

Phonological Awareness

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Children develop concepts, dispositions and skills in relation to:

- Phonological and phonemic awareness

What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological Awareness is the area of oral language that relates to the ability to think about the sounds in a word (the word's phonological structure) rather than just the meaning of the word. It is an understanding of the structure of spoken language and is an umbrella term that includes an awareness of words within a sentence, syllabic awareness, an understanding of onset and rime, and phonemic awareness. Becoming phonologically aware, i.e., becoming attentive to the sound structure of language, is an **aural** and **oral** skill.

Phonological Awareness differs from phonics because it is based on the sounds that we hear rather than the letters on a page.



Why Teach Phonological Awareness?

A child's level of phonological awareness at the end of the first year in school is one of the strongest predictors of future

reading success. Learning to read requires children to have a considerable awareness of the sound structure of spoken language and phonological awareness is the first building block in this process. It is a critical aspect of early literacy development and is linked to attainment in reading, comprehension and spelling. Sound awareness precedes and accompanies symbol awareness so that a child can learn to read with ease.

Phonological Awareness as a Continuum

Phonological Awareness can be placed on a **development continuum**, beginning with basic listening skills and progressing through an ability to identify rhyme and alliteration and to distinguish words within sentences. The continuum extends to include an awareness of syllables within words and onset and rime within words, until children are able to manipulate individual phonemes within words.

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word. E.g., the word *ship* has three phonemes /sh/, /i/, /p/.

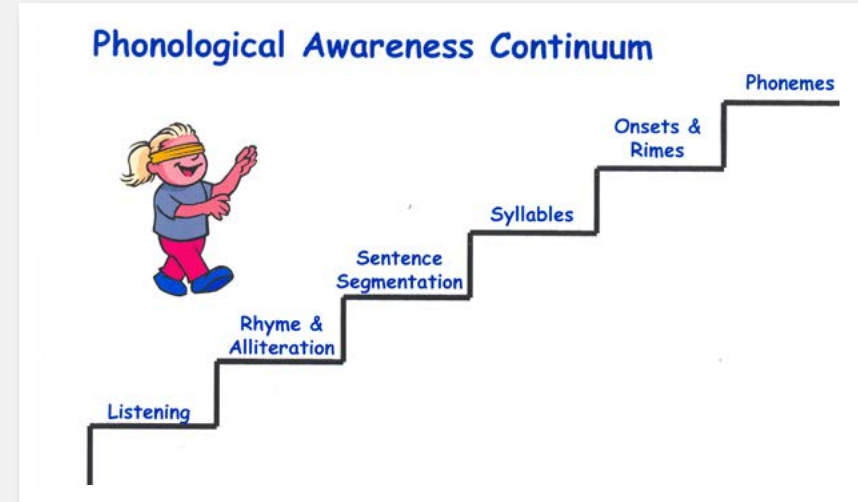
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Listening Skills

Developing children's active listening skills ensures their ears are *finely tuned* to language and its component parts.

Listening Games

- Chinese whispers
- Headbanz: Each child places a picture card on their forehead and they must ask the other children questions in order to guess what is on their picture.
- Simon says
- I went to the shop and I bought a ...
Each child must mention an item they bought in the shop after recalling the items mentioned by the others in the group.
- Clapping commands: One clap means stand, two means march and three means sit. Children sit in a circle and one child claps the commands for the rest of the group.



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Rhyme and alliteration

Teaching and learning about rhyme and alliteration can be meaningful, active and fun! One of the best indicators of how well children will learn to read is their ability to recite nursery rhymes when they start school.

Activities to support the development of rhyme

- Learn and recite rhymes as part of classroom routines and transitions
- Use rhymes within lessons and as part of lessons
- Read and discuss rhyming books as part of daily read-alouds
- Oral rhyming snap: Using words from a read-aloud, the children snap their fingers or say 'snap' when they hear two rhyming words
- A Feely Bag can be used containing rhyming objects. Children must try guess the other objects in the bag by feeling them and using rhyme
- Oddity task: Present children with three different objects and ask them to identify the odd one out

Sentence Segmentation

Most children will enter school with a good understanding that words form a sentence. An assessment to see if children grasp the concept that speech is made up of sentences and those sentences in turn are made up of words is an active sentence segmentation task.

For example, say a sentence such as 'That is a dog.' Ask the children to place a counter in a cup as they say the sentence, one counter for every word.

- Rhyme production:

What rhymes with hen?

Oral cloze text – Have you ever seen a fox in a ...

Rhyming I Spy – I spy with my little eye something that rhymes with blue

Activities to support the development of alliteration

- Identify alliteration in text. Echo and choral read a section of text with alliteration, once it has been identified
- Listen to, recite and respond to tongue twisters
- Children create their own tongue twisters
- Deliberately substitute a word/sound in a tongue twister and ask children to identify the incorrect word/sound

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Syllabic Awareness

When children can demonstrate an ability to detect words in a sentence and have a good understanding of rhyme and alliteration, it is time to progress to the next section of phonological awareness – syllable blending, segmenting and deleting.



Activities to support syllabic awareness

- **Syllable blending**

Blending involves children listening to syllables in a word and putting them together to identify the word, e.g., cow + boy = cowboy

- **Syllable segmentation**

Segmentation involves asking children to identify the number of syllables in a word and to break up the word into syllables. This can be done by clapping the syllables in a word or by using three boxes with the numbers 1, 2, 3 on them and children sort words (or pictures of the words) into the correct box according to the syllables.

One way of providing kinaesthetic reinforcement is to get the children to use their two hands and to touch their heads for the first syllable, their shoulders for the second syllable, their hips for the third, knees for the fourth, toes for the fifth and heels if there is a sixth syllable! Such exercises also give children an awareness of word length.

- **Syllable deletion**

Deletion involves deleting the initial and final syllables in words, e.g., say baker without the /ba/, say farmer without the /mer/.

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Onset and Rime

Onsets are the consonant sounds that precede the first vowel in a syllable. For instance, the sound *c* is the onset in the one-syllable word *cat*. In the two syllable word *window*, *w* is the onset in the first syllable *win*, and *d* is the onset in the second syllable *dow*. All syllables have a rime unit. Rimes consist of the vowel and any sounds that follow it in the syllable. For example, the rime in *cat* is *-at*, the rime in the first syllable of *window* is *-in*, and the rime in the second syllable is *-ow*.

Providing opportunities to practise blending and segmenting onset and rime in a variety of words would be beneficial for children.

Phonological Units						
What are the phonological units of the word 'basket'?						
Word	basket					
Syllables	bask		et			
Onsets and rimes	b	ask	et			
Phonemes	/b/	/ă/	/s/	/k/	/ě/	/t/

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the final subcategory of phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with phonemes in spoken words. Children who cannot hear and work with the phonemes of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these phonemes to the graphemes when they see them in written words.

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Activities to support the development of phonemic awareness

- **Phoneme isolation**

Children recognise individual sounds in words, e.g., What is the first sound in van?

- **Phoneme identity**

Children recognise the same sounds in different words, e.g., What sound is the same in fix, fall, and fun?

- **Phoneme categorisation**

Children recognise the word in a set of three or four words that has the odd sound. Use initial, final and medial sounds.

- **Phoneme blending**

Children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine the phonemes to form a word.

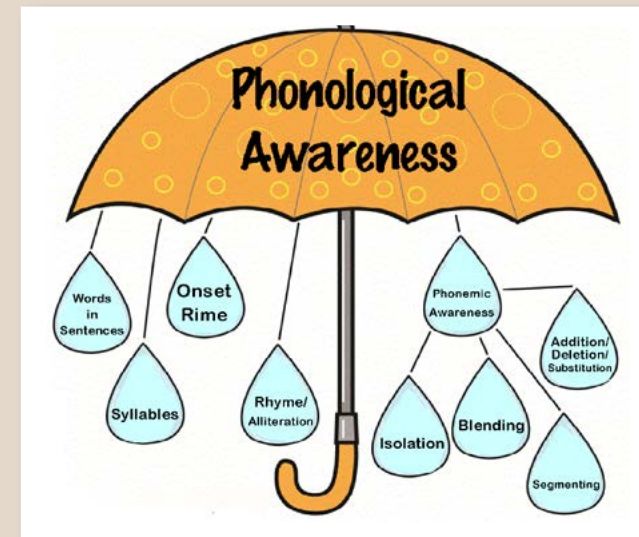
- **Phoneme segmentation**

Children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it. Elkonin Boxes can be used to explicitly teach phoneme segmentation.

To use Elkonin Boxes children listen to a word and move a coloured token (counter/cube) into a box for each phoneme they hear in the word. If a phoneme is repeated in a word, children should use a token of the same colour.

- **Phoneme manipulation**

Children change or delete the initial, final or medial phoneme in words, add phonemes to words and substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.



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References

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