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★ Outcomes for this workbook

Phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge

- Describe different aspects of phonological awareness and explain the difference between phonics and phonological awareness.
- Explain the importance of phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge for literacy development.
- List activities that support the development of awareness of sounds in words.
- Describe ways of supporting the development of letter–sound knowledge in Grade R.



1

Phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge

To become skilled readers, children need to understand the alphabetic principle – that there is a link between the letters they see on a page and the sounds they hear in words. Although this is obvious to adult readers, this is a big step for young children, particularly as they must first learn to hear the different sounds in words.

Activity 1.1 What is phonological awareness and why is it important for learning to read and write?

Work in small groups:

- 1 Focus your attention on one or two of these facts.
- 2 Read and discuss the facts you have been asked to focus on.
- 3 Your group shares what you have learnt with the bigger group.

Phonological awareness facts

Fact # 1

Young children often use and understand many words, but haven't yet become aware of the sounds that make up these words. They might know that a butterfly is a beautiful insect, but might not know about the sounds that make up this word. For example, the word **butterfly** is made up of three parts (that we call syllables): **bu | tter | fly**. The word **butterfly** starts with a **/b/** sound. Other words also start with this sound (such as ball, bag, bus, banana). The awareness of the sounds in a word, rather than the meaning of the word, is called phonological awareness.

Fact # 2

Phonological awareness activities don't require a focus on letters – most can be done with your eyes closed!

Fact # 3

It is easier for children to hear sounds in words by connecting the sounds to physical actions and concrete objects. This can be done, for example, by encouraging children to clap or hop for each syllable or sound, or to move counters as they say each syllable or sound in a word.

Fact # 4

Learning to hear sounds in words is not easy for many children, and so it is important that they have daily practice. You can do phonological awareness activities during the day in the following ways:

- While we're waiting for lunchtime, let's play a game of I spy!
- If your name begins with **/b/**, you can line up first for a snack.
- I am thinking of a kind of animal that likes to eat bones. It starts with the sound **/d/**.

Fact # 5

There are many skills that contribute to phonological awareness (PA). This table gives examples of activities that can be used to teach, practise and assess these skills:

PA ACTIVITY	EXAMPLES
1 Judging whether sounds are the same	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Do these words start with the same sound? sun ... sea man ... pan
2 Hearing the beginning and end sounds in words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What sound do you hear at the beginning of the word table?What sound do you hear at the end of the word bus?
3 Combining parts of words to make the full word (blending)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Which word do you get if you put these syllables together: te le phone? (telephone)Which word do you get if you put these sounds together: c-a-t? (cat)
4 Breaking words into parts (segmenting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">How many syllables do you hear in the word elephant: e le phant (three syllables)Say the sounds you hear in the word dog: d-o-g
5 Deleting or adding parts of words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Say 'Sunday'. Now say it again but don't say 'sun' (day)Say 'mice'. Now say it again but don't say /m/. (ice)Say 'up'. Now add a /c/ at the beginning at the word. (cup)
6 Substituting parts of words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Say 'packet'. Now take away the /p/ and in its place, add /j/. What is the new word? (jacket)

Fact # 6

There are different levels of phonological awareness:

- Awareness of syllables e.g. te-le-phone
- Awareness of rhyming words e.g. house/mouse
- Awareness of single sounds (phonemes) e.g. cat starts with a /c/ and has three sounds /c/ /a/ /t/ (**This is called phonemic awareness.**)

Fact # 7

Phonological awareness is not the same as phonics:

- Phonological awareness = the ability to hear sounds in words
- Phonics = knowing how specific written letters relate to specific spoken sounds

Phonological awareness lays the foundation for phonics.

Fact # 8

Once children develop awareness of sounds in words in one language, they will bring this awareness to any other language as they learn to read. Bilingual and multilingual children do better on phonological awareness tasks than monolingual children!

Fact # 9

Phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge are among the best predictors that children will learn to read successfully. They are even better predictors than IQ! Children with good phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge have a better chance of learning to read successfully.

Activity 1.2 Is learning about letters important in Grade R?

Work on your own:

- 1 Read these teachers' opinions on teaching children letter knowledge in Grade R.
- 2 Put a tick next to the opinions you agree with and a cross next to the opinions that you disagree with.
- 3 Discuss your responses in the big group and make a note of anything new you learn in the discussion.

Notes

Teachers' opinions on teaching letter knowledge

Teacher A: Children in Grade R should not be taught to recognise and write letters as this is the Grade 1 teacher's job.

Teacher B: Children can learn about letters and the sounds they make from a young age through incidental learning and fun, multisensory activities.

Teacher C: It is a great advantage for children to know the sounds of at least 12, but ideally all 26, letters when they start Grade 1.

Teacher D: Children know enough about the letters of the alphabet if they can chant ABC ... or sing the alphabet song.

Teacher E: In some languages, letters have both names and sounds. Although the names are useful, knowing the sound made by each letter is essential for learning to read and write.

Teacher F: When children read in Grade 1, they will be able to look at the pictures to predict what the words say. Letters are not that important.

Teacher G: In Grade 1, if children need to write a word, they need to listen to the sounds in a word, remember which letter goes with which sound and remember how to write the letter correctly. This is a lot to do at once, so it is a good idea to know about letters before Grade 1.

Work in pairs:

- 4 Refer to your CAPS document. Look for the Grade R requirements for awareness of sounds in words (phonological awareness) and letter-sound knowledge.
- 5 Write down the page number in the CAPS document and what you find.

- 6 Discuss your findings in the big group.

Activity 1.3 Letter–sound knowledge, phonological awareness and emergent writing

Work in the big group:

- 1 Look at the infographic (introduced in Module 3), and pay particular attention to the sections on letter–sound knowledge, phonological awareness and emergent writing.

Notes

Drawing and emergent writing

- I draw pictures of things I see around me, of stories and things that happen.
- I try to write about my drawings or I ask someone to write what I say.
- I write with marks and scribbles.
- I make letters and cards for my family and friends.
- I copy writing I see around me.
- I try to listen to sounds in words and write letters for the sounds I hear.
- I know how to write some common words correctly.

Letter–sound knowledge

- I can write my name.
- I am interested in letters.
- I write letters in the sand, with crayons, with a paintbrush and water.
- I know the sounds that different letters make.

Phonological awareness (awareness of sounds in words)

- I enjoy songs, rhymes and listening games.
- I can hear when words have the same sounds or different sounds.
- I play “I spy...” and I know what sounds words start with.
- I can put syllables and sounds together to make words.
- I can break up words into syllables and sounds.

Emergent reading

- I like books and enjoy reading!
- I notice signs, logos and labels and try to read them.
- I know how to turn the pages of a book and point to words as I read.
- I use the pictures in books to help me read in my reading voice.
- I look for letters I know to help me guess what words say.
- I try to sound out words I don't know.

I AM CONFIDENT TO EXPRESS MY IDEAS IN WRITING AND I CAN READ AND UNDERSTAND WHAT I READ.

When I grow up want to be a...
Nachir conservatism
 to save the *invoze*

Listening and speaking (oral language)

- I understand the meanings of lots of words.
- I ask questions and give answers when people ask me questions.
- I love listening to stories. I can tell my own stories too!
- I learn new words every day and I use these new words when I talk.
- I know my own language well and I am learning to understand and speak other languages.
- I talk about my ideas and I can explain what I think.
- I understand and use quite long sentences.

2 Discuss the following questions:

a) What are Liam's strengths as an emergent writer?

b) What aspects of emergent writing did Liam find challenging?

c) What will help him to take the next steps towards becoming a writer?

Activity 1.4 Observing and tracking the development of letter–sound knowledge and phonological awareness

Work on your own and then in pairs:

- 1 Think of two children you have taught and know well, and write their names in the blocks for Child A and Child B.
- 2 Put a tick in their column if you have seen them doing any of the things listed.
- 3 Now choose one of these two children to discuss with your partner.

CHILD'S BEHAVIOURS, SKILLS AND ATTITUDES	EVIDENCE OF THIS IN THE CLASSROOM	
	Child A	Child B
	_____	_____
Interested in letters and can write letters in the sand, with crayons or with a paintbrush and water		
Recognises many letters and knows the sounds these letters make		
Uses known letters to try and predict what words say (e.g. there's an 'm' for my 'mom')		
Enjoys songs, rhymes and listening games.		
Can hear when words have the same or different sounds.		
Can hear beginning sounds in words (e.g. sun starts with /s/)		
Can hear end sounds in words (e.g. bus ends with /s/)		
Can blend syllables to make words (e.g. he li cop ter – helicopter)		
Starting to blend single sounds to make words (t-a-p – tap).		
Can break words into syllables (crocodile – cro co dile).		
Starting to break words into single sounds (bag – b-a-g).		



2

Building phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge across the daily programme

Learning to hear sounds in words, and learning about letters and the sounds they make are processes that take time and patience! This must begin before formal reading tuition begins in Grade 1. We can create informal opportunities for children to listen for sounds in words and learn about letters across the daily programme in Grade R.

Activity 2.1 Guiding principles

Work in small groups:

- 1 Take time to read the list of guiding principles for building phonological awareness and letter-sound knowledge.
- 2 Talk about which of these principles are evident in your classroom and school, and which will need more focus.
- 3 On your own, rate your classroom from 1–4. Use this rating scale.

Rating scale

- 1 = Not doing this yet
- 2 = Still needs work
- 3 = Developing steadily
- 4 = I do this well!

GUIDING PRINCIPLES TO BUILD PA AND LETTER-SOUND KNOWLEDGE		RATING
1 Rich language	The teaching of letters and sounds takes place within a language-rich learning environment. Stories are read and told daily; there are opportunities for children to talk and their attempts at communication are acknowledged. Children are given opportunities to learn and use new vocabulary.	
2 Multilingual learning opportunities	Children’s home language is valued and activities build on the language expertise that children bring to the classroom. There is a culture of respect for different languages and children are never made to feel ‘wrong’ for speaking a different language or having different pronunciation. There are activities that include words from different languages, and children are made aware that letters may have different sounds in different languages.	
3 Daily practice	Children have daily practice to develop their ability to hear sounds in words and their knowledge of letter-sound relationships.	
4 Multisensory learning	The formation of letters is taught in multisensory ways. Children are encouraged to engage with letters in fun activities which allow them to touch, move and create letters using all of their senses.	
5 Reading and writing for a purpose	Reading and writing is modelled daily so that children see the purpose of sounds and letters. Children are encouraged to be emergent readers and writers through purposeful reading and writing activities. Their drawing and emergent writing is displayed.	
6 Environmental print	The classroom environment is print-rich. Children are encouraged to read and make sense of the print around them, and to see how we use letters as cues to read words. There is acknowledgement that children learn all the time, so they are encouraged to look for print and letters in their neighbourhood.	
7 Parental engagement	There are opportunities for parents to learn about how children are engaging with letters and sounds at school. Parents are encouraged to support informal learning at home and are given ideas for simple games and activities that they can build into their home routines (for example: I spy with my little eye).	

Activity 2.2 A view of a Stellar classroom

Work in pairs:

- 1 Look at this picture of a Grade R classroom.



- 2 How is this teacher building letter–sound knowledge in her class through multisensory activities?

- 3 Explain how the activities that focus on letter–sound relationships also build vocabulary?



3

Activities to build phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge in the Stellar Programme

In order to hear sounds in words, children need to be able to listen carefully. The Stellar Home Language Programme includes many activities to give children opportunities to learn how to listen carefully, how to become aware of the sounds in words, and to recognise and write letters and link letters to the sounds they make. Importantly, these activities also give the children lots of ways to practise their new skills and use their new knowledge.

Activity 3.1 Introducing a new letter from a story

Work in the big group:

Take a few minutes to think about how you currently introduce a new letter to children in your class. Brainstorm ideas as your facilitator writes them on a flipchart.

Work on your own:

- 1 Look at the steps for **Introducing a letter from the story** (Monday’s activity for Letters and sounds).
- 2 There are five big steps to introduce a new letter to children. (They are introduced with grey headings.) Write a summary of each step and underline any steps you want to remember to try in your classroom.

Steps to introduce a new letter

Activity 3.2 Forming the letter (multisensory activities)

Work in pairs:

- 1 Read the following and then add your ideas over the page:
Young children learn best when they are fully involved in activities and can use all their senses! Learning to write letters can be a difficult task for young children whose fine motor skills are still in the process of developing. Children should not be expected to write with a pencil between lines on paper; instead we should use multisensory activities to teach young children how to form letters in Grade R, for example, painting letters outside on a concrete surface using a paintbrush dipped in water.

More multisensory letter formation activities

- 2 Now look at the steps for the activities in your *Teacher's Guide*.
Work in the big group:
- 3 Share ideas for multisensory activities from your own list and the video.
- 4 Look in your *Teacher's Guide* for the steps for forming letters (Letters and sounds activity on Tuesday).
- 5 Begin a list of new resources and strategies that you would like to try in your class.

MULTISENSORY LETTER FORMATION ACTIVITIES THAT I WOULD LIKE TO TRY	RESOURCES I WILL NEED TO MAKE/COLLECT

Activity 3.3 Using letter boxes to build letter–sound knowledge

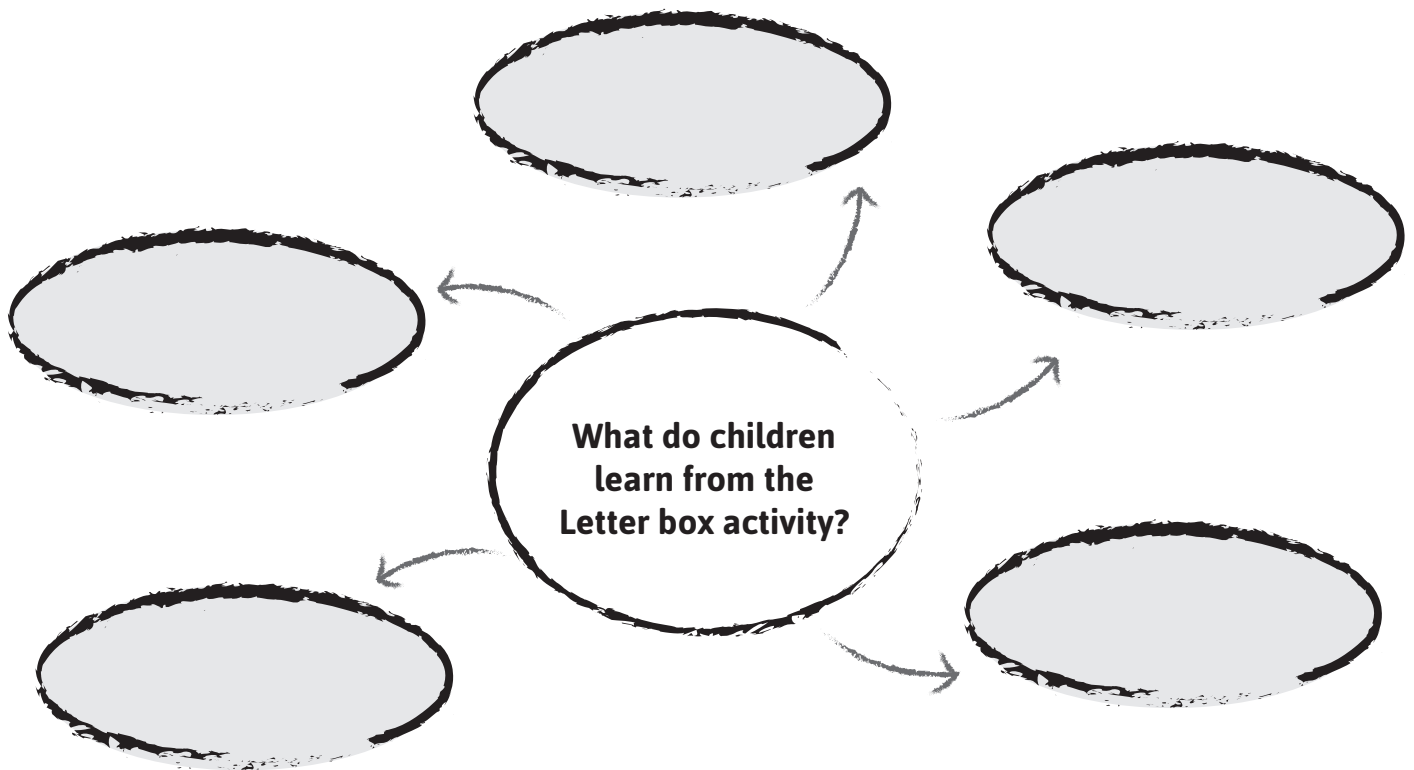
Work in the big group:



Letter boxes

- 1 Participate in a letter box activity led by the facilitator, or watch the video: **Letter boxes**. Where can you find the steps for this activity in your *Teacher's Guide*?
- 2 What do you think children learn from this activity? Write your ideas in the mindmap below.
- 3 Share your ideas in the big group and add any extra notes that you would like to remember.

Notes



In many languages, letters have names and sounds. However, the sounds that letters make are particularly important for beginning reading and writing. When learning about a new letter–sound relationship, children need to be able to hear the beginning sound in a word and then match this sound to a letter. It is also very important that they understand the meaning of the word they are learning; objects and pictures help with this.



Activity 3.6 Letter puzzles and games

Work in small groups:

- 1 Find the pages in your *Teacher's Guide* that give steps for the letter puzzles and games.
- 2 Participate in the letter puzzles and games rotation activity.
- 3 Discuss the following and write your ideas below:

Benefits of using games to teach letter–sound knowledge in my classroom:

Challenges of using games to teach letter–sound knowledge in my classroom:

Good ideas for dealing with the challenges of using games to teach letter–sound knowledge:

★ Technical terms

As an educator, you will come across technical terms that relate to the teaching of language and literacy. In this table we have given explanations of these terms. Due to the different structures of our languages, different technical terms may apply more to one language than another. As teachers of young children in our multilingual society, we believe it is important for you to understand what is common and what is different across languages.

TECHNICAL TERM	DEFINITION
Alphabet	The alphabet is made up of 26 letters. Some letters are called consonants and some letters are called vowels .
Vowel	The following letters are vowels: a e i o u . All the rest of the letters are consonants. Every word has at least one vowel.
Letter names and sounds	In English and Afrikaans, each letter has a name and makes a sound (or more than one sound). For example: The letter m has the name 'em' and makes the sound mmmmm. Children use the sounds of letters when they learn to read and write. In isiXhosa, letters don't have names. Some letters make different sounds in different languages. For example: c-cat (English), c-icici (isiXhosa); g-goat (English), g-geld (Afrikaans). Two letters can also go together to make a new sound. For example: 'sh' for shop. There is a lot to learn about letters and the sounds they make, and so it is a good idea if children begin this journey in Grade R.
Beginning sounds in words	The beginning sound is the first sound that you hear in a word e.g. 'sun' starts with the sound sssss. In isiXhosa, nouns start with vowel prefixes and so when teaching children to listen to beginning sounds in words, we focus on the consonant which is the first letter of the stem of the word, and not the vowel prefix. For example, for the word usana (baby), we would ask children to focus on the beginning sound of the root of the word '-sana'. It helps to say the word and emphasise the sound made by the consonant ussana .
Syllable	A syllable is a part of a word that has only one vowel sound. An example of a syllable is ' he ' in the word 'helicopter'. The word 'helicopter' has four syllables: he-li-cop-ter.
Multisyllabic words	Words that have more than one syllable are called multisyllabic words. For example: po-ta-to and he-li-cop-ter .

TECHNICAL TERM	DEFINITION
CVC words	<p>These are short words made up of a consonant, a vowel and a consonant (CVC). Here are some English examples: 'bus', 'cat', 'pot' and Afrikaans examples: 'jas', 'man', 'vet'. CVC words are usually the first words children learn to sound out if they are learning to read in English and Afrikaans. In Grade R, children can learn to listen to the different sounds in these short words (b-u-s; m-a-n). This will help them to read and write their first words in Grade One.</p> <p>There are very few single syllable words in isiXhosa that have a CVC structure.</p>
CVCV words	<p>These are short words in isiXhosa made up of a consonant, a vowel, a consonant and a vowel (CVCV). For example: sela (drink), lala (sleep), sika (cut). These are usually the first words children learn to sound out if they are learning to read in isiXhosa. These words can also have a vowel at the start (VCVCV). For example: ihagu (pig), umama (mom), usana (baby). In Grade R, children can learn to break these words into syllables (se-la) and to listen to the different sounds in these short words (s-e-l-a). This will help them to read and write their first words in Grade 1.</p>
Phonics	<p>This is a way of teaching children to read and write by learning the sounds of letters.</p>
Phonological awareness	<p>This is an awareness of sounds in spoken words. Phonological awareness includes awareness of rhyme, syllables and the beginning, middle and end sounds of words.</p>
Phonemic awareness	<p>This refers to an awareness of individual sounds in words. For example:</p> <p>/c/ /a/ /t/ cat</p>

★ Conclusion and wrap-up

To remind you of everything you have learned in this training, page back in your Workbook and tick if the following statements are true or false.

STATEMENT	TRUE	FALSE
Phonological awareness activities don't require a focus on letters – most can be done with your eyes closed!		
The Grade R CAPS document gives clear guidelines about how many letters learners should be able to recognise and write by the end of Grade R.		
The formation of letters is best taught in multisensory ways in Grade R. Children should be allowed to touch, move and create letters using all of their senses.		
Parents can't be expected to support their children in learning letter–sound relationships – this must be left to the teacher to teach at school.		
Young children benefit from activities that help them to learn how to listen.		
When teaching children about sounds in words, it will confuse them if you also talk about the meaning of the word.		
Young children need to practise writing letters, so it is a good idea for them to trace or copy rows of letters between lines.		
Phonological awareness and letter–sound knowledge are among the best predictors that children will learn to read successfully.		
It is easier for children to break longer words into syllables than shorter words into single sounds. (For example, breaking a long word like 'elephant' into three syllables 'e-le-phant' is easier than breaking a short word like 'cat' into three single sounds 'c-a-t').		
Letter boxes are a useful resource for a Grade R classroom because concrete objects are used to introduce words together with new sounds and letters.		