

U-HEAR PHONE

A fabulous tool for reading instruction

The U-Hear is a simple tube made from PVC pipe that allows students to speak quietly in one end and hear their own voice in another. Students use the phone to listen to their own voice as they practice reading.

This device allows students to better 'hear' their own voices when they speak quietly. There are many versions of this that have been made and now Literacy Innovators has made their own version, the 'U-Hear', and is selling it to you at a price that is cheaper than if you made it yourself. Below are many ways how it can be used in the classroom.



KEY BENEFITS

- easy for little hands to hold
- engages children to learn
- novel and fun
- durable and washable
- very affordable
- excellent for enhanced classroom management

Why can simple plastic phones enhance reading instruction?

The U-Hear can be a useful tool for various reading instruction activities. These simple devices are a fabulous tool for reading instruction because:

- 1)** The phone helps the student 'hear' their own voice. The pipe funnels the child's voice directly to their ear. This intentional focus on hearing sounds helps the students acquire phonemic awareness, a critical element to developing necessary proficient reader phonologic processing pathways.
- 2)** The phone compels the student to speak in a whisper or very quiet voice. In fact, if the student talks into the phone in a normal volume it is uncomfortably loud. By funneling their voice directly to the ear, the device itself dictates the student speak quietly. It works! (Almost all students automatically correct themselves to a whisper but a few with exceptionally loud voices may need a demonstration.)
- 3)** The phone improves the student's focus and attention because they are intentionally listening to their own voice. Both the physical presence of the phone and the sound funneling attributes help the student pay attention and listen carefully to what they are saying when they read. The phones improve the students focus on their own task and are less apt to be distracted by what their neighbor is saying/reading.



- 4) The phones help maintain classroom 'quiet' by reducing the overall noise level. Students must speak softly, or else they blast their own ears. This allows an entire classroom of students to quietly read orally without disturbing each other. The phones keep 'noisy' readers quiet so they do not disturb their neighbors. This 'noise management' aspect of the phones provides a fantastic tool for classroom teachers.
- 5) As an added bonus, it appears most students like using these effective tools. Feedback from many teachers across a wide range of grade levels indicates their students "love the phones", "thought they were the neatest things", "reach for the phones", "voluntarily use the phones" and even "went bonkers for the phones".
- 6) The phones may function as a tool to provide a level of privacy that is particularly important for struggling and adolescent students. This privacy may help struggling readers overcome their reluctance to read out loud. Many times older students who struggle with reading avoid out loud reading because they are self conscious and embarrassed to have their peers hear them read. This creates a catch-22 situation where the students who absolutely need to practice to build reading skills avoid practice for social reasons. The phones allow the students to practice necessary out loud reading without others hearing them. In a mixed level classroom, be sure ALL the students use the phones for all reading practice so struggling readers are not singled out. Avoid the situation where students perceive only the 'slow' readers use the phones.

How are U-Hear phones used in reading instruction? What U-Hear phone activities are effective in teaching reading skills?

PHONEMIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

The phones are an ideal tool for phonemic awareness activities. The tube design funnels sound directly to the ear and tends to block out other background noise. Not only do the phones likely boost physical hearing they also directly focus the child on listening to and hearing sounds.

When a child holds a phone, they intentionally listen to the sound coming out the earpiece. This direct focus on sound is vital to developing necessary phonemic awareness, the ability to hear, recognise and distinguish the sound structure of our language. The students say the sounds or words into the phones when conducting a wide variety of phonemic awareness activities to identify, distinguish, segment, blend or manipulate sounds.

Most phonemic awareness activities can be conducted with these phones in both individual, group and class situations.



GUIDED READING

The phones are exceptionally useful for guided reading in the classroom setting. The phones help teachers manage the challenge of providing one-on-one reading feedback to multiple students. The teacher can conduct guided reading with small groups of students (input indicates up to 6 students).

The students read text into their phones. The teacher can listen to one student at a time while the other students continue reading into their phones. The teacher rotates through the group, providing the needed individual attention, correction and feedback proven to build skills. The guided reading can be used to build foundational skills in correct phonologic processing including (decoding words

accurately, smooth blending, and attention to detail). The guided reading can also be used to directly work on and build higher level skills in fluency, vocabulary development, handling polysyllabic words, and developing strategies for reading comprehension. Guided reading is essential in remediation. However, one of the challenges of working with older students in a classroom setting is overcoming their reluctance to read out loud. The phones provide a level of privacy that allows older students to read out loud without their classmates hearing them.

INDEPENDENT READING PRACTICE

In independent reading, the phones are beneficial in:

Improving Self Correction: Feedback from teachers' observations indicates students may make fewer errors and correct themselves a higher rate when they are using the phones than when they read without the phones. Several teachers conducted informal measurements and found both fewer misreads and increased self correction of errors when students used the phones.

One teacher measured a 60-200% increase in the amount of text that was self corrected when using the phones. The student's increase in focus and attention when using the phone may very well contribute to this observed improvement in self correction. While I could find no scientific data, intuitively if a student is 'paying closer attention' and 'listening better' they will not only read more accurately but they will catch more of their errors themselves. If this is true, the phones should have a definite positive impact on the effectiveness of independent out loud reading time.

Developing Fluency: Students can use out loud reading practice to develop fluency. Students can read out loud into their phones in both guided and independent reading practice. Remember, after the base foundation of phonologic processing is established, the student MUST practice to develop fluency. Fluency is established word by word and requires repeated correct phonologic processing. The only way to build this fluency is with practice.

Practicing Expression: Students can use independent reading to practice expression. When the students listen to themselves in the phones, they tend to be more aware and better recognise the need to increase expression. (In the same way a student might fail notice their own monotone voice but quickly pick up lack of expression when listening to another student read). The phones encourage the student to pay attention to what their reading sounds like. In addition, they can practice reading passages 'expressively' without disturbing their neighbors.

Advancing Intermediate Level Students:

Independent out loud reading practice is especially useful for advancing students from the intermediate stage (beyond beginner but not yet to skilled – Years 3-6). Students at this level often have the foundation of phonologic processing yet are not experienced enough to have developed the fluency and expression of skilled readers. They simply need practice reading and lots of it. Out loud reading helps them advance.

Providing 'privacy' for older and struggling readers:

The phones can be used as a tool to provide a level of privacy that is important particularly for adolescent students. Struggling and adolescent students can practice reading out loud in 'privacy' without their peers hearing them. In a mixed level classroom be sure all the students use the phones for all out loud reading practice so struggling readers don't perceive only the 'slow' readers use phones.

ACTIVITIES TO EXPAND VOCABULARY

Students can use the phones to practice vocabulary words out loud without disturbing classmates. The students can learn and practice definitions of new words, practice using words in sentences or practice the definitions of common prefixes, suffixed and root words.

How can these 'phones' be used for other activities and subjects?

The phones are also useful for other subjects and activities. The phones are a terrific tool to use anytime the student needs to 'say' something out loud with minimal disturbance to other classmates or when the student needs to focus on listening to their own voice. While many teachers started using phones for reading, they expanded use to other activities. Teachers continue to report many uses for these phones in both regular and special education classes.

Suggestions, comments and tips indicate the phones can also be used as an effective tool for:

Learning Math Facts: Students can repeat math facts into their 'phones'. This provides a terrific method of orally repeating addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts. Mastering basic math facts is an essential foundation to math success. Students master the facts through repetition. Younger students can even quietly 'sing' math facts into the phones.

Learning Other Facts: The phones are terrific tools for students to orally practice facts or information that needs to be memorised in many subject areas. Oral repetition helps students learn and master specific facts or knowledge. The phones allow the student to orally practice facts or information out loud without disturbing others. The phone helps the child 'hear' the sound in speech development activities. One teacher combined speech awareness activities such as using hand mirrors, shape of mouth and tongue placement with listening to how the sound changed. Students can 'say the sounds' into the phones as they practice writing their spelling words. This focus on 'writing the sounds' when spelling strengthens the phonologic processing foundation.

Editing/Proofreading Papers, Improving Writing Skills:

The phones allow the students to review their writing, 'hear' exactly what they wrote and make necessary corrections and improvements. Feedback indicates students find more corrections/improvements when they use the phone than when they only read through their work silently. Once again, this is likely related to the benefit of increased focus/attention and intentionally 'listening' to their work.

English as a Second Language (ESL): The phones appear to be helpful with students who are learning English. The feedback indicates the phones may enhance the ability of students to discriminate sounds and hear/distinguish words.

Phone skills and manners: Some teachers use the phones to teach and practice actual telephone skills such as politely answering the phone, getting an adult, taking a message and for safety lessons in how to call 111 in emergencies.

Practicing for a Play, Presentation, or Speech:

Students can practice their lines or presentation with minimal disturbance to the others in the class.

Special Education Applications: One teacher reported the phones were a breakthrough with her autistic children. These children would not talk directly to the teacher but would talk to themselves in the phones. The phones may also be a tool to help manage distractions and benefit children who are challenged with attention issues.

References

Miscese R.(2008) Gagen ref:
www.righttrackreading.com/phonicsphones.html