

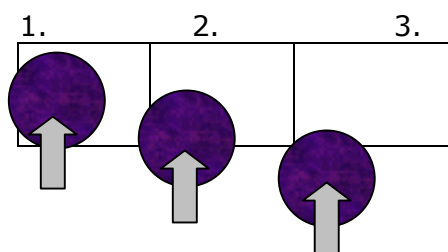
Elkonin Boxes: A Multisensory Technique for Teaching Literacy Skills

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Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to notice, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken language. Phoneme blending and phoneme segmentation are two important components of this instruction. Elkonin, a Russian psychologist, explored students' ability to manipulate phonemes by asking them to place counters in boxes (Elkonin, 1973). Additionally, recent research on "best practices" by the National Reading Panel, indicate that many effective reading programs use this technique. Students who use Elkonin boxes are able to hear sounds in words, segment words and demonstrate an understanding of letter-sound correspondence (Clay, 1993).

"Elkonin Boxes" are easy to make yourself by simply drawing squares on a piece of paper or other flat surface. The use of these templates with manipulatives to represent each sound (rather than each letter), make the task both concrete and multisensory. Create Elkonin boxes like the one in the illustration below. Start with words that have two or three sounds. Words with consonant-vowel-consonant patterns that can be stretched out like in "mom" and "man" and "nut", will be easiest for the beginner. But the technique will work equally as well with more advanced readers. **See the example below for using the "Elkonin Box" with the word man.**

/m/a/n/

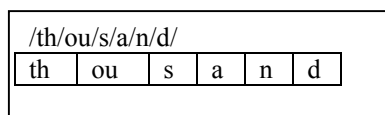
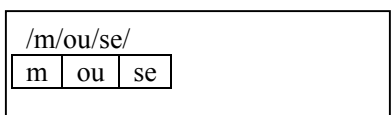


Follow these guidelines:

- ❖ Give the student counters, coins, or disks that are all of the same color or type (because we are not differentiating between vowels and consonants at this point).
- ❖ Model the process by slowly articulating and stretching the word phoneme-by-phoneme while pushing a counter into a box for each phoneme. /mmmmmmmm/aaaaaaa/nnnnnnnn/.
- ❖ Gradually the children can participate in this "say it and move it" activity by taking turns placing counters in each box while saying each sound in a word.
- ❖ NOTE: The most important part of Elkonin boxes at this stage is that the child controls the physical pushing of the sounds.

Variations:

- ❖ Use motivating manipulatives such as a toy car. As you say the word slowly, move the toy car into each box from left to right so the car "travels" through the sounds. You may also use cereal or M&M's.
- ❖ Draw boxes on a small white board using a permanent marker that can be erased at a later time using alcohol or lighter fluid. Have students use manipulatives and later a dry erase marker to record the phonemes.
- ❖ Use worksheets with a series of boxes in which students can write multiple words.
- ❖ As a next step, use actual letters. You may use letters from a scrabble game or letters that have been cut out of paper or card stock.
- ❖ With older children, use blank word cards (or index cards). Draw Elkonin boxes for each word. Students then write the spelling patterns for each sound in the sound boxes. Continue to discuss the distinguishing features as well as meanings to help students fully assimilate new words. This is a good spelling activity.



References:

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- Clay, M. (1993). *Reading Recovery: A Guidebook for Teachers in Training*. NH: Heinemann.
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