



Language and Literacy
in the Foundation Stage



Phonological Awareness

Acknowledgements

The Early Years Literacy Interboard Group wishes to record its thanks to the following schools for their willing co-operation in the production of this resource.

Ballysillan Primary, Belfast;
Corran Integrated Primary, Larne;
Dickson Primary, Lurgan;
Mallusk Primary, Mallusk;
Oakwood Integrated Primary, Dunmurry;
Saints and Scholars Integrated Primary, Armagh;
St Aidan's Boys' Primary, Belfast;
St Columba's Primary, Clady;
St Malachy's' Primary, Bangor;
St Mary's Boys' Primary, Strabane; and,
Sydenham Infants Primary, Belfast.



Introduction

The development of phonological awareness is an essential pre-requisite of both reading and writing. The starting point is oral language. Developing young children's awareness of words, syllables, rhymes and phonemes significantly increases their later success in learning to read and write.

Initial emphasis is on developing attention and listening skills to provide the foundation for all phonological awareness. This involves training in listening, recalling and sequencing. Children need to develop both auditory and visual discrimination to enable them to link sounds and letters at a later stage.

Teachers should explicitly demonstrate skills in a range of situations. It is important to ensure that children have the concepts in place to understand the language used, for example, 'first, in the middle, last, same, different'. Children need ample opportunities throughout the day to develop and practise specific skills within a supportive environment, for example, group activities, modelled and shared sessions, play etc.



Attention and Listening

Attention and listening skills are crucial for learning:

- Attention – the ability to take notice of and learn from what they see and hear going on around them;
- Listening – hearing sounds and being able to understand and interpret them.

The teacher needs to create an environment in which these skills can be developed, for example:

- ensuring she has the children's attention before giving instructions;
- minimising visual/auditory distractions where possible;
- using visual timetables;
- teaching active listening (see Talking and Listening).

Developing a Sense of Steady Beat

What is steady beat?

Steady beat is the consistent, repetitive pulse that lies within every rhyme, song or musical selection. This pulse has even duration and occurs at equal intervals. It can be either fast or slow.

In the following rhyme the underlined syllables indicate where the steady beat occurs:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall

All the king's horses and all the king's men

Couldn't put Humpty together again.

The ability to feel, express and keep a steady beat is an important pre-requisite for language development as it affects, for example, articulate speech flow, attention span, motor skills and reading comprehension.



Children need opportunities to experience a range of repetitive single movements that lend themselves to beat keeping, for example, tapping, pounding, marching, swinging, jumping, rocking, hammering, sawing etc.

Suggested activities to develop beat awareness and competence:

- Children match steady beat to verbal instruction, for example, 'march, march, march, march, march, march.'
- 'Watch and Copy' – copy a leader's movement, for example, patting shoulders.
- Child chooses and demonstrates a movement then adds a word to describe the movement, for example, punch; starts the movement and adds the chant, for example, 'punch, punch, punch, punch.'
- Begin a steady beat: Ask children to copy movement. Add an accompanying rhyme, for example, tapping, rocking as the rhyme is recited.
- Children initiate and maintain a steady beat while reciting a rhyme or poem, for example, marching, clapping, tapping.
- Encourage children to explore movements to accompany rhymes in their own way.

Stages of beat co-ordination:

- Single movement – make the same single movement on both sides of the body for each beat, for example, tap, tap, tap, tap.
- Single alternating movements – make the same single movement on alternate sides of the body for each beat, for example, tap, tap, tap, tap.
- Sequenced movements (two) – sequence the same two movements on both sides of the body (tap, punch, tap, punch).
- Sequenced movements (three) – sequence the same three movements on both sides of the body (second and third movements are the same, for example, tap, punch, punch, tap, punch, punch).
- Sequenced movements (four) – sequence four movements on both sides of the body, for example, tap, punch, pat, clap.

(adapted from 'Round the Circle' Phyllis S. Weikart High/Scope Educational Foundation)

Developing Auditory Processing Skills

Auditory Memory

Children should:

- recite rhymes, songs and poems from memory;
- recall environmental sounds, for example, following a sound walk;
- recall a sequence, for example, environmental sounds, clapping, musical sounds, shopping list games;
- follow a sequence of instructions;
- relay, for example, message or conversation;
- recount a story in sequence;
- recall the sequence of sounds in words.

Auditory Discrimination

Children should discriminate between:

- sounds which vary in pitch, volume and duration where the contrast is initially clear, becoming gradually less so;
- familiar environmental sounds which clearly contrast, for example, crisp bag/dog barking – moving to environmental sounds where the contrast is becoming less obvious, for example, different types of dogs barking;
- words which rhyme and words which don't;
- words which begin with same sounds/different sounds;
- words with the same/ different medial vowel.

Progress from using objects and pictures to spoken word alone.



Developing Visual Processing Skills

Visual Memory

Children should:

- recall objects/pictures/ words/letters, for example, recall detail from a picture, Kim's Game;
- recall in sequence, objects/ pictures/words/letters, for example, copy or complete patterns, sequence a series of pictures to retell a story;
- recall detail, incorporating colour, orientation and size, for example, objects, pictures;
- recognise and recall position of missing objects/pictures/words/ letters, for example, Pelmanism.

Visual Discrimination

Children should discriminate between:

- familiar objects/pictures/ words/letters which clearly contrast, for example, a picture of a house and a man/the letters 'f' and 'w';
- moving to objects/ pictures/words/letters where the contrast is less obvious, for example, a picture of a dog and a puppy/the letters 'b' and 'd'.

Attention should be drawn to colour, size and orientation.

Developing the Elements of Phonological Awareness

Rhyme

- listen to a wide variety of rhymes, poems, songs, rhyming stories;
- join in with rhymes, poems, songs, rhyming stories;
- complete a known rhyme;
- supply an alternative rhyming word;
- rhyme judgement:
 - consistently and accurately say if two words do/don't rhyme.
 - select the non-rhyming word from a list.
- generate rhyming words:
 - supplying a rhyming word for a given word.
 - create a string of rhyming words (including nonsense words).

All the above experiences are oral.

Syllabification

- mark syllables with clearly defined breaks using, for example, taps, beating out, counters, footsteps (progressing from children's names to familiar words to nonsense words);
- build syllables into words;
- sort objects or pictures according to the number of syllables.

All the above experiences are oral.



Hearing Sounds in Words

- Focus on segmenting individual sounds in single syllable words,
 - initial, medial and final, for example, c/a/t, h/ou/se, s/t/a/m/p,
 - stretch words to emphasise medial vowel, where necessary
 - (progress from using objects and pictures to spoken word alone).
- Blend sounds together to make words.
- Manipulate phonemes to make new words, for example, bat – bit – bin – tin.

Sound/Symbol Correspondence and Alphabetic Knowledge

- Children are introduced to the concept of letters through modelled and shared work and exploration of letter shapes, for example, magnetic letters.
- Children learn to associate a symbol with each sound.
- Teachers choose when it is appropriate to introduce letter names.

