



Phonic elements and phonological awareness – and play



EARLY YEARS

As usual, we start our school year with the focus on our students making meaning. The children have largely been in an aural environment over the holiday break, and while there may have been some interacting with print, visual or online text during this time, possibly not.

Our job is to get our students focused on the skills, knowledge and strategies of working with text across all modes and in all subjects.



In the early years, this starts with the sounds of the language, the basis for our written language.

There is a need for explicit instruction in letter sound connections (phonics) and word analysis skills: this should always occur within genuine literacy events and in contexts meaningful to the student. (emphasis added)

Australian Literacy Educators' Association *Literacy in 21st Century Australia: The ALEA Declaration*

We could start with the individual sounds that the students will need to use as they read and write. But that gives no sense of the value or relevance to communication, to the range of experiences - fun and academic – or to the richness and variety of English text.

As well, such a narrow focus ignores the 'literacy-rich practices' that our students bring with them. (Beecher and Arthur in Lowe, Hill and Delany 2001).

What we can do, to make sure we are using 'genuine literacy events' and contexts, is to incorporate other rich literacy practices, such as games, rhymes and poems. That is, children using what they already know and understand to listen to, respond to, engage in, and share the language, right from the beginning of their school learning. This surely sets the scene for exploring how to use the language purposefully, in writing in particular.

The types of situations we are looking for include opportunities where a student:

- *Responds to spoken texts; responds to short phrases relying on key words; recognises and generates one-syllable rhyming words; repeats familiar words heard in a text (all in Ls2)*

And

- *Listens actively to short texts consisting of a few sentences; recalls one or two ideas; responds to simple statements, commands or questions; uses a small range of listening strategies; discriminates individual words in a short spoken sentence; Identifies familiar objects and actions heard in a text (all in Li3)*



And

- *Responds to simple and predictable texts (in LiS4)*

Australian Curriculum

In the [NSW English syllabus](#), the introduction to the sounds, rhythms and communication possibilities of English sit in Early Stage 1, some in Reading and viewing 1, Outcome ENe-4A

[Students] *Develop and apply phonemic knowledge - join in rhymes and chants; understand that spoken words are made up of sounds; recognise rhymes, syllables and sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (ACELA1439); consistently identify words that start with the same initial sound; identify the beginning and end sounds of words*

NSW Syllabus English K-10 p.37

What better way to begin formal learning than to be introduced to repeated phonic and structural elements in powerful ways that build on what the child already knows, are meaningful, enjoyable and entertaining? What we need to beware of is 'wasting children's valuable time by teaching them what they already know' (Lowe, Hill & Delany 2001).

What does this look like?

We can decide the subjects and complexity of the texts we will present, based on our class context, our school context, the interests of the students, the topics we are working on, and the themes and ideas that have come up in stories or in class. Here are some ideas.

EARLY STAGE 1-STAGE 1

Educational jingles:

- 30 days has September ...
- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – Once I caught a fish alive ... etc.

Melodies and ideas for class transitions can be found on the internet. [Here](#) is one site.



Repeated phonic elements - oral:

- **‘Tongue Twisters’** – introduced slowly (it is not a race, we are looking for clarity here), eg
 - Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
 - She sells sea shells by the sea shore.
 - More tongue twisters are available [here](#) and on numerous internet sites. Plan beforehand. Work with students to make up your own for your class – parents can be included in this as a homework activity: *collecting words beginning with ...*
 - NOTE: Children may not have the muscular/articulation ability to clearly make some sounds in English until they are 7 or 8 years old. [This site](#) provides a chart to guide your understanding. If you are repeatedly working on vocalization and a child appears to be continuing to have difficulties, your local speech therapist can assist with information about how the sounds in English are made so you can understand the issue; they may suggest exercises you can use with the whole class.

- **Nonsense**

Nonsense verse and word play are particularly appealing to students. They provide a range of new possibilities for the use of the language.

- **Kerry Mallan’s** Laugh Lines (1993) PETAA: Newtown is a great introduction to many aspects of humorous verse appropriate for use in our classrooms. Mallan includes Spike Milligan, Edward Lear, C.J. Dennis, Margaret Mahy (NZ writer – see her fabulous [playground](#) constructed as part of the rebuilding of Christchurch), Allan Ahlberg, Joanna Cole, Michael Rosen, Ogden Nash, and dozens more – all worth inclusion in your classroom. Become familiar with these authors and use the ones that suit you best. They use the rhyme, rhythm, repetition and phonic elements your students need to meet syllabus outcomes.
- **N.M. Bodecker’s** Let’s Marry Said the Cherry and Other Nonsense Poems (1974) Faber & Faber: London (I love ‘The island of Yorrick is intensely historic ...’)
- **Elizabeth Honey’s** Honey Sandwich (1993) Allen & Unwin: Australia. Honey uses family and everyday contexts for her mad and poignant rhymes and ideas in this collection, eg ‘My umbrella has a broken wing. Poor thing.’
- **Robin Klein’s** Snakes and Ladders (1985) Allen & Unwin: Australia. Poetic narratives about the lives and imaginations of children, such as ‘Monday’s Blues’. To Stage 2.



- **Geoffrey Summerfield's** Junior Voices Books 1-4 (1970) Penguin Education: London is a wonderful collection of international, word play, historical, suburban and country poems – a little bit of everything. K-6

NOTE: Many of the books in this collection have been gleaned from library discards (almost a criminal offence), second –hand bookshops, markets and boot sales. They are not all ancient, but have been kept because the poems work for children. They are almost certainly out of print. Try abebooks.com.

- **Games** – based on repeated elements, memory and collaboration

- One student starts by saying '**I went shopping and I bought ...**' (or other appropriate context) and adds an item. Each person around the group repeats all that is said before and adds a new item. This can be done using alphabetical order, starting with 'a', and each item beginning with the next letter. Have the alphabet available for reference. (variations – 'I went to the zoo and saw ...', 'I went on a picnic and ate ...'etc.) NOTE: This activity also allows for repeated modelling of the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' – an apple, a box of chocolates, etc
- '**Simon/Simone says ...**': Children listen and respond to commands with the appropriate words at the beginning, and ignore the ones that don't. This game has a place in numerous languages and cultures. You can introduce the appropriate phrasing in other languages for your students to learn. A comprehensive overview is [here](#). There are some great ideas [here](#), such as 'Simon says play air guitar' (you'll have to ignore the million ads on this site).

- **Clapping and body percussion.**

- The teacher claps a **rhythmic pattern** and students repeat. Extend to using stamping, slapping thighs and upper arms, and on to percussion instruments.
- **Clapping syllables** – use students' names, colours, favourite foods, animals, whatever is appropriate. Introduce your own name – 'My name is Annette. If I clap my name, I need to use 2 claps.' Say and clap to demonstrate. Invite students to say and clap together. Introduce other names – your cat, a friend – use one, two, three and four-syllable names to model. Ask students to say their name, and invite the correct number of claps, one for each syllable. Prepare beforehand, so you know which names might be tricky. For example students may say that 'Min' has two syllables – 'M-in', which is actually the



onset and rime. Gently correct and move on. This not a test. Make the activity enjoyable, and repeat frequently so all students are able to participate.

- Use clapping syllables to construct a song to the tune of *Frere Jacques* or similar simple song. Try to include all children's names. ([This version](#) gives you the melody and the English version so you can plan for the numbers of syllables you need for each line). Syllabification is an integral component of spelling. This activity provides a solid base for future examination of words, and how they are constructed and pronounced.

Poetry Resources

- *Sing a Song of Popcorn* Poems selected by de Regniers, Moore, White & Carr (1988) Scholastic: NY
- *Someone is Flying Balloons* Poems selected by Jill Heylen & Celia Jellett (1983) Omnibus Books: Adelaide
- *Rattling in the Wind* Poems selected by Heylen & Jellett (1987) Omnibus Books: Adelaide

You may not find these in book shops as they are probably out of print. Try abebooks.com.

- *Tadpoles in the Torrens (Teachers' Edition)* Edited by June Aquilina (2013) Wakefield Press: SA
- ALEA 'Little people's literacy learning' resources at
- <https://www.alea.edu.au/publicresources/resources-for-parents-and-community/little-peoples-literacy-learning> accessed 2/2/2019

LATER STAGE 1 & STAGE 2

By the time students are in Year 3, they have a pretty good command of the majority of the basic spoken elements. Don't stop the enjoyment of it. Now is the time for students to be introduced to the more sophisticated play with words that has engaged writers for centuries.



Word Play

- Introduce students to Spoonerisms – ‘*Spooner or Later*’ by Paul Jennings, Ted Greenwood and Terry Denton
- ‘*Esio Trot*’ by Roald Dahl provides a good fun introduction to the possibilities of word play as the basis for the construction of a full novel. Read the whole novel through first. You can draw your students’ attention to elements of the text they may need in order to ‘solve’ the puzzle. Don’t give the game away. Let students discover the secret for themselves. Use the text for lots of follow-up. See Kath Cartwright’s blog on Primary Learning which includes some ideas for examining texts <https://primarylearning.com.au/2019/02/04/maths-inspiring-english/>
- Palindromes can be interesting – names such as *Eve, Ava, Hannah, Bob*. Sentences can be challenging to construct. The idea is that sentences are sensible, and have some elegance, such as *A man, a plan, a canal: Panama*. There are entire novels and musical compositions that are palindromic.

All of the above provide students with repeated opportunities to use their already diverse knowledge of the sounds of the language to be active participants in making meaning. Students will have a store of genuine literacy events upon which to build their further exploration of English. The explicit and systematic work with early writing formalities will have a background of meaningful contexts.

References

Australian Literacy Educators’ Association *Literacy in 21st Century Australia: The ALEA Declaration* <https://www.alea.edu.au/memberscentre/alea-declaration-and-advocacy/alea-declaration> Accessed 2/2/2019

Lowe, K., Hill, T., & Delany, V. (2001) *More than a sound a week* PEN 131 PETAA: Newtown

NESA (2012) *NSW Syllabus English K-10*