

# Queensland kindergarten learning guideline

Professional development | Resources



## Exploring sound–letter relationships in kindergarten

This resource was developed in collaboration with Stacey Campbell, associate lecturer and researcher at the Macquarie University, Institute of Early Childhood.

This resource and its accompanying video helps teachers meet Standards 2 and 6 of the *Australian professional standards for teachers* (available at [www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers](http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers)).

Please allocate 30 minutes to reflect on this document and view the video.

## Introducing sounds and letters

Research in kindergarten suggests that children are introduced to the alphabet through play-based experiences and adult–child conversations. Kindergarten teachers can help children explore sound–letter relationships by drawing attention to sounds through planned and play-based experiences. These experiences can be supported through teacher questioning, modelling and scaffolding of children’s play.

Sound–letter relationships in kindergarten can be explored through adult–child conversations, which narrate play-based learning. These conversations should be intellectually challenging and follow topics of interest to children (Campbell, Torr & Cologon 2014). Children also benefit from engaging in language games to introduce sounds and letters in an enjoyable way.

### Playing language games

Language games provide opportunities for children to attend to sounds and letters in different ways. There are many games that can be used to support children to explore sound–letter relationships. Kindergarten teachers can draw attention to environmental sounds (e.g. cars, construction, birds) to provide opportunities for children to learn how to listen attentively.

When children listen attentively, they become aware of initial sounds. A game that encourages this is *Guess who?* During it, the educator says: ‘Guess whose name I am going to say? It starts with the sound “d”’. If more than one child’s name starts with the sound, the children can guess all of the possible names (Adams et al. 1998).

Helping children make connections between sounds and letters can begin in kindergarten. Children need to be able to distinguish one letter from another for letter- and sound-correlation games to make sense. The best letters to start with are those that are meaningful to a child, such as letters in a child’s own name. Asking: ‘I’m thinking of someone’s name that begins with the letter/sound “e”’ is an example of a small-group game. For children whose names begin with a combination of two letters representing one sound (digraph) such as ‘sh’ or non–English letter–sound correspondences, further explanation may be needed (Adams et al. 1998).

Sensitivity to rhyme can be developed through sharing rhyming songs and poems, and by playing rhyme games. Development of the awareness of sounds (phonemic awareness) can be

supported through rhyme games, e.g. providing the word 'cat', then encouraging children to find matching words like 'hat' and 'mat'.

## Reading picture books

During shared reading of picture books, kindergarten teachers can help children explore sound–letter relationships by drawing attention to the initial sounds in words. Teachers can also highlight where picture books use the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent words (alliteration). Teachers can emphasise sounds in words containing the same initial letters or sounds, e.g. drawing children's attention to 'swish, swash, swoosh' in the picture book *Grandpa and Thomas* (Allen 2005). Picture books that contain rhyme can also provide opportunities to support children's phonological awareness. For example, emphasising the rhyming words 'sail, snail, tail' in the picture book *The Snail and the Whale* (Donaldson & Scheffler 2003).

## Sharing alphabet books

Kindergarten teachers can encourage children to build sound–letter knowledge by helping them make alphabet books and wall charts. This activity allows children to use images that are personally meaningful to them and build their understanding of the sound–letter combinations.

Most alphabet books can provide for a range of letter-learning opportunities to match sounds (phonemes) and letters (graphemes). Alphabet books that display the letter shape, accompanied by images beginning with the critical sound, can provide opportunities for children to build knowledge of letter names and sounds. Kindergarten teachers need to be aware that some alphabet books are quite complex in the way they require an existing understanding of the alphabet to match phonemes and graphemes and provide further support.



*Kindergarten teachers can provide opportunities for learning about letter shapes and sounds through sharing alphabet books.*

## Letter names and learning

In the kindergarten years, phonics knowledge can be enhanced through the intentional teaching<sup>1</sup> of letter–sound correspondence. In English, there are 52 letter shapes (26 capital and 26 lower case letters). Twelve of these letters have almost identical shapes (e.g. S and s), leaving 40 shapes for children to learn. In addition to becoming familiar with letter shapes, kindergarten children are exposed to letter names and sounds. Some research suggests letter names be introduced first; other research favours introducing sounds first. However, the introduction of letter names and sounds can be done together and in response to children's interests.

<sup>1</sup> For information on intentional teaching see pages 63–64 of the *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline* (QKLG) and further resources on the QCAA website at [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/20413.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/20413.html).

## Teacher resource list

Adams, M, Foorman, B, Lundberg, I & Beeler, T 1998, *Phonemic awareness in young children: A classroom curriculum*, Paul H Brooks Publishing, Baltimore.

Campbell, S, Torr, J, & Cologon, K 2014, 'Pre-packaging Preschool Literacy: what drives early childhood teachers to use commercially produced phonics programs in prior to school settings', *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, vol.15(1), pp. 40–53.

*Literacy and phonics in kindergarten* video and resource ([www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/28666.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/28666.html)).

## Picture book references and resources

Allen, P 2005, *Grandpa and Thomas*, Penguin Group, Camberwell.

Donaldson, J & Scheffler, A 2003, *The Snail and the Whale*, Macmillan Children's Books, London.

Glossary	
Alliteration	the commencement of two or more words of a word group with the same letter
Digraph	a pair of letters representing a single speech sound, e.g. ea in meat, or th in path
Graphemes	the smallest of writing or printing that distinguishes one meaning from another, e.g. the letters of the alphabet
Phonemes	the small units of speech that correspond to letters of an alphabetic writing system
Phonemic awareness	the awareness that language is composed of the small units of sound (phonemes)
Phonics	a method of teaching reading, pronunciation and spelling based on the phonetic interpretation of ordinary spelling
Phonological awareness	awareness of the sound structure of words

Glossary terms are adapted from definitions in *The Macquarie Dictionary* ([www.macquariedictionary.com.au](http://www.macquariedictionary.com.au)).

## More information

If you would like more information, please visit the QCAA website ([www.qcaa.qld.edu.au](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au)) and explore the resources under the headings 'Literacy and numeracy' and 'Intentional teaching'.