

Supporting Phonics in Secondary Schools

Introduction

Historically, teaching students to read has been a challenge reserved for primary schools. However, each year, around one quarter of students do not meet the expected standard in reading by the time they reach secondary school (DfE, 2022).

Increasingly, the need for specific intervention in foundational reading skills, such as phonics, has become vital in ensuring that all pupils can reach academic success across the whole curriculum.

Often, it can be a challenge to find age-appropriate resources and staff that have the knowledge and skills to teach these early reading skills.

Why is Phonics important?

Learning to read is not a simple task. It is made up of multiple processes and skills that work together to achieve full text understanding.

This is commonly explained by the Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer, 1986) which explains that full reading comprehension is made up of both language comprehension and decoding skills. Deficiencies in any of these core skills can then lead to differing issues in reading accurately and with understanding.

When students have not yet acquired decoding skills, this will impede their ability to read fluently and, thus, fully comprehend text. The result is a student that may be able to understand a text that is read out to them but may lack the fluency to understand and access text independently.

By focusing on these phonics skills explicitly, students are given the opportunity to unlock the fluent reading needed to fully understand curriculum texts. This, in turn, will support students in gaining full access to the Secondary curriculum.

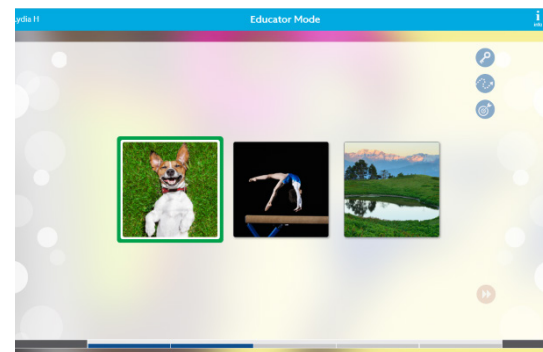
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How Does PowerUp Support Phonics?

Lexia PowerUp Literacy program provides students instruction and practice in all the key skills needed for accurate and fluent decoding.

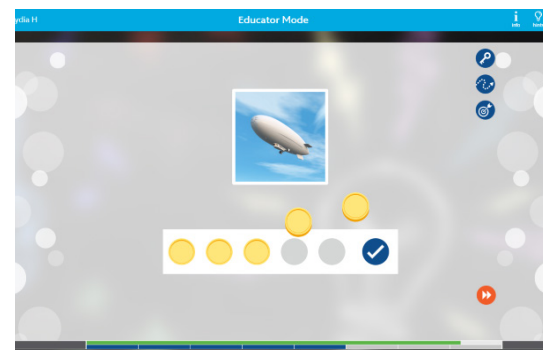
Blending

Before learning grapheme-phoneme correspondence, students receive explicit practice with their blending skills, refining their ability to combine sounds to read words. This essential skill acts as a foundation for fluent reading, aiding faster word recognition



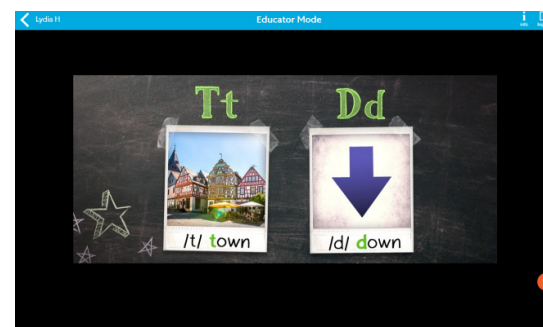
Segmenting

In addition to blending, students are also taught explicitly how to segment spoken and written words. Practice in listening to and isolating sounds that they can hear in words supports them in building the core skill used to spell words accurately.



Confusable Sounds

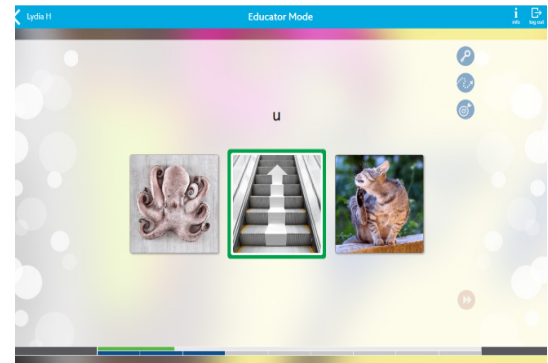
PowerUp also works to address misconceptions by supporting students in distinguishing between commonly confused sounds, supporting them to recognise the nuance of these linguistic sounds. Students also get the opportunity to manipulate sounds in words, laying the foundation for students to become confident readers and spellers.



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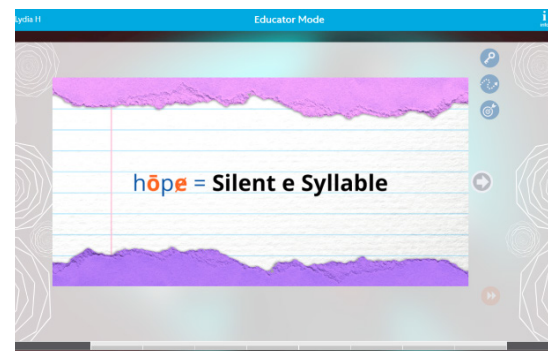
Letter-Sound Correspondence

PowerUp builds on phonology by introducing grapheme-phoneme correspondence in a systematic way. Students receive explicit instruction specific sounds, how each of these sounds are spoken and how it is represented graphically. Students systematically learn letter-sound correspondences first in isolation and then in the context of words. This allows students to apply their knowledge instantly.



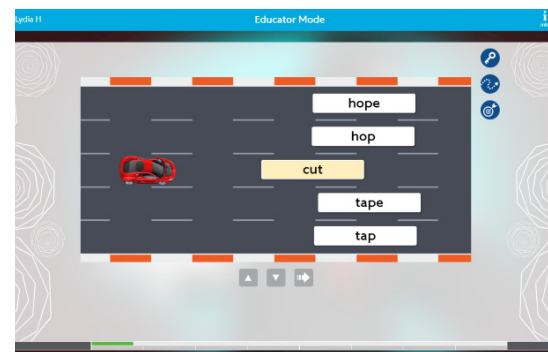
Syllable Awareness

Phonics work is extended further to facilitate the reading of multisyllabic words. Grapheme-phoneme correspondence is built upon by introducing students to common syllable patterns such as vowel diagraphs. By building an understanding of these common patterns, students are not only able to apply their phonic knowledge to decode longer and more complex words, but they can utilise this knowledge to help them become more accurate at spelling.



Building Fluency

Fluency is also built by including timed exercises and games to encourage automatic recognition of each sound. Fluency exercises appear at various points throughout their learning to encourage faster decoding and building their confidence.



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The Structured Literacy Approach

PowerUp adopts a Structured Literacy approach to teach these foundational literacy skills. Instruction is built on four main principles:

Systematic and Cumulative

Concepts are sequenced in a logical order of how words are structured. This builds from more commonly occurring sounds (eg short vowel sounds) to more complex spelling patterns such as silent-e syllables.

Explicit

Concepts are taught directly and clearly and each skill and activity is clearly modelled to the student. This is followed by opportunities to practice the skill independently.

Multisensory

PowerUp instruction uses multiple models of learning in succession to ensure visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learners needs are met.

Diagnostic

Students needs are identified with an initial assessment to ensure that each activity is pitched exactly at the students' level. Activities will offer additional support at the point at which students experience difficulty.

Engaging for Adolescent Readers

PowerUp uses age-appropriate graphics and high-interest reading materials to ensure students are engaged every step of the way. PowerUp utilises game-based motivation such as free choice, polls and streaks to foster autonomy and relatedness and to provide an immersive experience.

References

Department for Education (2022) Key stage 2 attainment: national headlines. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/key-stage-2-attainment-2022-national-headlines> (Accessed: 15 March 2022)

Gough, P. and Tunmer, W. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. Remedial and Special Education, 7, 6–10.