

Phonological Awareness Training

Learning to Read
With
Nursery Rhymes

by

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INTRODUCTION

Nursery Rhymes - A Foundation for Phonological Skills

Nursery rhymes have long had an important place in nurseries and primary schools. The popularity and flexibility of nursery rhymes has enabled them to feature not just as songs to be sung to young children but also in pantomimes, videos and on cassette tapes.

It is only within the last few years that it has become evident that they can provide the best possible foundation for the development of phonological awareness, which is so important in learning to read and spell.

The term "phonological awareness" refers to the young child's developing awareness of sounds within words. Research into the development of phonological awareness (Treiman 1991; Goswami & Bryant, 1990) has helped to trace children's development. From first developing an awareness of utterances being made up of a sequence of separate words, the child then becomes aware of syllables within words (although babies can sometimes replicate the number of sounds spoken even before they are able to produce any intelligible speech.) The next stage appears to be the awareness that the syllable itself is made up of a structure of sounds - onsets and rimes, with the onset being the initial phoneme, e.g. 'c' in cat and the rime, the remainder of the syllable 'at'. Finally the awareness of individual phonemes is achieved. Hence children's ability to be aware of individual sounds in words is a long way down the developmental pathway.

LEVELS OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Whole word:	wigwam
Syllabic division:	wig / wam
Onset-Rime division:	w-ig / w-am
Phonemic division :	w-i-g-w-a-m.

If we wish to help our children to learn to read effectively with the best possible rewards for their efforts, then it makes sense to ensure that our teaching follows the natural course of development rather than working against it. This new approach to phonics is contained in Levels 1 & 2 of the Phonological Awareness Training programme (Wilson, 1993) which is designed for children aged 7 years and older, especially those

experiencing specific learning difficulties. This book, which uses the same principles, was produced for nursery and early primary school aged children with prevention in mind. As a consequence it is hoped that many children will have an easier and more satisfying introduction to learning to read and spell.

There is research evidence which indicates that these hopes can be realised. In the early 80's Bryant and Bradley found that pre-schoolers who were given 'nursery rhyme training' subsequently made significantly greater progress with early reading skills than children who did not receive the training. Later work by Maclean, Bradley and Bryant (1987) found that these findings held even when influences such as intelligence, parents' education and social class were taken account of. Adams (1990) reported that early knowledge of nursery rhymes was 'strongly and specifically related to development of more abstract phonological skills and of emergent reading abilities'. There is therefore convincing evidence for the powerful influence of nursery rhymes in the development of reading skills and the need to ensure that they have a central role in the curriculum.

The rich, repetitive, yet varied language structures provide excellent examples of alliteration and rhymes which can develop children's phonological awareness in an effective but entertaining way. If we take a single line from a rhyme e.g. 'Lucy Locket lost her pocket', there are examples of alliteration with the 'l' sound; repetition of three, two syllable words; rhyming words 'Locket' and 'pocket', which not only share a rhyme but also all of their letters apart from the initial letter. In addition to this there is the repetition of the 'o' sound in 'Locket', 'lost' and 'pocket'. With so much to be gained from just one line of verse, just imagine how much learning could take place if the whole rhyme were to be learned.

Despite recent innovations such as nursery rhyme videos and cassette tapes, the best way to develop a child's knowledge of rhymes and sounds in order to establish the link between hearing sounds and their symbolic representations, is through singing with an adult and using a nursery rhyme book. Whilst videos and cassette tapes can be useful supplements to singing rhymes they should not be regarded as a substitute for this. Recorded materials can sometimes be too quick for young children to be able to follow or to join in with the words. Young children frequently misinterpret what they hear and if not corrected can reach unlikely conclusions e.g. recently I worked with a 6 year old who was adamant that there was no 'wool' in 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' and told me the line went 'Baa Baa Black Sheep, have you anymore?' Any potential benefits for learning about sounds, rhyme and rhythm will be lost if the child does not learn the correct words and rhythms.

SECTION 2

NURSERY RHYME

COLOURING SHEETS

Baa, baa, black, sheep

Baa, baa, black sheep,

Have you any wool?

Yes, sir, yes, sir,

Three bags full;

One for the master,

One for the dame,

And one for the little boy

Who lives down the lane.



SECTION 3

NURSERY RHYMES

TO CUT AND

RECONSTRUCT

Baa, baa, black, sheep

Baa, baa, black sheep,

Have you any wool?

Yes, sir, yes, sir,

Three bags full;

One for the master,

One for the dame,

And one for the little boy

Who lives down the lane.

Boys and girls come out to play

Boys and girls come out to play,

The moon doth shine as bright as day.

Leave your supper and leave your sleep,

And join your playfellows in the street.

Come with a whoop and come with a call,

Come with a good will or not at all.

SECTION 4

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

- WORD MATCHING

- RHYME CLOZE ACTIVITIES

Lucy

Locket

Tommy

Tucker

Miss

Muffet

Boy

Blue

Willie

Winkie