Phonological Awareness: Learning to Listen to Learn to Read

Definitions:
Phonological Awareness: The awareness of the constituent sounds of words in learning to read and spell.

Phonemic Awareness: The awareness of sounds (phonemes) that make up spoken words.

Phonics: A way of teaching that stresses sound-symbol relationships.

Early Learning Standards for NC Preschoolers:

- Children begin to enjoy listening to songs, poems, and books that have rhyme and word play and learn the words well enough to complete familiar refrains and fill in missing words.
- Enjoy and repeat rhythmic patterns in poems and songs through clapping, marching, or using instruments to beat syllables.
- Play with the sounds of language, learning to identify and then create rhymes, attending to the first sounds in words.
- Associate sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sound (e.g., Keshia and Katie begin with the same sound).
Development:

**Phonological/Phonemic Awareness** (from Bridge Portfolio Rating Scale, Pierce, Summer, & O’DeKirk, 2005)

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<th>How does demonstrate phonological awareness?</th>
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<td>Participates in familiar sound and word play, songs, finger plays through visual cues &amp; imitation</td>
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<td>Follows rhythmic beat of language and music</td>
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<td>Identifies/names sounds in the environment</td>
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<td>Repeats rhythmic patterns in poems and songs</td>
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<td>Awareness that different words begin with the same sound</td>
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<td>Identifies some initial letter sounds and/or makes some letter-sound matches</td>
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<th>How does demonstrate phonemic awareness?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recognizes sounds of language by completing familiar rhymes</td>
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<td>Plays with sounds of language by identifying and/or creating rhymes</td>
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<td>Plays with sounds of language by substituting initial sounds and/or creating alliterative pairs</td>
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<td>Can segment a sentence into words</td>
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<td>Can segment and blend syllables (hap-py)</td>
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<td>Can segment and blend onset-rime (b-ug=bug; r-ug=rug)</td>
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**Example Strategies for Teachers:**

- Read and reread books that have rhymes and refrains. Encourage children to fill in missing words and complete familiar refrains.
- Play word and rhyme games. Sing songs. Repeat chants. Share poetry.
- Clap out syllables in names. Example syllable game song:
  
  Higgerty, Pickerty Bumble Bee
  Can you say your name for me?
  Let’s all clap it!
  Let’s all snap it!
  Let’s all stamp it!
  
  -or-
  
  Clap it out! Clap it out! Let’s say your name and clap it out!

- Play “match the beginning sound” and “sorting by beginning sound” games.
- Discuss letter names in the context of daily activities (as opposed to teaching one letter per week) and provide opportunities for children to hear specific letter sounds, particularly beginning sounds.
• Provide opportunities to explore letters and sounds (e.g., with literacy tools and models such as magnetic letters, rubber stamps, alphabet puzzles, sponge letters, clay, ABC molds, and alphabet exploration software).
• Make available books in children’s home languages.

Provide daily shared reading experiences with big books!

Example Strategies for Families:
• Read to your child every day.
• As you read, call attention to the many different kinds of written materials in your home (labels, newspapers, magazines, cereal boxes, recipe cards, greeting cards) and in the outside world (billboards, menus, signs).
• Read alphabet books. Put magnetic letters on the refrigerator. Point out letters and their sounds in familiar names and signs.
• Use your home language when reading, singing, and playing word games with your children. You will be helping your child learn and enjoy the time you spend together.
• Protect your child’s hearing through routine health examinations and prompt medical attention to suspected ear infections.
• Have fun with words. Singing songs and playing rhyming and word games (nursery rhymes, poems, finger plays) help children develop an understanding of different sounds.

Ideas from Creative Curriculum, 4th Edition: Take listening walks, listen for specific word or phrase-have action to go with it (e.g., chica chica boom boom bottles); change familiar rhymes or other familiar words like from the menu, see if children notice; rhyming tub of objects (cat/hat; truck/duck); if your name begins with the same sounds as, “Tiny, tight, toes”…; add to word wall and/or make class ABC book of pictures of children doing things that start with the same sound as their name, “Tonya likes to tip toe; Derek likes to dig”; From a book like Jump, Frog, Jump-have children jump on a “lily pad” for each word; clap each word and open hands wide between words; words on cards from familiar repeated lines-children line up appropriately-talk about how many words.

Oral language cards from DLM Early Childhood Express have songs with rhyme and alliteration that go with many themes. There are also good ideas within each of their themes.

Websites:
www.sil.org
www.teams.lacoe.edu
www.ertp.santacruzk12.ca.us
www.reading.org

Print Resources:
Fee, Fie, Phonemic Awareness


Specific to early literacy, descriptive research shows that a literacy-in-play strategy is effective in increasing the range and amount of literacy behaviors during play, thus allowing children to practice their emerging skills and show what they have learned (Neuman & Roskos 1992). Evidence is also accumulating that this strategy helps children learn important literacy concepts and skills, such as knowledge about the functions of writing (Vokelich 1993), the ability to recognize print-related print (Neuman & Roskos 1993), and comprehension strategies such as self-checking and self-correction (Neuman & Roskos 1997). Like storybook reading, the literacy learning potential of play can be increased when it includes before, during, and after types of scaffolding as illustrated in "Guided Play to Explore New Words and Their Sounds."

Closing

We are gaining empirical ground in understanding early literacy learning well enough to identify essential content that belongs in an early childhood curriculum. Increasingly, the field can articulate key concepts and skills that are significant and foundational, necessary for literacy development and growth, research-based, and motivational to arouse and engage children’s minds. The need to broadly distribute this knowledge is great—but the need to act on it consistently and carefully in instructional practice is even greater, especially if we are to steer children clear of the Bramble-Bushes and on to be successful readers and writers.

References


Guided Play to Explore New Words and Their Sounds

With the teacher’s help, the children are creating a gas station/garage play center as part of an ongoing unit on transportation.

Before play. The teacher provides background knowledge by reading Sylvia’s Garage, by Debra Lee, an information book about a woman mechanic. She discusses new words, such as mechanic, engine, dipstick, oil.

Next, the teacher helps the children plan the play center. She asks children about the roles they can play (e.g., gas station attendant, mechanic, customer) and records their ideas on a piece of chart paper. She then asks the children to brainstorm some props that they could use in their center (e.g., signs, cardboard gas pump, oil can, tire pressure gauge) and jots these down on another piece of chart paper. The children then decide which props they will make in class and which will be brought from home, and the teacher and a child places an m after each make-in-class item and an n after each from home item.

During the next days, the teacher helps the children construct some of the make-in-class props, such as a sign for the gas station (“Let’s see... gas starts with g. Can you show us how to write a g?”). The list of props from home is included in the classroom newsletter and sent to families.

During play. The teacher first observes the children at play to learn about their current play interests and activities. Then she provides scaffolding that extends and enriches children’s play and at the same time teaches important literacy skills. She notices, for example, that the mechanics are not writing out service orders or bills for the customers; so she takes on a role as an assistant mechanic and models how to write out a bill for fixing a customer’s car. She monitors her involvement to ensure close alignment with children’s ongoing activity.

After play. During small group activity time, the teacher helps children with a picture-sort that includes pictures of people and objects from their garage play. They sort the pictures into labeled columns according to beginning sounds—m (mechanic, man, map, motor); n (nail, tank, top, twillight); and g (gas, gallon, garden, goat). They explore the different feel of these sounds in the different parts of their mouths. They think of other words they know that feel the same way.

After modeling, the teacher gives the children a small deck of picture cards to sort, providing direct supervision and feedback.