Key Terms and Definitions

Many special words and technical terms are used in the field of Phonics education. To avoid confusion, we have included some of these key terms and their definitions here. These key terms and their definitions can be used as reference materials, for example, you may refer to them if you are studying the course Certificate in Phonics Teaching to Young Learners at PolyU Speed in Hong Kong. They are also beneficial to anyone interested in Phonics education.

Knowing these key terms means that you can have a better understanding of the concepts behind them. Understanding these concepts can help you to apply them in teaching Phonics. Applying these concepts can allow you to grow in your journey as a Phonics educator as well as a researcher.

We have complied these definitions from several sources such as phonics websites and books (See 'Reference' at the end of this section). Some of them have come from Phonics practitioners who have been applying these concepts in their teaching. We hope that the definitions are user-friendly and can be understood by in-service or novice teachers, and parents who would like to teach their own children Phonics. The key terms are arranged in alphabetical order.

The following list of key terms and definitions is not an exhaustive list of all key terms and definitions that are used in the field of Phonics education.

Alternative Pronunciation
When reading English words, we discover that some vowel and consonant letters can be pronounced in more than one way. For example, the letters 'ow' can have the pronunciation /<u>ou</u>/ in the word 'owl', and the pronunciation /<u>oa</u>/ in the word 'bowl'. The sounds /<u>ou</u>/ and /<u>oa</u>/ are the alternative pronunciations for the letters 'ow'.

Alternative Spelling
When spelling English words, we discover that some vowel and consonant sounds can be spelt in more than one way. For example, the sound /<u>ai</u>/ can be spelt using the letters 'ai', 'ay' & 'a' in the words 'mail', 'play' & 'apron'.

Analytic and Synthetic Phonics
In Analytic Phonics, young learners learn to identify (analyse) the common sound in sets of words in which each word contains the sound that is the focus of the lesson. For instance, they might be asked to listen to the words 'big', 'bag' and 'bat' and decide in what ways the words sound alike. In Synthetic Phonics, young learners learn to become aware that words are made up of sounds and that they can put the sounds together from left to right to say the word, e.g., /b/+/i/+/g/= 'big'.

Bigrams
*See **Unigrams and Bigrams**.*

Blending
To draw individual sounds together to pronounce a word, e.g., /c/ /l/ /a/ /p/ blended together reads 'clap'. Blending can be done orally or with text. Oral blending involves hearing sounds and merging these sounds together to make a word. Blending from text involves looking at letters and putting their corresponding sounds together to form words or part of words. Young learners develop oral blending <u>before</u> they can blend from texts.

Bouncy and Stretchy Sounds
Some sounds are said continuously – stretchy - while others are said with a short stop in between – bouncy. Letter 'n' in 'nap' is an example of a stretchy sound – you can say and hold /nnnnnn/ continuously. Letter 'p' in 'nap' is an example of a bouncy sound – you produce /p/ and stop, you do not say /p/ continuously.

Common Exception Words
This is the term used in the 2013 English National Curriculum for common words with unusual letter-sound correspondences. These are the words that 'Letters and Sounds' and other commercial phonics programmes refer to as 'tricky words'. They are common words with phonic irregularities, e.g., 'one', 'who', 'should'. *(See also **Tricky Words**.)*

Consonant Sounds
Consonants are sounds marked by constriction or closure in the breath channel – represented by the letters other than 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o' and 'u'.

Consonant Blends (Adjacent Consonants)
When consonants come side by side in a word, they are called Consonant Blends or Adjacent Consonants, e.g., 'st-' in 'stop', '-st' in 'test', 'cl-' in 'club' and 'str-' in 'string'. Although we blend these sounds together, it is important to note that we produce each of the sounds represented by these letters – they do not become one sound.

CVC Words
<u>C</u>onsonant-<u>V</u>owel-<u>C</u>onsonant words. Young learners' early reading experiences will include words like 'cat', 'dog', 'sit' and 'pen', which have single letters for each sound. Later, CVC words will include those with **digraphs** such as 'chip', 'wi<u>sh</u>' and '<u>ch</u> <u>ur</u> <u>ch</u>'. CVC words can be extended to become CCVC, CVCC, CCCVC words where C represents consonant sounds and V represents vowel sounds. *(See **Digraphs**.)*

Decodable Words, Decodable Readers (Phonics Readers)
Decodable words are words which can be easily decoded using phonic strategies, e.g., 'cat', 'dog', 'lamp'.
Decodable Readers (Phonics Readers) are books with a controlled vocabulary incorporating only the letter sounds taught up to a certain point. The majority of the words in this kind of texts are made up of 'regular' letter-sound correspondences that have been taught. This means that young learners can read these words by blending the sounds of the letters from left to right.

Decoding
The process of reading a word with Synthetic Phonics has two stages. Firstly, the individual letter-sound correspondence is recognised, and then the sounds are blended or synthesised into a word. <u>Reading (decoding)</u> and <u>spelling (encoding)</u> are <u>reversible</u> processes that are often taught simultaneously in Synthetic Phonics.

Digraphs
Two letters which combine to make a new sound. E.g., the sound /<u>ng</u>/ in the words 'Hong Kong' is written with two letters 'n' and 'g', but they make one sound. We can help kids to distinguish digraphs by putting a line underneath them when digraphs are first introduced, e.g., '<u>ng</u>' - /<u>ng</u>/.

Encoding
Encoding is when we transcribe units of sounds into units of letters, that is, spelling.

Formative Assessment
Formative assessment generates data on student learning while it occurs - it is conducted during the learning process. Formative assessment is a way of framing learning activities such that they generate observable and measurable data for teachers <u>and</u> learners. During formative assessment, learners can discover what they have mastered and which areas they need to improve. Teachers can also discover which knowledge, skills and abilities should be clarified and strengthened.

Graphemes (Letters)
A grapheme is a written symbol that uses letters to represent sounds. In the word 'cat' there are three sounds /k/ /a/ /t/ and they are each represented by a single letter grapheme 'c' 'a' 't' respectively. In the word 'shop' there are three sounds /<u>sh</u>/ /o/ /p/, but the first sound is represented by two letters '<u>sh</u>' and these are known as digraphs. There are still three sounds in the word 'shop', the first being represented by two letters. Graphemes can be represented by one letter, e.g., 's' for the sound /s/, two letters, e.g., 'sh' for the sound /<u>sh</u>/, and three letters, e.g., 'igh' for the sound /<u>ie</u>/. Letters are usually represented in between quotation marks like this – 'sh'. *(See **Digraphs**.)*

Interaction Patterns
Interaction patterns are the different ways that learners and the teacher can interact in the class. Using the right interaction pattern is a fundamental factor in the success of any activity and the achievement of aims.

for the following activities / interactions	use the following acronyms
teacher instructing the whole group	T – SS
teacher giving support to one student	T – S
pair work	S – S
group work	SS – SS
students giving ideas to teacher	SS – T
student giving support to peers	S – SS

*Above is a sample list showing some but not all interaction patterns.

Lesson Plan
A lesson plan, usually made by a teacher, is the detailed description of the course of instructions or 'learning trajectory' for a lesson. A daily lesson plan is developed by the teacher to guide class learning. Details will vary depending on the preference of the teacher, subject being covered, and the needs of the students. There may be requirements mandated by the school system regarding the plan. A lesson plan is the teacher's guide for running a particular lesson, and it includes the goal (what the students are supposed to learn), how the goal will be reached (the method, procedure) and a way of measuring how well the goal was reached (test, worksheet, homework etc.).

Letter Formation
Letter formation is the sequence of movements followed by the pencil to form a letter. The starting position is the consistent point from which the letter begins when forming it.

Letter-Sound Correspondence (LSC) (Letter-Sound Relationship) or Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence (GPC)
Knowing this means that young learners are able to match a letter(s) to its corresponding sound and vice versa, that is, you are also able to match a sound to its corresponding letter(s).

Multisensory
Multisensory is often used to describe strategies that involve young learners in activities that include the use of two or more sensory modalities simultaneously to take in or express information.

Orthographical
See Phonological and Orthographical.

Phonemes (Sounds)
Phonemes are individual sounds. In English, there are around 44 phonemes, the number varies slightly according to the accent and which phonics programme you look at. Sounds are usually represented in between slashes like this - /p/.

Phonemic Awareness
Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate the phonemes (sounds) in spoken words and to remember the order of the phonemes (sounds) in words. For example, the phonemes (sounds) in the word 'big' can be segmented as /b/ /i/ /g/.

Phonological Awareness
Phonological awareness is a broad skill that includes identifying and manipulating units of the oral language such as spoken words, syllables, and onsets and rimes. Young learners with phonological awareness can identify and make oral rhymes, clap out the number of syllables in a spoken word, and recognise words with the same initial sounds, e.g., the sound /m/ in 'mum' and 'moon'.

Phonological and Orthographical

phonological – a word is represented in its sound pattern, e.g., 'short' - CVC	orthographical – a word is represented in its letter pattern, e.g., 'short' – <u>CC</u> <u>VV</u> C
The 1st C in 'short' is the consonant sound /<u>sh</u>/.	The 1st C in 'short' is the consonant sound /<u>sh</u>/ made by the consonant digraph 'sh' and shown as <u>CC</u>.
The V in 'short' is the vowel sound /<u>or</u>/.	The V in 'short' is the vowel sound /<u>or</u>/ made by the vowel digraph 'or' and shown as <u>VV</u>.
The 2nd C in 'short' is the consonant sound /t/.	The 2nd C in 'short' is the consonant sound /t/ made by the single letter 't' and shown as C.

Schwa
An unstressed vowel sound roughly equating to /uh/. The schwa is the <u>most common vowel sound in spoken English</u>. A schwa sound occurs when a vowel letter, which makes a clear stressed vowel sound in most words, is instead sounded with <u>an unstressed sound</u>. E.g., the 'a' in '<u>a</u>part' is pronounced as a schwa.

Segmenting
This means to split up a word into its individual sounds in order to spell it, e.g., the word 'cat' has three sounds: /k/ /a/ /t/. Segmenting can be done orally and with letters. Oral segmenting is the act of listening to a whole word and then orally splitting it up into the sounds that make it. Segmenting from text divides spoken words into their component sounds using letters, e.g., dividing 'bat' into /b/ /a/ /t/ and writing 'bat'. Young learners need to develop oral segmenting skill <u>before</u> they can segment words using letters and then to spell them.

Summative Assessment
Summative assessment refers to the processes and instruments that provide a general and final assessment of student's learning within a given course or learning unit. Due to this, summative assessment is also formal in nature, and can include instruments that measure broadly the skills and content areas developed in a course, e.g., course tests and end-of-term projects.

Synthetic Phonics
*See **Analytical and Synthetic Phonics**.*

Tricky Words
When teaching systematic, synthetic phonics, we refer to common words with phonic irregularities as 'tricky words', e.g., 'one', 'who', 'should'. *(See also **Common Exception Words**.)*

Trigraphs
Three letters which combine to make a sound. The letters 'igh' in 'night' is a trigraph.

Unigrams and Bigrams
A unigram is a single item from a sequence, e.g., a single letter from the English alphabet such as 's'.
A bigram is a pair of consecutive written units, e.g., two letters such as 'sp'.

Unvoiced and Voiced Consonant Sounds
When we say an unvoiced consonant sound, our vocal cords do not vibrate, e.g., /f/; whereas our vocal cords vibrate when we say a voiced consonant sound, e.g., /v/.

Vowel Sounds
These are phonemes (sounds) where air flows through the mouth unobstructed. In reading instruction, 'a', 'e', 'i', 'o', 'u' are considered vowel letters, and vowel sounds can also be represented by consonant letters, such as 'y' in 'myth' or 'fly', or a combination of consonant and vowel letters, such as 'igh' in 'night'.

References

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