

Speaking of Literacy Listening Guide

Episode 2: An Interview With Dr. Emily (Diehm) Gunaseelan

This listening guide serves as a reference while listening to the Iowa Reading Research Center's podcast, *Speaking of Literacy*. Visit our website to listen to the episode and access the transcript.

About the Guest

This episode features Dr. Emily (Diehm) Gunaseelan. Emily is a speech-language pathologist teletherapist at Green Hills Area Education Agency providing virtual speech-language therapy services to PK-12 students in southwestern Iowa. Prior to her switch to full-time clinical work, Emily worked as faculty in speech-language pathology undergraduate and graduate programs at the University of Toledo in Toledo, Ohio and St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa. She is a founding member of the Structured Word Inquiry Research Vanguard (SWIRV) and a board member of the Iowa branch of the International Dyslexia Association. Her clinical and research interests include the evaluation and intervention of oral and written language disorders in school-age children, with a particular interest in morphology.



Pre-Listening Discussion Questions

Before you listen, consider the following questions. This can be a self-guided or discussion-based activity. Activating your background knowledge and considering your thoughts about these topics can help you relate the topics discussed in the episode to your personal experiences.

- What do you know about the role of a speech-language pathologist (SLP) in a school setting?
- In what way do you think SLPs need to collaborate in a school? With whom?
- How do you think written and spoken language are connected? How does spoken language differ from the language we use when writing?

Thematic Summary

Could you introduce yourself and your role for us?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

How do you collaborate with teachers, reading interventionists, etc.?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

Could you give an overview of how SLPs address literacy in therapy?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	

What questions do you still have?	
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What is an SLP's role in supporting a child that has dyslexia?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

How early can we start intervention for speech and language skills that impact literacy?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

How does morphology interact with phonology?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

What is the best way to introduce morphology and phonology instruction to children with dyslexia?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	
What questions do you still have?	

What is your advice to parents and educators concerned about a child's reading and writing?

Key Takeaways	Notes
What did you learn?	

What questions do you still have?

Research Highlights

Meaux, A. B., Diehm, E., & Collins, G. (2020). Morphological knowledge: Opportunities for collaboration through multitiered system of supports. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 51*(3), 515-530. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-19-00051

This article addresses the role of morphology in the English writing system and the benefits of morphological interventions in supporting students' oral and written language development. The authors describe how SLPs can collaborate with educators to increase elementary students' morphological knowledge.

Apel, K., Diehm, E., & Apel, L. (2013). Using multiple measures of morphological awareness to assess its relation to reading. *Topics in Language Disorders, 33*(1), 42-56. <https://doi.org/10.1097/TLD.0b013e318280f57b>

In this study, the authors sought to determine whether early elementary students' performance on morphological awareness tasks predicted their overall reading ability (i.e., word reading and reading comprehension). Findings indicate that different morphological awareness tasks uniquely predicted different aspects of reading at different grade levels. The results provide direction for clinicians on how to assess the morphological awareness of early elementary students.

Definitions

This episode includes technical terminology relating to research, linguistics, communication sciences and disorders, and the science of reading. Read the definitions below to understand how these important terms are being used in this context.

- **Speech-language pathologist (SLP):** SLPs are professionals with expertise in communication, speech, language, voice, feeding, and swallowing. Speech-language pathologists work in education, research, and healthcare settings to treat patients across the lifespan.
- **Digraph:** Digraphs are combinations of two letters that represent one sound (e.g., "ph" is pronounced /f/).
- **Professional development (PD) day:** PD days are scheduled days throughout the year for staff to participate in trainings, collaborate with colleagues, and plan.
- **Non-categorical:** Iowa is a non-categorical state in terms of special education eligibility. Children are either eligible or not eligible for special education based on disability status. Rather than



using disability-specific labels (e.g., “autism” or “specific language impairment”), children with disabilities are referred to as “eligible individuals.” Special education focuses on individual students’ instructional needs rather than their specific disability category.

- **IEP (Individualized Education Program):** An IEP is a written document that describes an educational program for a student with a disability such as a reading disability. In other words, the IEP is a plan for specially designed instruction to meet the educational needs of a student deemed eligible for special education services. IEPs are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- **Dyslexia:** According to the International Dyslexia Association, “Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”
- **Developmental Language Disorder (DLD):** According to the National Institute of Health, “Developmental language disorder (DLD) is a communication disorder that interferes with learning, understanding, and using language. These language difficulties are not explained by other conditions, such as hearing loss or autism, or by extenuating circumstances, such as lack of exposure to language. DLD can affect a child’s speaking, listening, reading, and writing. DLD has also been called specific language impairment, language delay, or developmental dysphasia.”
- **Phoneme:** A phoneme is the smallest part of a word that makes a single articulated sound (e.g., the phonemes in “cat” are /k/, /ă/, /t/; the phonemes in “fish” are /f/, /ī/, /sh/).
- **Graphemes:** Graphemes are the written symbols that represent speech sounds.
- **Morpheme:** A morpheme is the smallest part of a word that has meaning (e.g., “the” is a single morpheme; “pretest” has two morphemes: “pre-,” meaning before, and “test”).
- **Structured Literacy:** Structured literacy is an approach to reading instruction that is grounded in the findings of the science of reading, the body of research on how children learn to read. This approach focuses on phonology, sound-symbol associations, syllables, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Each of these elements is taught in a way that is explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic.
- **Morphological family:** A morphological family is a group of words that share a morpheme (i.e., a meaningful unit of a word) and a meaning. For example, the words “sign,” “design,” and “signature” make up a morphological family because they all contain the morpheme “sign,” meaning a mark or symbol.
- **Affix:** An affix is a word part added to the beginning or end of a root word to change the meaning (e.g., “un-,” meaning “not,” “-able,” meaning “capable of,” and “-ed” to indicate past tense).
- **Base:** A base word can stand by itself as a complete word or combine with an affix. For example, the word “use” can stand alone as a complete word, or it can combine with the prefix “re-” to form “reuse” or the suffix “-ful” to form “useful.”
- **Phonological awareness:** The knowledge of sounds within spoken language. It begins with the recognition of phrases within sentences and progresses to successively smaller units (e.g., words within phrases, syllables within words, onsets and rimes, and individual phonemes).
- **Etymology:** Etymology is the study of the meaning of a word or morpheme, including its origin and evolution.

- **IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet):** The IPA is a system of symbols that represent every spoken speech sound across all languages with a one-to-one sound-symbol correspondence.
- **Structured Word Inquiry (SWI):** SWI is an approach to literacy instruction that focuses on the interrelationship of morphology, phonology, and etymology. This method builds on explicit phoneme-grapheme correspondence instruction by analyzing word parts and their relationship to other words.

Post-Listening Discussion Questions

After listening to the episode, continue the conversation with the following questions. This can be a self-guided or discussion-based activity. Considering these post-listening questions can allow you to reflect on the content of the episode, deepening your comprehension of the episode's key ideas.

- Emily discussed how the length of sessions with students was the biggest shift from clinical practice to working in a school. What struggles did she have? How did she overcome them? How do you deal with time constraints in your work?
- Emily explained what collaboration might look like in this profession. What does collaboration look like in her role? What does collaboration look like in your role?
- Emily gives some advice to parents, caregivers, and SLPs at the end of the episode. How could you implement her recommendations in your own life? Think of 2-3 concrete examples.

Resources and More Information

Want to learn more? The following list contains resources and studies that were mentioned in the episode as well as further reading materials on key topics from the episode.

- [Dr. Emily \(Diehm\) Gunaseelan's research](#): Access Dr. Gunaseelan's published works on her Google Scholar profile.
- [Dr. Kenn Apel's research](#): Access Dr. Apel's published works on his Google Scholar profile.
- [A Novel Idea: The History of the Science of Reading](#): For more information about the science of reading and further listening, listen to the IRRC's podcast, *A Novel Idea: The History of the Science of Reading*.
- [Explicit Vocabulary Instruction Using the POSSUM Approach](#): For more information about explicit vocabulary instruction that encompasses phonology, morphology, and etymology, read this blog post from the IRRC. Also access the PDF POSSUM graphic organizer to use during instruction.
- [Structured Word Inquiry](#): For more information about the Structured Word Inquiry approach, including links to relevant research articles and examples, visit this website.