



Building Phonemic Awareness

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Abstract

Waag Society develops a tangible and intuitive tool for primary school children who just started learning to read. It provides pupils with an interactive system that invites them to unravel the mystery of word construction in a playful and explorative way. Storybox exists of a set of technologically enriched blocks, filled with different sounds (phonemes). Every block contains a sound that can be listened to separately or in a series. If a series of phonemes form a word, one doesn't hear the individual sounds, but the entire word.

Playing with Storybox, children will be able to distinguish and manipulate individual sounds and literally build or deconstruct words. Thus pupils will develop phonemic awareness in one of the most natural ways of learning – playing. Studies have shown that phonemic awareness has a direct correlation with students' ability to read as they get older. It improves children's word reading and reading comprehension, as well as helping children learn to spell.

Learning to read is mostly a serious and structured matter. StoryBOX offers children the possibility to discover language in an explorative way. Hence the exploration of the language is experienced as playing, rather than learning. Pupils build, change and combine out of their natural curiosity. This playful approach is meant to enrich existing educational formats, rather than to replace them.

The challenge in the developing process is to create a tool that satisfies the demands of language education, suits the practice of the teacher, and that offers the pupils an exciting and effortless manner of learning. Therefore a key aspect of this project is to involve pupils and teachers in the design process to assure that the final product will suit their real needs.

In this paper the language and education context and the specifics of the development process will be presented.