

The big four to foundational phase literacy

Preparation for learning to read begins early in children's lives, even earlier than some people might think. In fact, some would say that emergent reading skills begin at birth when children are first exposed to speech. Emergent reading skills continue to develop throughout the foundational phase of learning years as children acquire language and are exposed to printed materials in meaningful ways.

A well-rounded early education in literacy includes all four components of foundational phase literacy, also known as "the big four", and they make up the foundation for future literacy development.

Foundational phase literacy development areas

Oral language development
Print awareness
Phonological awareness
Alphabetic principle

These are the four components of a complete literacy curriculum in preschool. Each component is important to preschool literacy, which is why teachers and parents need a vast resource of teaching strategies in their teaching.

Oral language development

Very simply defined, oral language is the acquisition of vocabulary that aids in meaningful speech and conversation. However, oral language development consists of much more than simply vocabulary. It also includes:

- Phonology - The organisation of sounds within an alphabetic language.
- Grammar or syntax - The rules that govern the structure of speech and writing
- Morphology - A subset of semantics which considers the smallest units of meaning within a word, as well as how the word is formed.
- Pragmatics - The understanding of how language is used in social situations.
- Discourse - The act of communicating, in oral or written form.

Print awareness

Print awareness refers to a child's understanding that written language has a direct relationship with oral language. Sometimes called "concepts of print," it also includes skills such as:

- Reading pictures develops storytelling skills by using pictures to "read" a book rather than relying on the words to be read aloud.
- Picture and word differentiation. These are two separate things.
- Line sweeping is the act of "sweeping" reading from the end of one line to the beginning of the next.
- Punctuation develops awareness that symbols in writing tell readers what to do.
- Purposeful print. Print that has a purpose to communicate and give information to the reader.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognise the variety of sound units that make up words. It encompasses a wide variety of sound-related skills that are necessary for reading. Skills include:

- One-to-one correspondence in reading. Understanding that each written word corresponds with a spoken word.
- Rhyming.
- Syllable awareness, counting syllables, as well as blending and segmenting syllables.
- Onset and rime manipulation if the "k" sound in cat is replaced by the "p" sound, what new word is created?
- Phoneme awareness that words are made up of small and individual sounds.

Alphabetic principle

This refers to phonics instruction, which means that sounds in words are represented by symbols (letters). It is understanding that the speech sounds of language have systematic and predictable relationships with letters of the alphabet and letter combinations, thus forming words. Skills include:

- Letter-sound associations that every sound has a matching symbol or set of symbols.
- Sound blending.
- Isolating individual sounds in a word.
- Word identification.

Source: 2022

