

# Queensland kindergarten learning guideline

Professional development | Resources



## Literacy and phonics in kindergarten

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

It is recommended that you allocate approximately 30 minutes to reflect on this document and view the *Literacy and phonics in kindergarten* video.

These resources support teachers to meet Standards 2 and 6 of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*

## Literacy and phonics learning in kindergarten

Awareness of the relationship between letters and sounds begins in kindergarten. Phonics refers to the relationship between letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes) in written words (Mesmer & Griffith 2005). In English, there are 26 letters (graphemes) to represent about 44 sounds (phonemes). It is a complex process for kindergarten children to make this link between letters and sounds.

For kindergarten children aged three to five years, both the *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline (QKLG)* and the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* support the learning of sounds and letters when children show interest. These documents recommend intentional teaching of letters, sounds and the relationships between them (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2010).

The intentional teaching<sup>1</sup> of letter–sound connections through engaging in stimulating, meaningful, child-centred language and literacy experiences enhances children’s literacy learning (Cabell et al. 2008). Research by Campbell, Torr & Cologon (2012) also supports the intentional teaching of phonics through play-based experiences, including multiple experiences with oral language.

## Oral language

Children’s experiences with oral language and vocabulary are central to early and long-term literacy success (Dickinson, McCabe & Essex 2006). When young children engage in natural, everyday communications, they concentrate on the meaning of what is said and the messages conveyed. In a literate society, most children experience oral language and print concurrently as they start to understand how oral language carries messages and that written script has specific features (Scharer & Zutell 2013). In developing the foundation for learning letter–sound relationships, children need to be aware that spoken language is made up of words, syllables and sounds (Christie, Enz & Vukelich 2007). When children hear the separate sounds in words they are able to relate these sounds to letters, or combinations of letters in the alphabet with greater understanding.

<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).

## Letter names

The research of Ehri and Roberts (2006) suggests that a child's ability to identify letters and letter names is a strong predictor of later reading success. Learning letter names gives children the correct labels for talking about letters or groups of letters. Kindergarten teachers can provide many opportunities for learning about letter names and shapes through experiences such as singing the alphabet song, sharing alphabet books or playing with magnetic letters (Ehri & Roberts 2006). In addition to learning letter names, children benefit from engaging in phonics and developing their ability to hear the separate sounds in words in order to relate these sounds to letters of the alphabet.



*Kindergarten teachers can provide opportunities for learning about letter shapes and names through experiences such as playing with magnetic letters.*

## Finding the letters in children's own names

Children in the kindergarten years learn from teachers who provide a range of language and literacy learning experiences. When teachers draw attention to letters and sounds through planned, meaningful and play-based experiences — such as finding the letters in children's own names — children are supported in their phonics learning.

Research has found that for children aged three to five, name knowledge and letter knowledge are linked. Children are often motivated to read and write their own names, and those of their friends and family; commonly learning initial letters in their name before learning other letters. These are usually the first letters children become motivated to write (Bloodgood 1999). Teachers can help children notice letters in a print environment by providing opportunities to see their names printed on their lockers, bags or name cards. This is a strategy to allow children to explore letters and sounds that are significant and serve a real purpose. Teachers can also provide opportunities for learning about phonics through dramatic play, drawing attention to the sounds in children's names when engaging in conversation and reading, or finding their name on a morning sign-in sheet.

## Teacher resource list

This resource list suggests materials to use as a starting point for professional reading and discussion for teachers about literacy and phonics in kindergarten.

Bloodgood, J 1999, 'What's in a name? Children's name writing and literacy acquisition', *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 34, pp. 342–367.

Cabell, SQ, Justice, LM, Vukelich, C, Buell, MJ & Han, M 2008, 'Strategic and intentional shared storybook reading', in LM Justice & C Vukelich (eds), *Achieving Excellence in Preschool Literacy Instruction*, Guilford Press, New York.

Campbell, S, Torr, J & Cologon, K 2012, 'Ants, apples and the ABCs: The use of commercial phonics programs in prior-to-school children's services', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, vol. 12(4), pp. 367–388.

Christie, J, Enz, B & Vukelich, C 2007, *Teaching Language and Literacy: Preschool through the elementary grades*, 3rd edn, Pearson Education, Boston.

Dickinson, D, McCabe, A & Essex, M 2006, 'A window of opportunity we must open for all: The case for preschool with high-quality support for language and literacy', in DK Dickinson & SB Neuman (eds), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*, vol. 2, Guilford Press, New York.

Ehri, L & Roberts, T 2006, 'The roots of learning to read and write: Acquisition of letters and phonemic awareness', in DK Dickinson & SB Neuman (eds), *Handbook of Early Literacy Research*, vol. 2, Guilford Press, New York.

Mesmer, H & Griffith, P 2005, 'Everybody's selling it, but just what is explicit, systematic phonics instruction?', *The Reading Teacher*, vol. 59(4), pp. 366–376.

Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority 2014, *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline*, [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p\\_10/qklg.pdf](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/qklg.pdf) or [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/10192.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/10192.html).

Scharer, P & Zutell, J 2013, 'The development of spelling', in J Larson & J Marsh (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Early Childhood Literacy*, 2nd edn, SAGE Publications, London.

## More information

Please visit [www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/12974.html](http://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/12974.html) and explore the resources under the headings Intentional teaching > Literacy and numeracy and Inclusion and diversity > Cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST) are available at [www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Standards/Standards/AllStandards](http://www.teacherstandards.aitsl.edu.au/Standards/Standards/AllStandards).