

Spotlight on Early Years

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From the Research

The view that children learn in different ways is under scrutiny. Dehaene has said:

…it is simply not true that there are hundreds of ways to learn to read. Every child

is unique… but when it comes to reading we all have roughly the same brain that imposes the same constraints and the same learning sequence.

Evidence suggests that most pupils with moderate to severe and complex needs are not 'visual learners', as previously thought. Trembath, for instance, in a small study, found 'no evidence of a prominent visual learning style in children with ASD, while Kathy Cologon has noted that, for pupils with Down's syndrome:

Sight-word learning on its own is insufficient for reading development and teaching with this approach alone is contrary to current evidence-based practices in literacy instruction.

SSP, rather than a whole-word approach, provides pupils with moderate to severe and complex needs the best opportunity to gain functional literacy. Pupils who have a hearing or visual impairment are generally able to access phonics teaching if they have some hearing or vision

Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities The reading framework DfE July 2023

- The wide range of learning difficulties experienced by pupils with identified SEND can have a significant impact on children's and young people's access to the curriculum. This section concentrates on good practice for those with moderate to severe SEND and complex needs.
- Literacy is as important for these pupils as for their peers and teachers should be ambitious about teaching them to read and write. These pupils have to navigate the same written language, unlock the same alphabetic code, learn the same skills, and learn and remember the same body of knowledge as their peers. These are critical in helping them prepare for adulthood.
- Schools are expected to enable access to appropriate phonics instruction for pupils who have complex needs. Under the Equality Act 2010, they are required to make reasonable adjustments to enable pupils with disabilities to have full access to the curriculum and to be able to participate in it.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who have fallen behind with reading Ofsted March 2023

- We have been writing about how important it is for all children to be able to read for some time now. This blogpost focuses on pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who are not reading fluently.

Learning to read is essential for all pupils because it helps them to:

- read for pleasure
- study all subjects in the curriculum
- be prepared for life.

That is why our education inspection framework (EIF) places a strong emphasis on how well all pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, are taught to read.

All pupils need the same knowledge of the alphabetic code to become independent readers and spellers

- Extensive research shows how important teaching systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) is until children can decode automatically.

- SSP represents a body of knowledge needed for word reading (and spelling). Without the knowledge they build through being taught SSP, pupils will struggle to read unfamiliar words.

- This is true for all pupils who are learning to read, including those with SEND. Broadly speaking, it will only be those pupils with severe cognitive difficulties that cannot be taught the alphabetic code.

Making reasonable adjustments to help pupils access the same phonics curriculum as their peers

- Pupils with SEND may have a range of difficulties that affect how easily they are able to access the curriculum. Under the Equality Act 2010, schools must make reasonable adjustments to enable pupils with SEND to have full access to the curriculum and to be able to participate in it. This includes making appropriate phonics instruction available for children with complex needs.

- When leaders are thinking about how to help pupils with SEND access the same phonics curriculum as their peers, it's important that they assess the individual pupil's needs. Knowing each individual's learning needs then plays an important part in helping staff to choose the most effective pedagogy to secure the knowledge being taught. Assessment should identify the precise knowledge which pupils need in order to progress through the curriculum. Teaching can then target this knowledge precisely.

What effective schools do

- Inspection evidence shows us that the most effective schools teach all pupils to read, despite disadvantage or special educational need. These schools know that pupils' understanding of the alphabetic code underpins successful reading and spelling. They make sure adults read to children, they teach SSP well and they give children time to practise and consolidate their growing knowledge.

- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who have fallen behind with reading – Ofsted: schools and further education & skills (FES)

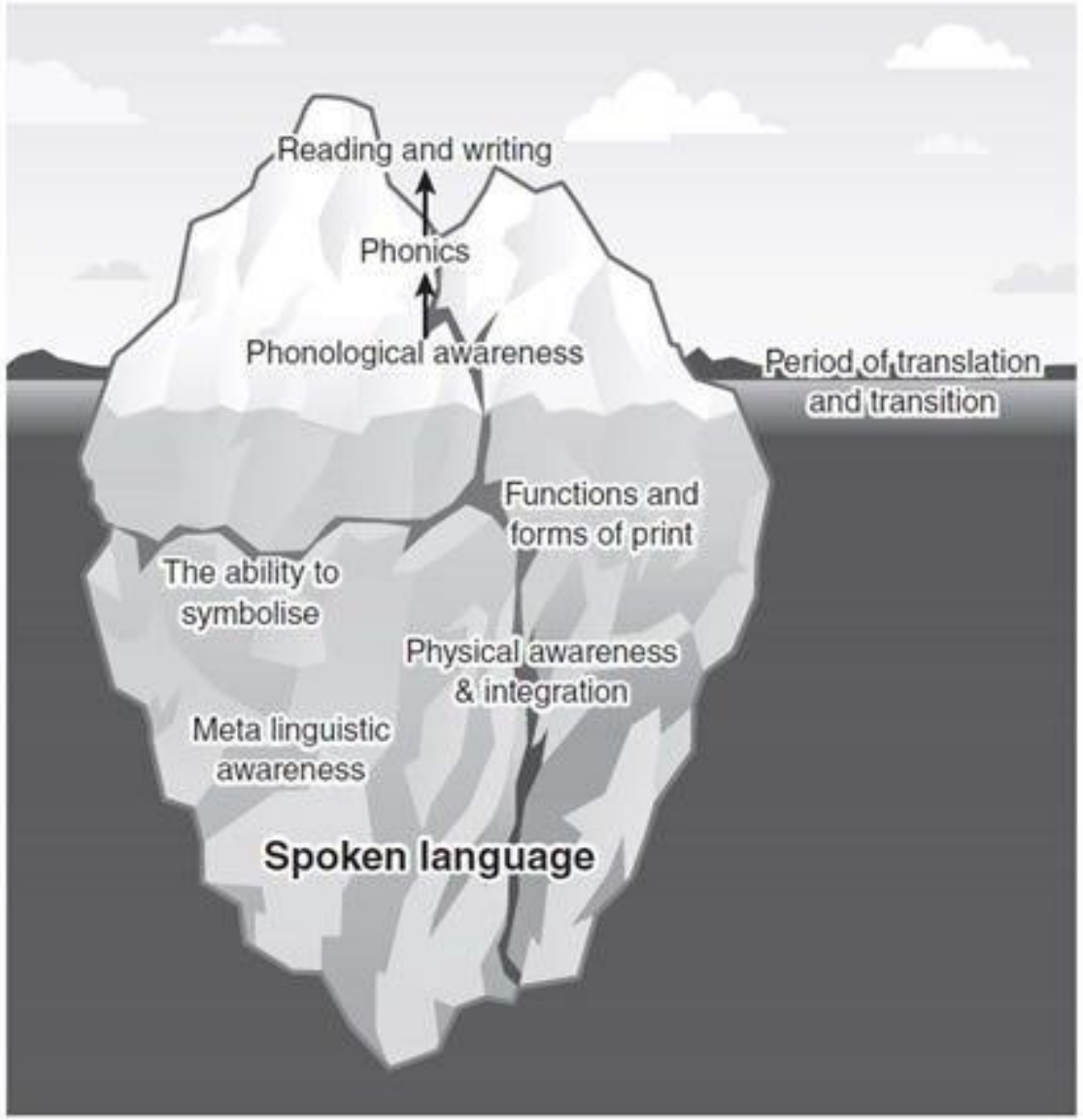
So what do we do….



Identify what needs to be taught

- Imagine an iceberg.
- The visible tip represents reading and writing: the visible products of becoming literate. This is supported by a huge body of knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes that are not visible in the same way, but the robustness of what is visible depends upon them.
- Becoming literate with ease and success depends upon a range of knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes that are developed before, and underpin, explicit, formal, literacy teaching.

What Comes Before Phonics? - Guest Article by Dr. Sally Neaum ABCDoes.com Jan 2025



Dr Sally Neaum: What comes before phonics?

- **Spoken language**.
- **Physical activity that supports sensory awareness and integration**
- **Meta-linguistic awareness**
- **An understanding of the functions and forms of print**.
- **The ability to symbolise**.
- **Phonological awareness.**

- What Comes Before Phonics? - Guest Article by Dr. Sally Neaum

And also……

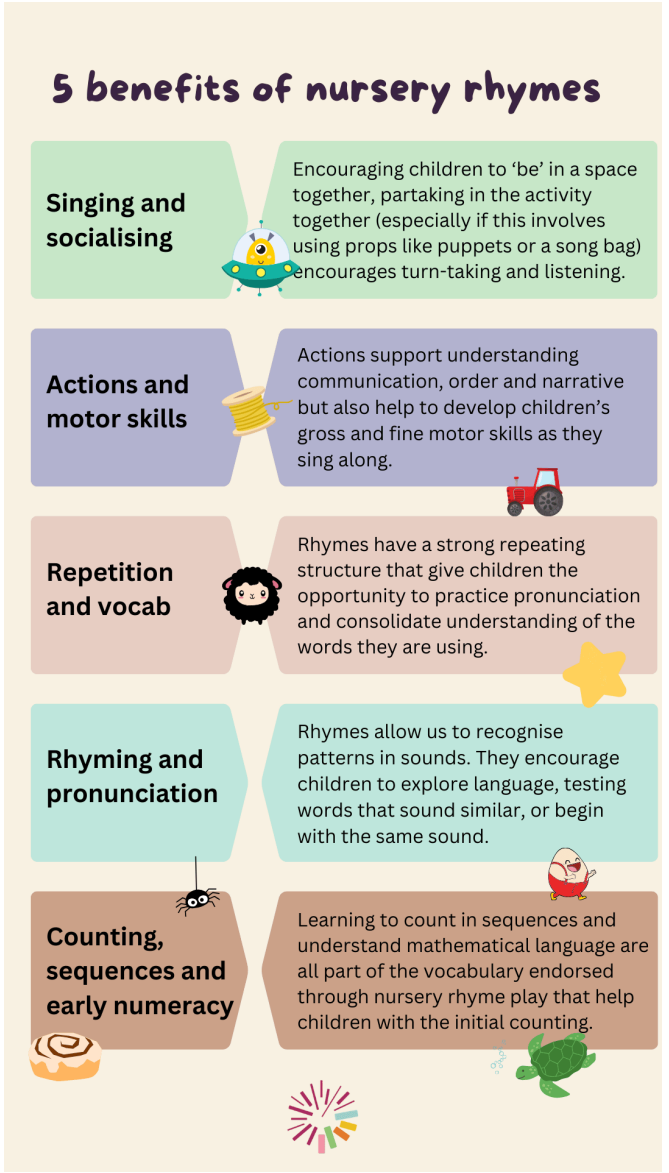
- A fascination with sounds and print
- Motivation and interest to crack the code and apply the code
- Physical development from eye tracking to core strength
- Ability to listen and attend for short periods
- Engagement with narrative and non-fiction text
- Understanding of language structures and specific vocabulary – language comprehension
- The recall of letter patterns – our names, digraphs and trigraphs and ‘tricky’ words
- An awareness of same and different for grapheme – phoneme correspondence

Children will need foundational skills such as tuning into sounds or orally blending and segmenting

- Phase 1 games for **listening and attention**
- **Shared and focused attention** – however brief
- **Tuning into sounds** – soundscapes, sound bingo, listening walks, matching instrumental sounds
- **Rhythm and rhyme**
- **Alliteration**
- **Voice sounds**
- **An interest in symbols and print**
- **Oral blending and segmenting**

- Phase 1 Videos – Letters and Sounds
- Phonics bllom.com – use with caution
- From senses to sentences: building early literacy with sensory play

Phonics on the move



Use what works for the child

- A quiet, visually calm space space
- Movement breaks
- Now and next
- A well known adult
- Sensory opportunities

More repetition may be needed

- Time and patience
- Chunk up the session
- Revisit at other times
- Work with colleagues and families to share strategies

Follow Children's Interests

- The train drives along
- Each attempt is rewarded with sensory feedback
- Themed or colour coded resources
- Visuals show progress – rocket countdown
- Sounds are compared e.g. motorbike engine
- Make it more physical if needed – bucket game

The session may need to be shorter or chunked up

- A whole phonics session on the carpet is likely to be ineffective if children are focusing on staying on the carpet and all the expectations that brings.
- Move location
- break it up
- focus on preferred learning contexts
- revisit during the day
- integrate revisit opportunities into more playful contexts

Visuals may need to be supported with real objects

- Can you supplement the visual with a physical object
- Can you provide physical letters as well as grapheme cards (check font)
- Can you develop a routine with introducing new letters – a box or bag or bucket
- Do you need to add a sensory element

Reflect Children's Developmental Stage

- Be respectful of children's social development as well as their phonics learning
- Phonics is a code and this can be presented in a developmentally appropriate way

Physical grapheme cards maybe better than slides on the IWB

- See it, say it, touch it – multi sensory opportunities
- Matching to physical resources
- Use children's interests
- Ensure that physical resources are available to the child at other times in their school day – application for their own purposes

What about Fidelity to the Phonics Programme?

- Ensure that the person delivering the session has the necessary phonics skills of correct enunciation and the knowledge of how to apply synthetic phonics e.g. letter names for digraphs
- Maintain the sequence to avoid missing anything crucial
- Utilise visuals from the programme
- Be consistent with modelling letter formation – use the school patter
- When applying in reading and writing provide opportunities to utilise phonics skills rather than encouraging reliance on memorising whole words or copying

Asset Based Model – finding unique pathways

- What are the special skills and talents of this child – what **can** they do and how can we utilise these skills and attitudes and knowledge to build upon:

…in the chat



What has worked for you……



3 top tips

- Start with where the child is – find their place on the phonics journey to build a strong foundation
- Understand the layers of phonics teaching and be skilful and accurate in your teaching
- Be consistent for success – in teaching and in opportunities to practice and refine their skills

