

Connecting the Dyslexia Conversation to the SIPPS Program

By Lenora Forsythe | Categories: SIPPS, Implementation, Dyslexia

In Part One of this blog series, Dr. Holly Lane shared the current definition of dyslexia, background information that sheds light on how it became a hot topic, and implications for instruction.

In Part Two of the series, Dr. Lane encouraged teachers to explore the core principles of best practice in dyslexia instruction. She advocated for powerful, evidence-based instruction in phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and decoding, and explained the tenets of structured literacy.

In this third and final installment, I want to connect those blogs and other recent publications to the *SIPPS* (Systematic Instruction in Phonological Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words) program, share my key takeaways, and leave you with new resources that will help you consider our work here at Collaborative Classroom in the context of current dyslexia conversations.

Shortly after the Collaborative Classroom published Dr. Lane's dyslexia-focused blogs, the International Literacy Association (ILA) issued a Literacy Leader's Brief titled *Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction*, in which the ILA promotes systematic and explicit phonics instruction as part of comprehensive literacy instruction. The brief raises many important issues, but the one that stands out most is "...phonics instruction is helpful for all students, harmful for none, and crucial for some" (p. 2).

This statement applies directly to the evidence-based instruction in phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and decoding recommended by Dr. Lane as essential instructional elements for students with dyslexia. Moreover, the statement emphasizes the importance of effective instruction regardless of whether the student has a diagnosis.

The ILA brief prompted me to take a closer look at the Collaborative Classroom's reading intervention program for grades K-12, *SIPPS*, and think about how it aligns with the essential instructional elements (phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, decoding, and encoding) that Dr. Lane described.

The Role of *SIPPS* and Structured Literacy

With the rise of conversations and legislation around dyslexia, we at Collaborative Classroom have reflected on our own work and how it supports students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties. This work is set in the context of our mission, which is to provide a sustainable, scalable, and affordable way for schools and districts to implement research-based teaching practices that support teachers with helping students grow as readers, writers, and thinkers as they develop the social and emotional skills necessary to thrive.

The *SIPPS* program, based on the research of Dr. John Shefelbine, is designed to efficiently close gaps in foundational skills using systematic, explicit instructional routines. The structure and design of the *SIPPS* program are beneficial and effective for students with dyslexia, and the program aligns with the Structured Literacy framework, which the International Dyslexia Association recommends as best practice in teaching students with dyslexia.

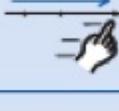
You can find a detailed chart illustrating how *SIPPS* routines align directly with the framework in a document titled "Structured Literacy and the SIPPS Program." Here, we'll delve deeper into how these *SIPPS* routines support the critical instructional elements Dr. Lane discussed in her blog.

Phonological Awareness

In *SIPPS*, phonological awareness is taught and reviewed daily using explicit, systematic routines that do not involve print. The activities are sequenced so that they generally increase in difficulty. During this routine, the teacher visually represents units of sound with horizontal lines for phonemes and boxes for words, syllables, and rimes. These visual cues are used as students are prompted to practice oral blending and segmenting. The illustrations below show a routine for segmenting.

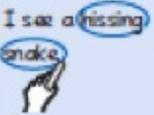
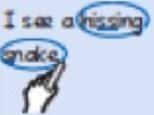
Instruction (using the word sat as an example)		
	Point to the solid blank (which corresponds to the targeted position) and pause.	You: "Listen for the first sound."
	Point to the left of the blanks and pause.	You: "Say sat."
	Sweep your finger under all three blanks and off to the right.	Students: "sat"
	Point to the left of the blanks again and pause.	You: "Sound sat."

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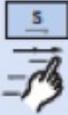
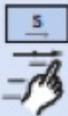
Instruction (using the word sat as an example)		(continued)
	Sweep under the first blank and hold, because /ss/ is a continuous sound.	Students: "/ss/"
	Sweep under the second blank and hold, because /ää/ is also a continuous sound.	Students: "/ää/"
	Sweep your finger under and past the third blank, because /t/ is a stop sound.	Students: "/t/"
	Point to the solid blank and pause.	You: "First sound?" Students: "/ss/"

The Alphabetic Principle

In *SIPPS*, explicit and systematic instruction ensures that students thoroughly learn spelling-sound relationships. The teacher uses handheld cards to introduce new spelling-sound relationships and to review those taught previously. Students immediately practice new sounds by blending and reading decodable words. See this example for introducing the sound /s/.

Instruction (using the sound /ss/ as an example)		
Step 1: Introduce		
 <p>I see a hissing snake.</p>	Write the sentence on the board and read it aloud.	You: "I see a hissing snake."
 <p>I see a hissing snake.</p>	Circle and read the words <i>hissing</i> and <i>snake</i> .	You: "hissing, snake"
 <p>I see a hissing snake.</p>	Underline the <i>ss</i> in <i>hissing</i> and the <i>s</i> in <i>snake</i> and have the students say the sound of the letter <i>s</i> in these words. If they don't know the sound, say it for them.	Students: "/ss/"
Step 2: Explain		
	Explain that the sound is continuous by both telling the students that they can say the sound for a long time without stopping and demonstrating it. Point to the "hissing snake" picture on the wall card and explain the mnemonic.	
Step 3: Practice		
a. "My turn." "My turn again."		
	Show the sound card for <i>s</i> .	

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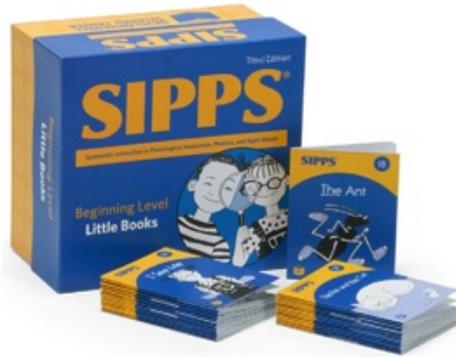
Instruction <i>(using the sound /ss/ as an example)</i>		<i>(continued)</i>
	Point to the left of the arrow on the card. Pause.	You: "My turn."
	Sweep under the letter, pausing for about 2 seconds with your finger directly below the spelling.	You: "/ss/"
	Again point to the left of the arrow on the card. Pause.	You: "My turn again."
	Sweep under the letter, pausing for about 2 seconds with your finger directly below the spelling.	You: "/ss/"
b. "Together." "Sound." "Again."		
	Point to the left of the arrow.	You: "Together. [pause] Sound."
	Sweep under the letter, pausing for about 2 seconds with your finger directly below the spelling.	You and students: "/ss/"
	Again point to the left of the arrow. Pause.	You: "Again."
	Repeat the hand motion.	You and students: "/ss/"

(continues)

Instruction (using the sound /ss/ as an example)		(continued)
c. "Your turn." "Sound." "Again."		
	Point to the left of the arrow.	You: "Your turn. [pause] Sound."
	Repeat the hand motion.	Students: "/ss/"
	Point to the left of the arrow.	You: "Again."
	Repeat the hand motion.	Students: "/ss/"

Decoding

Ample decoding instruction and practice is provided in the *SIPPS* program. First, students apply new sounds and review sounds as they blend and read decodable words. The *Reading a Story* routine in each lesson gives students the opportunity to apply what they have learned about sounds in the context of reading connected text. Each lesson includes a new story composed primarily of previously taught spelling-sounds and sight words. These two decoding routines ensure that students transfer discrete skills directly to reading.



5 Reading a Story

For the *first reading* of a sentence in a story: For all decodable words: “Sound.” “Read.” For a sight word at the beginning of the sentence: “Read.” For sight words that follow, just sweep under the word. For the *rereading* of a sentence in a story: “Read” for the first word in the sentence. Sweep under all the words that follow.

DECODING SUPPORT

Ann: Students may have difficulty blending words that have a double consonant. Explain to the students that the two *n*'s are sounded out only one time.

ants: For decodable words with inflections: Cover the inflection and have the students sound out and read the base word. Uncover the *s* and have the students say the sound of the inflection and then read the entire word.

Paraphrase or read:

You: “This story is about Sam and Ann, a trash can, and a rat.”

Sam and Ann Ran

Can Sam sit on the mat? Yes. / Can Ann sit on the mat? Yes. / Sam and Ann are on the mat. / Is the can on the mat? No. / Is 1 ant on the can? No. / Are 2 ants on the can? Yes. / Is a rat in the can? Yes. / Sam and Ann ran.

Correction

For sight words, say the word, have the students reread it, and go back to the beginning of the sentence. For decodable words, model the blending of the word once, have the students reread it, and go back to the beginning of the sentence.

Encoding

The Guided Spelling routine in each *SIPPS* lesson provides spelling practice coordinated with decoding instruction. In this routine, students learn strategies they can apply to spelling many words phonetically. The teacher models spelling strategies and helps students write the words successfully. This ensures that from very early on, students understand the reciprocal relationship between the sounds they are learning to decode and their spelling.

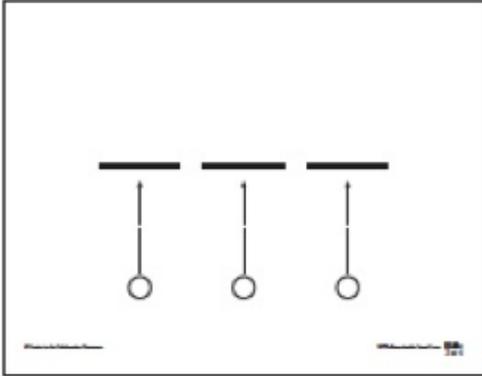
Less Support (when all students are gaining proficiency)		
	Point to the left of the visual cue.	You: "At. I saw you at the store. Say at." <i>Students: "at"</i>
	Point to the left of the arrow in the visual cue.	You: "Sound at."
	Sweep your finger under the blanks in succession and off to the right. Hold under continuous sounds.	<i>Students: "yää/t"</i>
	Point to the left of writing line number 1.	You: "Write at."
	Monitor and assist the students until they have finished writing.	
	Point to the left of writing line number 1.	You: "Read and sound what you wrote."
	Write the corresponding spellings on the writing line as the students respond. Have the students check their work.	<i>Students: "at, /ää//t/"</i>

Multisensory

SIPPS instruction is multisensory. Students listen to verbal prompts, follow visual cues, and respond chorally in most routines. Students also write during the Guided Spelling routine. When needed, teachers have the option to enhance the basic *SIPPS* routines using guidance from the *Intensive Multisensory Instruction for SIPPS Handbook*. This manual provides additional multisensory instruction ideas that can be smoothly incorporated into regular *SIPPS* lessons. In the example below, the teacher is prompted to use the Segmentation routine with the addition of a visual cue and markers. The enhanced routine includes a "Sound Lines" page and one marker in each circle on the page for each student.

Example (using in)

You: "I will say a word. You repeat the word and sweep your hand under the blanks on your page the way I do on the board. Say in."



> (The students say *in* while sweeping their hand under the blanks on their page as you do on the board.)

You: "Sound in. Push one marker up to the line as you say each sound."

> (The students sound *īnn* while moving the left marker up to the line for /ī/ and the second marker up to the line for /n/.)

You: "Now move your markers back down to the circles."

Repeat the instruction with the first word to ensure that the students understand the procedure before going on to the next word. Then continue with the remaining words on the list.

The Orton-Gillingham Approach

Across the country, the term Orton-Gillingham in relation to dyslexia instruction is gaining currency. The OG approach was developed in the 1930s by Dr. Samuel Orton and Anna Gillingham as a solution for students with dyslexia and other reading challenges. The Orton-Gillingham approach is just that: an approach, not a curriculum. We compared the characteristics of the Orton-Gillingham approach and the *SIPPS* program. Our findings, documented in "The Orton-Gillingham Approach and the *SIPPS* Program," identify the similarities between the OG Approach and Dr. Shefelbine's approach.

Key Takeaways

Fully understanding dyslexia is challenging, and students who have difficulty learning how to read may or may not have an official diagnosis. For these children, internal or external factors have made the road to learning how to read painstakingly difficult. According to literacy expert Tim Shanahan, a dyslexia diagnosis does *not* suggest a particular instructional treatment. My takeaway is that the heated conversation around dyslexia is distracting us from focusing on what has happened and is happening instructionally to support students—whether they have a diagnosis, are waiting on one, or will never have one. We cannot, and should not, wait for a diagnosis. Instead, we should focus on our first line of defense: consistent, systematic, and explicit instruction. At the heart of our conversations are individual children who have unique needs and paths in reading development. We know that systematic and explicit instruction will benefit these children; and there is an urgency to ensure *all* students receive what we know will be "helpful for all, harmful for none, and crucial for some" (ILA, 2019, p.2) in an effort to grow readers who can read the words, understand them, and find joy in reading.

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