phonics system you are only teaching the short vowel sounds at first. The long vowel sounds and the vowel combinations will come later.

When teaching vowel sounds, explain to your student that the vowels are all on pink cards and are very important because every word must contain at least one vowel. Use the sound card. Tell the student the name of the letter, keyword and the sound. Ask him/her to repeat it in that order (a, apple, /a/) Reinforce by having the student write the letter (or finger trace) while saying its name, keyword and sound. You may also use a picture to illustrate the keyword.

You will have your student enter the letter, keyword and sound into his/her notebook. Use a separate page for vowels. Then you’ll give your student a pink sound card to practice the letter at home.

Let’s pair up and practice teaching a vowel sound now.

How did your practice go? Did you feel comfortable using the sound cards? Did you run into any problems?

Working with sound cards

Once you have taught your student just a few letter sounds you can immediately form some words, which brings the learning into context.

Ask for volunteer “student” and demonstrate putting *a* and *d* cards together. Ask student for short *a* sound and then *d* sound. Put them together to form a word – *ad*. Add *s* card and ask for sound. Put it in front of *ad* and form *sad*. Replace *s* with *m* to form *mad*.

You can put sound cards together and ask your student to **read** the word and you can ask your student to **spell** words with the sound cards. One way to do this is through the use of word patterns or word families. These are rhyming words with the same ending sound such as hat, bat, mat, fat, sat, rat, cat. Pages 66-73 in Tutor book describes ways you can use word patterns with your students and pages 170-180 has lists of word patterns for you to use. The Patterns in Spelling workbooks are available at the Literacy Volunteer offices for you to borrow and use with your student.

Wilson Reading System

If your students need to begin by learning their letter sounds, you may start off with the Wilson books. These books use a structured system to teach phonics and emphasize the use of sound cards, word lists, word cards, and controlled sentences to teach the rules of phonics. A typical Wilson reading lesson would include:

**Quick Drill** – The students will be asked to look at the card, name the letter, sound and keyword for sounds that have been previously introduced. The purpose is to teach to automaticity so that the letter names and sounds become immediate. As students become more confident with the letter sounds, the tutor can say the sound and ask the student to name the letter and find the card.

**Introduce new sounds** – Each week a few new sounds will be taught. The student will get a sound card for each new sound so s/he can practice at home. The new sounds should also be added to the student’s notebook.

**Word cards** – Students will also receive word cards for vocabulary or sight words that s/he is learning.

**Word lists** – Each Wilson lesson includes word lists which have words constructed *only* with the sounds that have been introduced in that lesson or previous lessons. This allows the complexity of words to gradually increase.

**Controlled sentences and stories**  – You can select sentences (and eventually stories) from the Wilson lesson for your students to read each week. The controlled text will only contain words that were in the word lists in that lesson. It’s best to ask students to read the sentence silently first and then out loud. Students can use a pencil for tracking as they read. This exercise will provide an opportunity for students to practice the skills they’ve learned in context.

**Dictation** – The tutor chooses words and sentences from the Wilson word lists and controlled text and asks the student to write these down. Depending upon the level of the student, you might start with 5 words and 2 sentences and eventually progress to 10 words and 5 sentences. Always have the student say the word or repeat back the sentence before s/he writes it. When dictating sentences, remind students to include capital letters and punctuation.

(Provide some time for class to look at Wilson books and practice the above)