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## The Possibilities of Speech Therapy Stimulation in Children with Delayed School Attendance

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**Abstract:** Our report presents the Elkonin's training of phonematic awareness. This programme is suitable for 5–6 years old children or children whose compulsory school attendance is postponed. We will shortly be presenting the results of our study that was done in 20 children. The aim of the study was to quantify and to compare the level of phonological ability in the studied group of children before and after the training. We would like to show that it is a very suitable and stimulating programme that is possible to apply in pre-school children with impaired communication ability and the postponement of school attendance which can be risk factors in the process of learning and reading. This training can be applied by special educationists, speech therapists and elementary school teachers after passing the course.

**Keywords:** phonological awareness, phonematic awareness, compulsory school attendance, reading, group therapy, training of phonematic awareness, effectivity of the phonological therapy.

### Introduction

Many children are currently delayed in their mandatory school attendance because of various reasons.

One of the reasons is the disrupted communication ability – simply improper speech. These children repeatedly attend pre-school or visit the “zero” grade at school but with the right logopedic stimulation. Currently,

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logopedic stimulation shifted to lower ages in order to prevent the occurrence of more significant problems in the acquisition of those skills at a later age.

We want to introduce the program "Training phonemic awareness by D. B. Elkonin" which we applied to children with impaired communication skills that indicated a postponed mandatory school attendance. By these children there is an expected increase in the problematic acquisition of reading and writing.

If a child with impaired communication ability is supported reasonably and well "saturated" with basic elements of speech, it can prevent later complications in reading and writing.

Training phonemic awareness (the TPhA) mediates an original way of understanding the word and spelling. This is a precondition for better learning to read and write even in the pre-school period. Phonemic awareness training is especially appropriate (Mikulajová, Dujčíková, 2001):

- for children who are "at risk" of dyslexia or as part of prevention of dyslexia (usually these children are identified with disturbed or delayed speech development),
- for socially disadvantaged children as the prevention of future learning difficulties,
- for children attending pre-school to acquire useful skills,
- for dyslexic children as a therapeutic procedure.

D. B. Elkonin developed phonemic awareness training in pre-school children in the 1950's. We used traditional analytic-synthetic approach for the acquisition of reading skills. This method does not respect the individual differences of children in this age. Children work with a primer that doesn't help in the exploration of surrounding reality (Mikulajová, Dujčíková, 2001). Especially for children with special problems in this area, the coaching skills in preparation to learn the sounds and various surrounding sound segments can greatly help them and is very typical for children of this age. This method was adapted for the Slovak language by Mikulajová Marina PhD. The advantage of this method is a simple

structure, based on the most natural elements – rhythm – division of words into syllables.

Visualization of the units, handling with these basic units using identifications of units with sound segmented into the smallest parts of language. In this way children discreetly penetrate the analysis and synthesis of the words and language. Children are working with tokens and so they learn to analyze the phonetic structure of words (Mikulajová, without giving the year).

Phonemic awareness training by Elkonin has four stages:

*I. The concept of the word, syllabic word analysis* (4 hours) – children are getting used to primer, learn to work with syllables and divide words into syllables, using these syllables by means of the original “elkonins” way (lower arch).

The goal is to become familiar with the quantity of syllables. They will learn to use the word “schema words”, “scheme syllabic words.”

*II. Analysis consonant words* (12 hours) – learning to navigate the phonetic structure of words, identify the first and last vowel in a word, to distinguish short and long words. They will learn to find out number of vowels in a word.

*III. Vowels and consonants* (9 hours) – realization of the difference of pronunciation of vowels and consonants, first they work with material - (chips), later children work without chips. Children assign words by color scheme according to the number of phonemes.

*IV. Hard and soft consonants* (5 hours) – Children learn to distinguish time differences in sound and spelling, realize the importance of correct identification and writing by trained pairs of phonemes.

They work with chips, which are suitable for children for illustrative purposes. The whole process includes 30 hours (i.e. pre-graphemic period).

The structure is based on spelling words by Elkonin (Mikulajová, 2005): allocate a sound – indicate it (material) – check if you are right:

1. Say the word and listen carefully to what you say.

2. Use your voice (stretch your arms, speak louder), sound came first in the whole word, name and characterize the sound.
3. Select a sound symbol.
4. Emphasize the voice of the other (after the third, fourth...) vowel in a word, name and characterize it, marking a sound symbol.
5. Check whether you have allocated all the sounds in the word "read" what you "wrote" (check all phonemes in the word "read" – if the word is complete, it is propaedeutic reading).
6. Determine whether it is called a long syllable, if so, mark it (this requires a vote of the whole word at a time).
7. Check whether you got the whole word, "read" it by syllables.

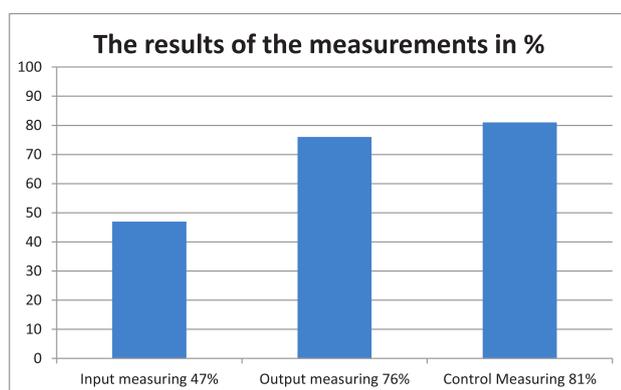
Children work in groups of 2 to 6. This method can also be applied individually, but children lose experience of mutual work.

### Own research

In our group we had 20 children who attended the whole subsidy i.e. 30 hours of targeted stimulation. We used the test of phonological awareness (March, 2000) three times and we recorded measurements: *input measuring* (before applying the program), the *output measuring* (immediately after application of the program) or *control measurements* (six weeks after the end of application program). All measurements of phonological awareness were made according to the present test, which has three levels and comprises of 9 subtests:

- I. The level – awareness of rhythm: 1. Awareness of rhymes; 2. Production of rhyming;
- II. The level – awareness of syllables: 3 Syllable analysis; 4. Syllable synthesis; 5. The isolation of the first syllable; 6. Skipping syllables;
- III. The level of awareness of phonemes: 7. The isolation of the first voice; 8. Synthesis of phonemes into words; 9. Analysis of words into syllables.

Each subtest contained 5 tasks that are ordered by difficulty from the easiest to the hardest. Motivational story and training tasks are adjusted to each task. For subtest analysis - sounds of words for better understanding and handling we used chips, each chip with a different colour related to the sound. The child pronounces individual sounds and inserts tokens representing the sounds into the corresponding word scheme. Child receives 2 points for each correct answer, 1 point for a partial one, 0 points for an incorrect or false answer. Total possible points is 90. For each subtest the percentage performance is calculated.



Finally, the calculated overall success of the test.

### Conclusion

In our work we wanted to highlight the effectiveness of group therapy by applying the "Training phonemic awareness by D. B. Elkonin". Its main advantage is that the practice of phonemic analysis is conducted separately from the analysis "grafemickej". Therapy lights the intensive operations with new abstract graphic symbols, which strains the visually-spatial discrimination, memory and attention of the child. In this program, the child can handle audio analysis of spoken language by smaller segments. The child learns during training the relevant knowledge of the

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language and its phonetic structure. The present program has many "sides" of the positive effects that enrich a child in confidence, interaction within the group and a linguistic.

Also, it would be very useful to anchor the present training hours of language training in the normal type of kindergarten, but also in the preparatory year of primary school, where the possible occurrence of children with problems in specific speech disorders and, therefore, suspected disorders of school skills, is even higher. Here we see room for school speech therapists or special teachers in the development of children's language skills to implement this training program in children at risk in terms of prevention of dyslexia, dysgraphia and dysortographia. We propose to develop the topics into the curriculum throughout the school year and systematically work on this area. We recommend therefore to continue in implementing group therapy.

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