An examination of primary-grade teachers' understanding of English phonology considered necessary for the teaching of reading
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Abstract

This study examined both teachers' understanding of English phonology considered necessary for the teaching of reading and teachers' abilities to accurately gauge their own levels of knowledge. A sample of 99 primary-grade teachers involved in making instructional decisions related to teaching primary-grade children (K-3) how to read provided information on the Knowledge of Phonology Survey.

Results were similar to those of earlier studies. Phonemic awareness continues to remain elusive to the teachers responsible for making it visible to the children they teach. Teacher responses indicate confusion in many phonological areas, including the ability to differentiate blends, digraphs, and diphthongs; the ability to articulate the meanings of key terms widely used in the literature; the ability to recognize the difference between a regular and an irregular word; and the knowledge of the progression of difficulty in blending and segmenting tasks.

Teachers may not be able to accurately gauge their own levels of knowledge of the phonological structure of English. Findings indicate no statistically significant difference in teachers' understanding of English phonology when those who feel very well prepared to provide students with explicit, systematic instruction in phonological awareness are compared with those who feel less than very well prepared. Nor is there a statistically significant difference in teachers' understanding of English phonology when those who report being highly knowledgeable about the sound system of the English language are compared with those who report being less than highly knowledgeable.

This study suggests that primary-grade teachers would benefit from coursework and professional development focused on increasing their understanding of English phonology.