

Funēemics® and English Language Learners (ELLs)



According to research, students who have not gained phonemic awareness will have a difficult time mastering the subsequent skills of sound/symbol correspondence. This problem is only intensified with English Language Learners (ELLs) due to non-transferable phonemes between English and any of the myriad of other languages (Antunez, 2002). Geva & Siegal (2000) assert:

“It is critical to know that older striving readers and English language learners also benefit from phonemic awareness training. Research shows that when English language learners are provided explicit phonemic awareness instruction, they are able to catch up with native speakers’ progress on word identification and spelling” (as cited in Antonacci & O’Callighan, 2012, p. 2).

The following are research-based considerations for teaching phonemic awareness to students whose first language is not English, published by the Broward County Public Schools Multicultural & ESOL Program Services Education Department (2007, p. 4). Following each consideration is an explanation of the methodology the *Funēemics* program uses to address it.

What the Research Indicates	How the Research is Applied in <i>Funēemics</i> .
<p>“Some phonemes may not be present in ELLs’ native language and therefore may be difficult to pronounce and distinguish auditorily and place into meaningful context. It is especially important that ELLs receive explicit instruction in these phonemes. Teachers can teach phonemic awareness while also explicitly teaching vocabulary words, their meaning, and their pronunciation to ELLs.”</p>	<p>Rhymes, songs, and riddles provide meaningful context for the words used in <i>Funēemics</i>. Many of the words students learn to manipulate phonemically are illustrated, supporting the acquisition of new vocabulary naturally within the lessons. The teacher modeling inherent in the structure of the <i>Funēemics</i> lessons emphasizes correct pronunciation.</p>
<p>“Research suggests that ELLs respond well to meaningful activities such as language games and word walls when the activities are consistent and focus on particular sounds and letters. Poems and songs, with their rhythm and repetition, are easily memorized and should be used to teach phonemic awareness and print concepts to ELLs.”</p>	<p><i>Funēemics</i> incorporates word games, songs, and rhymes throughout the 59 lessons.</p>
<p>“ELLs benefit from social and group settings that encourage interactions because they often learn from one another.”</p>	<p>Teaching <i>Funēemics</i> in a small group setting provides plenty of opportunities for multiple responses, allowing ELL students to learn from their English-speaking peers.</p>

What the Research Indicates	How the Research is Applied in <i>Funēemics</i> .
<p>“Scientific research on phonemic awareness demonstrates that children learn language indirectly in the following three ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. through conversations, mostly with adults; 2. listening to adults read to them; and 3. reading extensively on their own. <p>Developing phonemic awareness may pose a challenge for ELLs because their parents and other adults in their lives are often not fluent in English. . . . One of the best ways to help children develop language naturally is through the use of children’s literature that focuses on some kind of play with the sounds of language.”</p>	<p><i>Funēemics</i> is teacher-led, giving many opportunities for conversation, and uses a variety of songs, rhymes, and word games that play with the sounds of the language. Research has proven these activities to be “strongly and specifically related to more abstract phonological skills and of emergent reading abilities” (Maclean, Bryant, and Bradley, as cited in Adams, 1994).</p>
<p>“Phonemic awareness experiences should help develop positive feeling towards learning a new language. The teacher should avoid drill and rote memorization activities. Engaging the students in playful and fun activities will promote an environment where students will be comfortable playing and taking risks with the language.”</p>	<p><i>Funēemics</i> engages students in song and rhyme using whimsical, fun, and child-friendly illustrations. The interactive widgets help the lessons come alive and provide opportunities for repetition.</p>
<p>“The teacher should allow and be prepared for individual differences. . . . ELLs’ development of phonemic awareness can differ from that of native speakers because of their varying ability to discriminate discrete sounds of the target language.”</p>	<p>The <i>Funēemics</i> program provides many opportunities for differentiated instruction. See <i>Funēemics® and Differentiated Instruction</i> in the Teacher’s Manual for more information.</p>
<p>“Phonemic awareness activities are not intended to replace ELLs’ interactions with meaningful language and print. Therefore, the recommended activities are not intended to replace invaluable reading experiences such as reading aloud and language experience.”</p>	<p>While the <i>Funēemics</i> program does an excellent job of integrating reading aloud and language experience into the lessons, it is important to follow up with many opportunities for conversation and literature immersion. Please refer to the appendix of the Teacher’s Manual for a list of children’s books that use phonemic awareness concepts.</p>