CHAPTER 4

Phonological Awareness

Preschoolers are language users. They know that words have meaning and power. They delight in adding new words to their own stash and have natural curiosity about the world that they express through words. What they might not know, though, is that words are composed of a combination of sounds. One of the foundational literacy skills that we can develop in preschool is phonological awareness, a bedrock concept about the construction of words.

WHAT IS PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS?

Phonological awareness sounds scarier than it is. We like to think of phonological awareness as a skill that can be developed playfully with no paper, no pencil, and no materials of any kind. It involves thinking about the sounds of language instead of the meaning of language (Lonigan, 2008). Phonological awareness is not the same as reading words; phonological awareness is working with the sounds in words separate from the written letters. As a result, phonological awareness can be developed in the dark. A preschool teacher leading his or her children in a song with rhyming words is providing phonological awareness experience. By singing and noticing or providing rhyming words, the children are experimenting with the sounds of words in their language, specifically words that sound the same at the end. A preschool teacher leading his or her children on a walk and talking about things they see that start with the same sound, such as a goose and a garden, is building children's phonological awareness. And the preschool teacher who tells his or her children that *cowboy* is a compound word made up of the words *cow* and *boy* is introducing his or her children to phonological awareness. Phonological awareness instruction is not scary. Most preschool teachers do some phonological awareness work naturally as they interact with their children.

It is useful, though, to be more intentional. In this chapter we provide some of the technical vocabulary you need to understand how to plan for phonological awareness development. Children's overall phonological awareness consists of four levels of awareness: (1) word awareness, (2) syllable awareness, (3) onset–rime awareness, and (4) phoneme awareness (Lonigan, 2008). Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the four components of phonological awareness. These awarenesses are progressively more advanced. Interestingly, as the knowledge becomes more complex, the parts of sounds that children are working with become smaller and smaller. Figure 4.2 provides a visual representation of the developmental sequence of the four components of phonological awareness.

The story becomes a bit more complex, for within each of the four components there are also levels of task difficulty. For example, some syllable tasks are harder for children than others. In addition to type of task, the type of words used in an activity also makes a task easier or harder (Yopp & Yopp, 2000). For example, in a syllable counting activity, counting syllables in one- and two-syllable words is easier than counting syllables in three- and four-syllable words. Preschool teachers must make conscious decisions about the type of task they ask children to complete, finding a task that is not too hard, not too easy, but just challenging enough. Levels of task difficulty are addressed below within descriptions of each component.

Word awareness is the most basic awareness. Although words are the building blocks of communication, young children may not perceive them as individual units. Rather, they experience a stream of speech, without breaks between words. Or they might confuse a syllable with a word. The trick is to realize that an individual word, regardless of the number of letters or syllables it has, represents an individual meaning. Word awareness requires children to think about an individual word as a unit of speech. Experiences that target word awareness include working with compound words ("What do you get

Term	Definition	Example Teacher Talk
Word Awareness	Knowledge that a word is a unit of speech.	Which word is longer—*cat* or *forest*? What do you get when you put *lip* and *stick* together?
Syllable Awareness	Knowledge that words are made up of parts called syllables.	Let's see how many syllables are in the word *construction*.
Onset–Rime Awareness	Knowledge that one-syllable words can be divided into beginning sounds and then the vowel and what comes after.	What sound do you hear first in the word *cat*? What comes after the /c/?
Phoneme Awareness	Knowledge that words are composed of individual speech sounds that blend together.	What word do you get when you put the sounds /d/ /o/ /g/ together?

FIGURE 4.1. Subcomponents of phonological awareness.

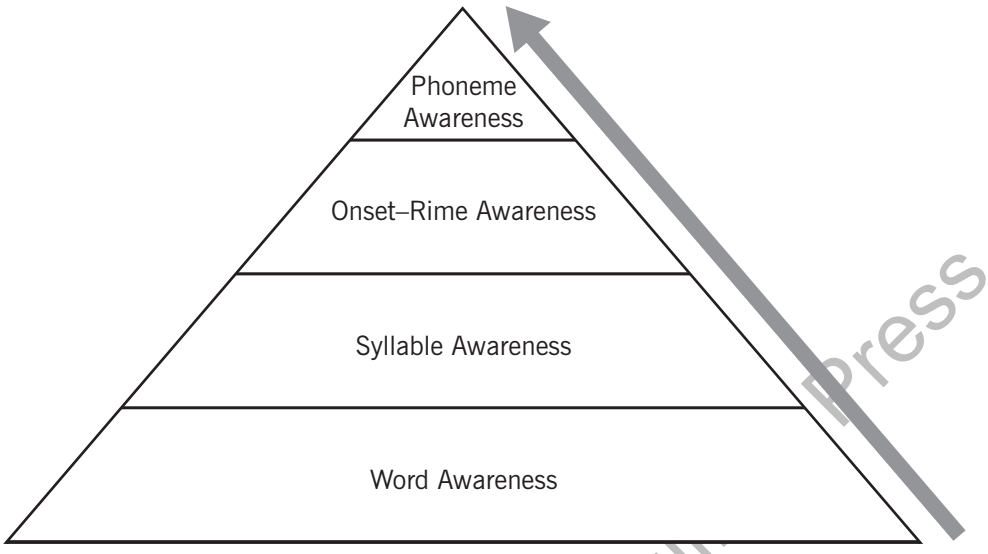

FIGURE 4.2. Developmental progression of phonological awareness skills.

when you put *tree* and *house* together?"), and counting how many words are in a sentence ("How many words are in the sentence—'The dog is chasing the ball'?"). See Figure 4.3 for a summary of word awareness tasks and a progression of difficulty. Note that these activities simply invite children to play with words.

Syllable awareness is the next developmental step. To develop syllable awareness, children understand that words are made up of parts called syllables. A syllable is a unit of sound anchored by a vowel, but preschoolers need not know those terms. Preschool teachers asking children to clap out the number of syllables in a word ("Let's clap out the number of syllables in Susan's name together: *su-san*."), comparing the number of syllables in different words ("Which has more syllables: the word *cat* or the word *hippopotamus*?"), or to delete a syllable from a word ("Can you say *pumpkin* without *pump*?") are building children's syllable awareness. See Figure 4.4 for a summary of syllable awareness tasks and a progression of difficulty.

Next, onset–rime awareness requires children to separate the beginning sounds (onset) from the ending sounds (rime) in a syllable. For example, the word *cat* has one syllable. In that syllable the /c/ is the onset and the /at/ is the rime. In the word *chime*, the /ch/ is the onset and the /ime/ is the rime. Preschool teachers usually use one-syllable words to target onset–rime awareness. They draw attention to beginning sounds in words by playing with alliteration in tongue twisters ("Can you say the sentence, 'Katie kangaroo kicked a kickball,' three times fast?") and ending sounds in words by playing with words that rhyme ("Which word does not sound the same at the end: *cat*, *lunch*, *bat*?"). See Figure 4.5 for a summary of onset–rime awareness tasks and a progression of difficulty.

Task	Description	Example
Counting	Ask children to count the number of words in sentences; the more words, the harder the task for children	"How many words are in the sentence 'The dog barked'?"
Identification	Give children a sentence and ask them to say one word in the sentence.	"Tell me one word in this sentence 'Today is Monday'."
Blending	Ask children to put two or more words together to create compound words.	"What word do you get when you put the words *rain* and *bow* together?"
Segmenting	Ask children to break a compound word apart into two words.	"What two words do you hear in the word *friendship*?"
Deletion	Ask children to say part of a compound word by taking away a word.	"Can you say *football* without the word *foot*?"
Substitution	Ask children what word they would have if they changed a word in a compound word.	"What word would you get if you changed the word *basket* in *basketball* to *volley*?"

FIGURE 4.3. Word awareness tasks.

Task	Description	Example
Counting	Ask children to count the number of syllables in words; the more syllables, the harder the task for children.	"How many syllables are in the name *Hunter*? Let's clap it out together."
Identification	Give children two words and ask them if they contain the same beginning or ending syllable.	"What parts of *rainbow* and *raindrop* are the same?"
Blending	Ask children to put two or more syllables together to create words.	"What word do you have when you put /sis/ and /ter/ together?"
Segmenting	Ask children to break a word apart into syllables.	"What parts do you hear in the word *candy*?"
Deletion	Ask children to say part of a word by taking away a syllable.	"Can you say *pumpkin* without the /kin/?"
Substitution	Ask children what word they would have if they changed a syllable in a word.	"What word would you get if you changed the /ber/ in *berry* to /cher/?"

FIGURE 4.4. Syllable awareness tasks.

Task	Description	Example
Identification	Give children three words and ask them to identify two that contain the same beginning sound.	"Listen to these words: *drip*, *drop*, *tin*. Which two words start with the same sound?"
Blending	Ask children to put an onset and a rime together to create a word.	"What word would you get if you put the sounds /b/ and /oat/ together?"
Segmenting	Ask children to break a word apart into onset and rime.	"What two chunks of sounds do you hear in the word *land*?"
Deletion	Ask children to say part of a word by taking away the onset or the rime.	"What sound do you get when you take /p/ away from *pig*?"
Substitution	Ask children what word they would have if they changed the beginning sound in a word.	"What would you get if you changed the /sh/ in *sheep* to /j/?"

FIGURE 4.5. Onset–rime awareness tasks.

Finally, phoneme awareness is the most complex skill, requiring children to identify individual sounds in words (phonemes). Instruction targeting phoneme awareness asks children to identify individual sounds in words ("What sounds do you hear in the word *cat*?") and blend individual sounds together to create words ("What do you get when you put /c/ /a/ and /t/ together?"). Phonemic awareness is so fine a level of phonological awareness that researchers debate whether it should even be taught to preschoolers (International Reading Association & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). We have encountered some children who are ready to begin work with phonemes by the end of preschool; however, these children have already developed a strong foundation in alphabet knowledge and in word, syllable, and onset–rime awareness. See Figure 4.6 for a summary of phoneme awareness tasks and a progression of difficulty.

WHY IS PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS IMPORTANT?

These fairly technical language tasks may seem to be a strange match for the language skills of preschoolers, but phonological awareness is important. Phonological awareness is an essential building block for successfully learning to read (Ball & Blachman, 1988). A child's phonological awareness predicts later reading skills, such as decoding, reading comprehension, and spelling (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). Reading research shows that children who are good at segmenting syllables, rhyming, and blending phonemes become readers faster than their peers (Lonigan, 2008). Understanding why that

Task	Description	Example
Counting	Ask children to count the number of phonemes in words; the more phonemes, the harder the task for children.	"How many sounds do you hear in the word *pig*?"
Identification	Give children a word and ask them to identify the beginning or ending sound.	"What is the first sound in *foot*? What is the last sound?"
Blending	Ask children to put two or more phonemes together to create words.	"What word do you get when you put /c/ /a/ and /t/ together?"
Segmenting	Ask children to break a word apart into phonemes.	"What sounds do you hear in the word *hat*?"
Deletion	Ask children to say part of a word by taking away a phoneme.	"Can you say the word *pin* without the /p/?"
Substitution	Ask children what word they would have if they changed a phoneme in a word	"What word do you get when you change the /b/ in *bug* to /r/?"

FIGURE 4.6. Phoneme awareness tasks.

might be is a foundational idea for designing preschool phonological awareness experiences that make sense.

Decoding is a skill typically targeted in the middle of kindergarten. It makes sense that children who are able to play with sounds in words will have an easier time decoding words. When an individual encounters an unknown word, one way to "get it" is to make the individual sounds and then blend them together. This type of "sounding it out" involves two sets of skills: letter-sound knowledge and the phonemic awareness skill of oral blending. Conversely, children who have trouble with phonological skills struggle to make the connection between written words and the sounds in the words (Lonigan, 2008). The good news is that research indicates that preschool children can be taught phonological awareness effectively (Adams, 1990). The key to phonological awareness instruction at the preschool level is to make it playful and to use words that are meaningful to the children.

WHAT DOES PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS INSTRUCTION LOOK LIKE?

Effective phonological awareness instruction in preschool does not have to be costly or time-consuming. The results of the National Reading Panel (2000) suggest that programs with less than 20 hours of phonological awareness instruction were sufficient for laying the foundation of phonological awareness skills children need. We now share ideas for

phonological awareness instruction that require few materials and take 5 to 10 minutes of classroom time to implement. With a small amount of advanced planning, preschool teachers can incorporate phonological awareness instruction throughout the preschool day, during whole group, small group, centers, or even transitions and outdoor play.

Whole-Group Instruction

Whole-group time offers preschool teachers a perfect opportunity to teach phonological awareness. We have chosen to highlight two approaches to teaching phonological awareness during whole-group time—through song or poem and in connection with storybook reading.

Singing songs and reading poems that contain rhyming lyrics is a playful way of teaching preschool children to hear, recognize, and generate rhyme. Luckily, it is not hard to think of dozens of preschool songs that contain rhyme. To make a rhyming song meaningful to children in your classroom, we recommend trying to connect the song you choose to your current theme of study. For example, if you are studying animals at the zoo, you may want to teach your children the rhyming song "Willabee Wallabee Woo," which features an elephant. In that song, children first hear a silly situation: "Willabee Wallabee Woo, an elephant sat on you. Willabee Wallabee Wee, an elephant sat on me." Then the remaining verses are made to include children's names. For example, one verse could be "Willabee Wallabee Wowen, an elephant sat on Owen." Or, if you are working on an outdoor nature unit, you can sing "The Ants Go Marching" with your children. In that counting song, each verse includes a rhyme to go along with the number of ants marching. For example, the first verse begins, "The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah. The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah. The ants go marching one by one, the little one stops to suck his thumb. And they all go marching down to the ground to get out of the rain, boom boom boom boom." Children love to get up and march around the room as they sing this song and act out the rhyming actions.

While planning your instruction, it is important to locate song lyrics and, whenever possible, recordings of songs to play in the classroom. It is embarrassing to get halfway through a song and realize you have forgotten the lyrics. Figure 4.7 lists a collection of resources we have found useful when tracking down preschool song lyrics.

Once you have identified a song or poem to use, incorporate the song or poem into your daily routine. Do you sing or recite a poem in the morning before large group? Do you sing or recite a poem in the afternoon before going outside to play? Singing is a fun, developmentally appropriate way to engage children in playing with the sounds of the English language. And, the good news is that children love singing and reciting poetry. Introducing a new song or poem that fits with the current theme of study makes it meaningful to the children and can coincide with the content of your lessons. For example, we recently observed a preschool teacher using "The Caterpillar Poem" during a thematic unit on exploring nature. This poem is structured so that it reviews the life cycle of the

Text-Based

Church, E., & Hensley, D. (2000). *The great big book of classroom songs, rhymes, and cheers (Grades preK–1).* New York: Scholastic.

Silberg, J., Schiller, P., & Berry, M. (2006). *The complete book and CD set of rhymes, songs, poems, fingerplays, and chants.* Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.

Henry, L. K., & Moore, S. (2007). *Early learning with puppets, props, poems, and songs: Reproducibles and how-to's for dozens and dozens of easy activities that help children build background knowledge, vocabulary, and early concepts.* New York: Scholastic.

Web-Based

Creative Kids Crafts—
www.creativekidscrafts.com/preschoolsongs.html

Gayle's Preschool Rainbow—
www.preschoolrainbow.org/index.htm

KIDiddles Printable Songsheets—
www.kididdles.com/printables_home.html

Preschool Express—
www.preschoolexpress.com/music_station.shtml

FIGURE 4.7. Resources for discovering preschool song lyrics.

butterfly and includes rhyming words. First, she selected the poem because it coincided with her learning objective of teaching the life cycle of the butterfly. Second, she created a poster of the words to help her as she taught the children the poem and to serve as a visual representation of each stage in the cycle for children as they read. See Figure 4.8 for a photograph of the teacher's poem poster. Next, the teacher introduced the poem by explaining to her children that they were going to learn a new poem about the caterpillars and butterflies they had been learning about in class. The first day the teacher read the poem as she pointed to each word on the poster for the children. The second day the teacher read the poem first and then asked the children to say it along with her the second time. By the third day the children came into class saying parts of the poem they remembered, and as a class they could say the entire poem with the teacher. Through this poem, the teacher achieved two instructional goals. First, she helped reinforce the concept of the life cycle of the butterfly that she had been working on through large-group storybook reading and activities during center time. Second, she engaged children in playing with rhyming words.

One nice thing about teaching phonological awareness through a poem or song is that it is highly engaging to young children. While the teacher in our example was reading a poem with her children, the teacher's aide took time to set up activities for center time. Using classroom time and classroom personnel in this way maximizes time used for instruction. The teacher did not have to stop after reading the poem to set up centers, but could transition smoothly from reading to center time.

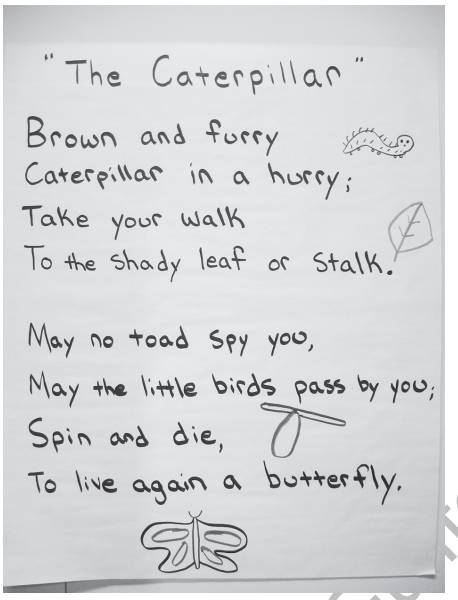

FIGURE 4.8. The Caterpillar Poem (Rossetti, 1988).

Phonological awareness instruction can also be incorporated effectively into large-group storybook reading. What better place to talk about rhyme, compound words, or syllables than when children encounter language in storybooks while listening? Phonological awareness instruction goes hand in hand with storybook reading because it is a natural, authentic context for encountering the sounds of language. The hardest part about incorporating purposeful phonological awareness instruction is choosing the best book. Figure 4.9 lists some of our favorite rhyming books, but there are millions more out there to discover and use. Our advice about choosing the right book is to find one that fits in with your current unit of study and one that will hold children's interest. Texts that are too long or involve complicated plots may require children to focus so much on comprehension that they are not able to attend to phonological awareness. Don't force phonological awareness activities with a book that is better suited to other activities; most books will provide you with some natural choices to develop attention to the sound of language, but doing so artificially will not be worthwhile.

The same teacher who read "The Caterpillar Poem" with her children continued the nature theme with her class the next week by reading Denise Fleming's *In the Tall, Tall Grass* (1991). Prior to reading to her class, the teacher read the book to practice reading dramatically and to look for rhyming pairs of words. She then decided to review the concept of rhyming words before reading, draw children's attention to the rhyming words during reading, and engage children in a rhyming activity after reading to informally gauge children's understanding. On the day of the storybook reading, the teacher calls

Andreae, G. (2001). *Giraffes can't dance*. New York: Orchard.
Barner, B. (1999). *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* New York: Scholastic.
Brown, M. W. (1947). *Goodnight moon*. New York: Harper Collins.
Brunelle, L. (1999). *The itsy-bitsy spider and a handful of finger rhymes*. San Francisco: Weldon Owen.
Christelow, E. (1989). *Five little monkeys jumping on the bed*. New York: Scholastic.
Donaldson, J., & Scheffler, A. (1999). *The gruffalo*. London: Macmillan.
Fleming, D. (1991). *In the tall, tall grass*. New York: Henry Holt.
Guarino, D. (1997). *Is your mama a llama?* New York: Scholastic.
Hoose, P., & Hoose, H. (1998). *Hey, little ant*. Berkeley, CA: Tricycle Press.
Martin, B., & Archambault, J. (1989). *Chicka chicka abc*. New York: Little, Simon.
Martin, B., & Carle, E. (2007). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt.
Mitton, T., & Parker, A. (2003). *Tough trucks*. New York: Kingfisher.
Posada, M. (2000). *Dandelions, stars in the grass*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books.
Seuss, Dr. (1963). *Hop on Pop*. New York: Random House.
Shaw, N. (1986). *Sheep in a jeep*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Slepian, J., & Seidler, A. (2001). *The hungry thing*. New York: Scholastic.
Westcott, N. B. (1992). *Peanut butter and jelly: A play rhyme*. London: Puffin.
Wood, A. (1999). *Silly Sally*. Boston: Red Wagon Books.
Yolen, J., & Teague, M. (2004). *How do dinosaurs count to ten?* New York: Scholastic.

FIGURE 4.9. Rhyming books on our shelves.

children to the rug and the teacher's aide sits on the rug with the children in order to help with child engagement. She sits on the rug in close proximity to a child she knows sometimes has a hard time paying attention during large-group activities. She is also available to children who need to ask a quiet question. With teaching staff and children in place, here is a glimpse of storybook reading.

> "Good morning! Today we are going to read one of my favorite books called *In the Tall, Tall Grass*, but before we begin I want you to listen for a very special thing in our book. I want you to look for rhyming words. Remember rhyming words sound the same at the end like *cat* and *bat*. Will you listen for rhyming words in our book for me? Okay, when you hear a rhyming word, raise your hand."

Next, the teacher begins to read, weaving phonological awareness instruction in with her normal routine of pointing out print concepts and asking comprehension questions. On one page she reads, "crunch, munch, caterpillars lunch," and pauses, allowing children to hear the words. Two or three children raise their hands. The teacher calls one child's name.

CHILD: *Crunch* and *munch*, they rhyme!

TEACHER: That's right! *Crunch* and *munch* rhyme, they sound the same at the end. Is there another word we heard that rhymes with *crunch* and *munch*?

SECOND CHILD: *Caterpillars lunch*.

TEACHER: Which word rhymes with *crunch* and *munch*—*caterpillars* or *lunch*?

SECOND CHILD: *Lunch*!

TEACHER: That's right. *Crunch*, *lunch*, and *munch* all sound the same at the end. That means they rhyme.

The teacher and children continue this dialogue on every page with rhyming words. The teacher pauses after every two-page spread to allow time for children to hear and digest the words. The teacher notices while reading that some children know when words rhyme before she even begins reading, several children begin to catch on as they hear others find rhyming words, and a few children are not yet participating in finding rhyming words at all. As an informal assessment after reading, the teacher engages children in a rhyme odd-man-out activity. Let's listen in.

TEACHER: You all did a great job finding the rhyming words in our book. Now let's look at some more rhyming words. I have some pictures. Some of the words rhyme and some do not. On my way into school this morning my pictures got all mixed up. Do you think you could help me find which words rhyme and which do not rhyme?

CHILDREN: Yes!

TEACHER: Great. Okay, the first picture I have is a _____. (*Holds up a picture of a cat and allows children to identify it.*) Yes, this is a cat. And the next picture I have is a _____. (*Holds up a picture of a bug and allows children to identify it.*) Yes, this is a bug. And the last picture I have is a _____. (*Holds up a picture of a rug, allows time, but when children do not answer, tells them.*) You may not recognize this picture, but it is a rug. So my three words are *cat*, *bug*, and *rug*. Which word does not rhyme?

CHILD: Cat!

The teacher continued the activity with four more sets of words containing two rhyming words and one nonrhyming word for children to identify. Children's responses to the activity provided the teacher with informal data on child understanding. For example, the teacher noticed that some of her children energetically answered the questions correctly; she can reasonably conclude that these children are comfortable with rhyme and are ready for harder rhyme and other phonological awareness tasks. The teacher identified another group of her children who were eager to participate and answered some questions correctly and others incorrectly; these children need more practice. Four or five children in the class energetically answered, but their answers were consistently

incorrect. The teacher plans to provide more explicit instruction and practice for these children. Finally, a few children were hanging in the back of the group not participating at all. The teacher suspects these children do not yet understand rhyme. She will build their understanding during small-group instruction.

The example of incorporating phonological awareness instruction into storybook reading we just shared focused on rhyme. You can focus instruction on any phonological awareness skill during storybook reading, not just rhyme. Let the storybook you are using help define which skill to target. Is there alliteration? Are there compound words? Is there a nice contrast between short sentences and long sentences that children can count and compare? Storybooks are ripe with possibilities for phonological awareness instruction. You just have to look at them in a new way.

Small-Group Instruction

Time set aside for small-group instruction provides teachers an opportunity for more individualized, needs-based instruction. When used to target phonological awareness, small-group instruction provides children a concentrated dose, targeting a skill with which they need more practice. This being said, phonological awareness instruction in small group should be fun, playful, and developmentally appropriate. And, like large-group instruction, it can be very brief, with as few as 5 or 10 minutes each day. The advantage for small group that preschool classrooms have over kindergarten classrooms is the benefit of multiple classroom staff. For example, in a preschool classroom with three adults, each adult can plan and run one small group. Conceivably you can have three small groups running at the same time, all targeting skills groups of children need to practice. Let's consider two examples of small-group activities, one focused on compound words and one on rhyme.

Early in the school year, compound word manipulation is a good phonological awareness skill to start with young children. They have fun recognizing smaller words they know in larger words and putting small words together to create large words. Of course you can play with putting compound words together and taking them apart with no materials; however, especially in the beginning when working with young children, it is often helpful to have some sort of physical manipulative or picture to represent the two parts of words. A manipulative or picture of each of the two words being put together helps to make the activity slightly less abstract for young children. Below is an example of a compound word small-group activity using manipulatives.

In October, a preschool teacher's aide used her 10-minute small-group time to work with six children on compound words. The children had been working on compound words for a few weeks in large group, and the teacher's aide wanted this group of children to have some additional opportunities for practice. Since the class was working on a thematic unit of seasons and weather, the teacher's aide chose compound words related

Common Preschool Theme	Related Compound Words
Outdoors/Nature/Insects	Baseball, birdbath, birdhouse, blackbird, bonfire, butterfly, campfire, doghouse, earthworm, firefly, flashlight, football, footprints, horsefly, housefly, ladybug, outdoor, outside, playground, underground, waterfall, wildlife
Transportation	Aircraft, airline, airplane, airport, breakdown, firefighters, firehouse, fireman, headlights, horseback, horsepower, houseboat, lifeboat, lifejacket, racehorse, railroad, roadblock, roadway, roadwork, rowboat, sailboat, suitcase, windshield
Food	Buttermilk, butterscotch, cookbook, cupcake, grapefruit, hamburger, milkshake, popcorn, watermelon
Doctor/Dentist/Health	Backache, backbone, eyeball, eyebrow, eyeglasses, eyelash, eyelid, eyesight, headache, healthcare, mouthwash, sickbed, toothache, toothbrush, toothpaste, toothpick
Seasons/Weather/Time	Afternoon, bedtime, daybreak, daylight, daytime, downpour, hailstorm, moonlight, naptime, nighttime, overcast, overnight, rainbow, raincoat, raindrop, rainfall, rainstorm, snowball, snowflake, snowman, snowplow, snowshoe, snowstorm, sunburn, sundown, sunlight, sunset, thunderbolt, weathervane
Building/Construction	Handyman, sandpaper, sawhorse, toolbox
Flowers	Buttercup, daylily, flowerpot, greenhouse, sunflower

FIGURE 4.10. List of common compound words by theme.

to this overarching class theme. See Figure 4.10 for a list of compound words organized by common preschool themes.

The teacher's aide began her small group by asking children if they remembered what a compound word was and reinforced their discussion by repeating and expanding the children's ideas. Then she provided each child in her group with a blue block and a red block. She explained:

> "We are going to work together to build some compound words, or longer words that are made up of two smaller words. Your blue block is going to be the first word and your red block is going to be the second word, and when we put the two blocks together we are going to get a compound word. Watch me first. I have the word *snow*. (*Places the blue block so that it is on the children's left-hand side.*) My blue block is the word *snow*. Next, I have the word *flake*. (*Places the red block so that it is on the children's right-hand side.*) My red block is the word *flake*. When I put the two words together (*Moves the two blocks so that they are touching.*) I get *snow … flake*, *snow …*

flake, *snowflake*! My compound word is *snowflake*. Now I want you to try with your blocks. Put your blue block down to be the word *snow*. (*Children place blue blocks down in front of them on the left and say the word snow*.) Next, put your red block down to be the word *flake*. (*Children place red blocks down in front of them on the right and say the word flake*.) Now what word do you get when you put *snow* and *flake* together? (*Children push the blocks together and say the two words together*.)

During the short small-group period, the teacher's aide models several examples of weather-related compound words and then allows time for children to practice. At the end of the small-group session the teacher's aide may assess how children are progressing by asking children to complete one or two compound words without manipulatives to move or to explain what they are doing when they use the blocks to represent words.

Rhyme is also an important phonological skill to play with in a small-group setting. A *Rhyme Basket* is one of the most versatile small-group tools a preschool teacher can have, and it is easy to make your own. To make a Rhyme Basket, first find a basket, box, or bag to serve as the container. Next, collect concrete objects (pairs of things that rhyme) to place in the container. Use your creativity! For example, a sock that has lost its match and a rock from your garden or a small bell and a shell from the beach are objects that are easy to collect. You can also find small plastic toys that rhyme, such as a dog and a frog. Figure 4.11 provides some possible objects for the Rhyme Basket. Once you have your basket with between 8 and 12 rhyming pairs, there are many variations of activities you can do with your preschoolers.

Some rhyming tasks are harder than others. Figure 4.12 provides a summary of the progression of rhyming tasks from easier to most difficult. Typically, children can complete rhyme-identification tasks before rhyme odd-man-out tasks and odd-man-out tasks before rhyme-generation tasks. The great thing about a Rhyme Basket is that you can target all of the different levels of rhyme activities with one tool. Here are a few examples:

-sock and rock	-house and mouse
-dog and frog	-fly and pie
-shell and bell	-bear and chair
-tree and bee	-snake and rake

FIGURE 4.11. Materials for creating your own rhyme basket.

Type of task	Description	Example
Rhyme Identification	Children identify whether two words rhyme.	"Do the words *cat* and *bat* rhyme? Do the words *cat* and *dog* rhyme?"
Rhyme Odd-Man-Out	When presented with three words, children choose which word does not rhyme.	"Listen to these three words: *cat*, *dog*, and *bat*. Which word does not rhyme?"
Rhyme Generation	When given a word, children are asked to come up with a word that rhymes.	"Can you think of a word that rhymes with *bee*?"

FIGURE 4.12. Progressive levels of rhyming activities.

1. *Finding Rhyming Pairs—Teacher Directed*. For this activity, the teacher pulls out of the basket one of each pair of rhyming words and scatters the remaining objects on the table or floor. The teacher asks the children if they recognize what the items are on the floor and helps clarify all of the names to make sure children know each object. Then the teacher holds up one of her objects and says, "This is a _____. What object on the floor rhymes with _____?" Together the teacher and children locate all of the matching pairs of objects.

2. *Finding Rhyming Pairs—Child Directed*. For this activity, the teacher pulls out of the basket one of each pair of rhyming words and distributes the remaining objects to the children. The teacher asks the child to name the object he or she is holding and helps clarify the name. Then the teacher holds up one of the objects and says, "This is a _____. Does anyone have an object that rhymes with _____?" Together the teacher and children locate all of the matching pairs.

3. *Rhyme Odd-Man-Out*. For this activity, the teacher pulls out of the basket two objects that rhyme and one object that does not rhyme. The teacher asks the children to identify each object first and helps to clarify the names. Then the teacher repeats the three names and asks, "Which of these objects does not rhyme?" Together the teacher and children eliminate nonrhyming objects in groups of three.

4. *Rhyme Generation*. For this activity, the teacher scatters all of the objects in the middle of the table or floor. First, the teacher and children name all of the objects. Then, the teacher asks the children if they see any objects that rhyme. Children take turns finding two objects that rhyme. The teacher can then hold up the two objects that rhyme and ask children to think of other words that rhyme with those two words. This task, producing additional examples, is by far the most challenging.

Center Time

Phonological awareness activities that children can accomplish with or without a teacher's help are appropriate for center time and allow children to experiment with and practice the skills they have been learning during whole-group and small-group instruction. Believe it or not, there are child-directed activities that can help children develop their phonological awareness. The key to making center-time phonological awareness activities successful is to align the concepts being practiced with those to which children have previously been exposed. Since children's knowledge of phonological awareness will vary, it is also a good idea to have a range of center-time activities from which children can choose. And, of course, it is always a good idea if the activities connect whenever possible to the overarching thematic unit.

As an example, let's look at our classroom that is immersed in the nature theme to see what phonological awareness activities the teacher has included in center time. In the library, the teacher has added several rhyming books related to the nature theme, including *In the Tall, Tall Grass* (Fleming, 1991), *Hey, Little Ant* (Hoose & Hoose, 1998), *The Itsy-Bitsy Spider* (Brunelle, 1999), *Bugs! Bugs! Bugs!* (Barner, 1999), and *Dandelions, Stars in the Grass* (Posada, 2000). The children have heard these books read aloud, so they can engage in pretend readings of various types. The children are encouraged to browse, look at the pictures, and read the book with an adult when available. Also, in the library, the teacher has placed the homemade Rhyming Basket, described above, for children to explore. There is a laminated chart on the wall that is divided into two columns. Above one column the word *Word* is written and *Sentence* is written above the second column. There are individual laminated sentence strips with some words and

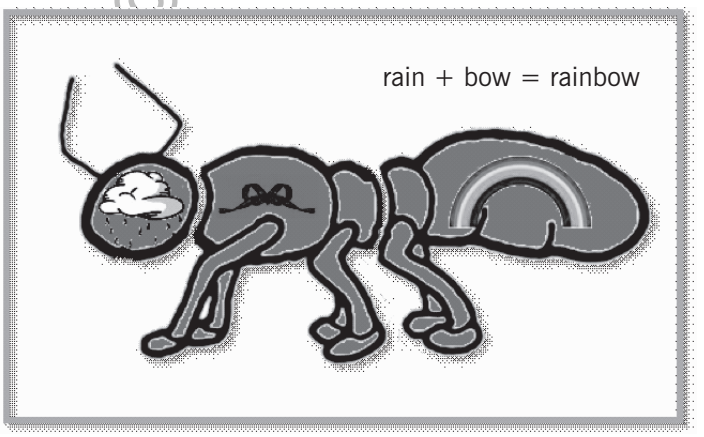

FIGURE 4.13. Ant sequencing: Compound words.

some sentences written on them. All of the words and sentences connect to the nature theme and review vocabulary words that the children have been learning. The children know the routine is to sort the single words into the "Word" column and the sentences into the "Sentence" column. Within the library center alone the teacher has included two phonological awareness activities, including rhyme and word awareness.

At the science center the teacher has included an ant sequencing activity. On one side of the simple, three-piece sequencing set the teacher has drawn an ant for children to piece together. On the other side of the cards are three pictures, one on each segment of the head, thorax, and abdomen. The first two pictures are of individual words that go together to create a compound word. The third picture is of the compound word itself. So, for example in Figure 4.13, the head piece has a picture of rain, the thorax has a picture of a bow, and the abdomen piece has a picture of a rainbow. Children work to put the sequencing cards in order to create concrete compound words with which they are familiar.

Finally, at the games center the teacher has placed two games designed to practice phonological awareness. The first is a game targeting syllable awareness. The teacher has hung a short string along the wall in the center and placed three clothespins on the line. One clothespin is marked with a number 1, the second is marked with a number 2, and the third is marked with a number 3. Scattered on the table are green leaves cut out of construction paper. Taped on each leaf is a picture that the teacher has printed from clip art on her computer of objects that are familiar to the children. Each object has one, two, or three syllables. So, for example, one leaf has a picture of a cat on it; one leaf has a picture of a pumpkin on it; and one leaf has a picture of a basketball on it. The children playing the game are asked to sort the pictures into groups by the number of syllables and attach them to the appropriate clothespin. Children would attach the leaf with the picture of the cat to the clothespin with the number 1 written on it, the leaf with the picture of the basketball to the clothespin with the number 3 written on it, and so on. The second game is a memory matching game with pictures that begin with the same initial sound. The cards are shaped like butterflies to connect with the nature theme; however, the pictures are of simple, concrete objects that children can recognize and determine the initial sound. For example, one butterfly has a picture of a sun and a second butterfly has a picture of a spoon. When a child finds both pictures beginning with the /s/ sound during his or her turn, it is a match, and the child gets to go again. The children play in this way until all the matches are made.

The teacher in the above example chose activities for center time that both practiced phonological awareness and included a range from easier to harder skills. Children working on words versus sentence and compound words were developing initial phonological awareness skills; children who were practicing rhyme and syllables were working on harder skills; and children who were matching by initial phoneme were developing the most complex skill along the phonological awareness continuum. It is important to

provide enough choices for practice to engage all learners at their own level. The teacher in our example knows that some of her 3-year-olds are still learning and struggling with what a word is, while some of her children who are kindergarten-bound are beginning to experiment with initial sounds in words and can be challenged by some beginning phonemic awareness activities. Center time in the preschool classroom is a perfect time for providing children the differentiated instruction they need to develop further as emergent readers. As children rotate through centers, the teacher and teacher's aide also rotate through the centers engaging children in rich conversation to improve their oral language and vocabulary. They are also able to help children who are playing with phonological awareness tasks by playing along beside them, asking and answering questions about compound words and initial sounds, and informally assessing where individual children are in their phonological awareness development.

Additional Opportunities

Phonological awareness instruction need not be limited to the classroom. Outdoor activities are just as useful for practicing phonological awareness with young children. In fact, combining phonological awareness and movement helps many children learn the skills and become more motivated to do so. The good news is that many of the games with which children are already familiar can be modified to include phonological awareness. For example, consider the game Duck, Duck, Goose. You can change the game to focus on rhyme by having the child say rhyming words, even made-up rhyming words, and when they say a nonrhyming word they begin to run. Or, to practice phonemic awareness, the child can say all words that begin with the same sound and then say a word that begins with a different sound before running around the circle. Games with passing balls also work well with phonological awareness. Children can pass a ball to another child who then needs to say a rhyming pair or a word with a designated number of syllables or a word with a particular beginning sound before passing the ball on to another child. Another great physical activity is to use jumping, marching, skipping, and so on to count out the number of words in a sentence or the number of syllables in a word. Having children use their bodies helps them physically keep track of the items they are counting.

One of the best ways to weave phonological awareness instruction into outdoor time is to go for a class walk with a specific goal. The goal can be to find pairs of things that rhyme. For example, the teacher or teacher's aide leading the walk can say, "I spy something that rhymes with *ride*," and his or her children can say, *Slide.* Or the walk can be for the purpose of finding all of the things that they can that begin with a specific sound. If the sound is /s/, children can find *sun*, *sand*, *slide*, *sidewalk*, and so on. The same walk can be used for finding words that have a certain number of syllables or looking for compound words. Do not be afraid to be creative with your phonological awareness instruction, for it does not have to be formal to be effective.

IMPLEMENTATION IN THREE CLASSROOMS

A Public School–Based Preschool: Pam

Pam works with a population of children who may struggle with formal reading instruction when they enter kindergarten. Pam also knows that phonological awareness is a crucial foundation for children's early reading development. She has a strong knowledge base in early literacy development because of her degree in early childhood education and continues to learn how she can support children's growth in phonological awareness through professional development experiences offered in her district. As a result, Pam ensures that she draws explicit attention to areas of phonological awareness like rhyme, syllable, and alliteration during her instructional routine.

Luckily, Pam's district has adopted a research-based preschool curriculum that directs her to explicitly teach those essential elements in her whole-group shared reading and circle-time activities and provides some supplemental ideas for her learning centers. Pam knows that for some in her class though, it may not be enough. Pam uses the results of her district's screening tool, the PALS-PreK (Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening; University of Virginia, 2004), to identify those students who may need additional help in this area. PALS-PreK assesses some early elements of phonological awareness like rhyme and beginning sound awareness. Pam is able to use this valuable information to group students who need an extra dose of phonological awareness, and she works with them during small-group time.

Pam works with students on rhyming, syllables, and initial sounds. Pam knows that she has only a short time to work with these children so she takes advantage of each moment. She often uses the same instructional sequence. First, she will model the activity for the children. So, if they are working on a syllable activity, she will think aloud the process for deciding whether *elephant* has one, two, or three syllables. She will clap the syllables aloud and then match the picture to another picture on the sort that also has three syllables. Second, she will engage all of the children in the activity. Each child will clap, tap, or snap the syllables in his or her picture and then decide where it belongs in the group sort. Last, she will have each child sort his or her own picture and watch while the children move through the process. This serves as an excellent form of instruction as well as assessment. She also extends these instructional opportunities by sending the same lesson activity home with the children. Along with the materials, she provides directions for the parents so that they can actively engage their child in the phonological awareness activity.

Pam and her assistant Cheryl also use their monthly Title I Parent Workshops as a vehicle for bolstering children's phonological awareness. They know that parents are children's first teacher and they play a key role in children's reading success. During one of the first of these workshops, they introduce parents to an understanding of phonological awareness, discuss how they will address this area of literacy in the classroom, and

provide some simple, but meaningful ways that parents can help build children's awareness of sounds while they are at home or "out and about" on a trip to the grocery store. Pam and Cheryl feel confident that because of their focus on phonological awareness throughout the preschool day, as well as support from parents, that they are setting up their children for future reading success.

A Head Start Center: Elaina

Given that Elaina works with a large population of children learning English as a second language, she must adapt her phonological awareness instruction differently from Pam and Cheryl. However, phonological awareness instruction for children who have no or limited English at the beginning of the school year is something Elaina has struggled with. How do you teach children to play with rhyme in a language they do not yet even know? The good news is that research indicates that developing phonological awareness in one language transfers to phonological awareness in other languages (Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, & Wolf, 2004; Lopez & Greenfield, 2004; Manis, Lindsey, & Bailey, 2004). In Elaina's case, if her children develop a strong foundation in phonological awareness in their home language of Spanish, that knowledge will transfer into the language they are learning in the classroom—English.

While Elaina has a Spanish-speaking classroom aide in her room, the curriculum she uses is not bilingual. All instruction occurs in English with some Spanish used to help acclimate young children at the beginning of the year with classroom routines and personal expectations. Thus, in an English-only classroom the best way Elaina can support English language learners' (ELLs') phonological awareness development is by encouraging support of the same skills she is teaching in English in the classroom at home in Spanish (Yopp & Stapleton, 2008). She wants the parents of her children to know that by reading and talking about children's books in Spanish, by playing with tongue twisters, by singing rhyming songs, and by pointing out the sounds of letters and words that children come in contact with, parents can greatly support their children's language and literacy development (Yopp & Stapleton, 2008).

At the beginning of the school year Elaina knows the most important thing for her to do is to reach out to Spanish-speaking parents to give them the message of the importance of speaking with their children in Spanish. All too often Elaina has met parents who take English classes and try to speak with their children only in English to help them all to be successful. However, she knows that what her ELLs need most is a strong language role model in their native language in order to develop phonological awareness. Elaina has several opportunities for getting her message to parents.

First she makes an initial home visit to parents prior to the school year beginning in order to meet the children and families with whom she will be working. She brings an interpreter, usually a classroom aide or Family Service worker who speaks Spanish. At

that initial meeting, Elaina works to create a relationship with the family and discusses with them the importance of fostering strong language-rich experiences in the home in order to support their children's language and literacy development. The Head Start center also hosts monthly parent meetings, and the classroom teachers are able to make suggestions for items on the agenda. Elaina uses these parent meetings throughout the year as an opportunity to introduce and reinforce ideas about language development that parents can use in the home with their children.

A Private Preschool: Sarah

Sarah knows that most of her children will need short, consistent phonological awareness experiences. She plans them four or five times each day. She takes responsibility herself for some of these opportunities, and she plans with Maria for others. Sarah works during and after her big-book read-aloud, after her afternoon trade-book read-aloud, and as a transition between the center rotations. Maria will address phonological awareness in the library center and the writing center.

Sarah's collection of big books provides ample chances to attend to syllables, rhymes, and alliteration. She knows to weave these into the reading, but she also wants to return to them afterward, pulling words or ideas out of the story environment to focus her children's attention on sound rather than meaning. She has a pocket chart and a collection of picture cards and she can almost always link her work to one of the central concepts in the book. For example, in a book about spring, she can then use the word *spring* to launch a 2-minute rhyming activity with *king*, *sing*, and *ring*. Her favorite activity with the children is to sing the Sesame Street song "One of These Things Is Not Like the Others" and present children with a set of three pictures and ask them to find the one that does not belong. First, she ensures that all children pronounce the picture names aloud, helping them to generate a strong phonological representation. Then, when they find the one that does not belong, she is careful to tell them why. This game works with all sorts of phonological tasks, including compounds and beginning sounds. Once the pictures have been introduced in this whole-group manner, she moves the pictures into the library center so that children can redo the tasks in pairs with the help of her assistant.

As a normal part of her afternoon trade-book read-aloud, Sarah selects a sentence from the book that represents an important idea or event. Then she writes that sentence on a sentence strip, and the children "read" it with her until it is memorized by all of them. Next, she cuts the words apart, careful to leave puzzle edges as clues. The individual puzzle pieces are then put into a ziplock bag with a photocopy of the book's cover and presented to the child of the day to further celebrate his or her book choice. After that day, the bag goes into the library center with the book so that other children can have a chance to reassemble and "read" the target sentence, developing their word awareness.

The use of rhyming songs is also an important part of Sarah's routine. As a way of transitioning between centers, Sarah uses songs, many of which include rhyme and alliteration. As the time for transition approaches, she sings the day's song in a very quiet voice. This is a signal for children to put away their materials. When they have done that, they join in the singing. This procedure makes the transitions regular and fun, and it gives the children a chance to use their voices in playful ways.

More targeted phonological awareness attention comes in the writing center. Sarah's assistant has picture cards and manipulatives to use. When she is working with word awareness, she asks the children to tell her what they want to write, and she draws lines for them. They "read back" the blank lines, developing their concept of words using language that they choose themselves. They also "write" by using pictures. She has sets of pictures that children can select to make rhyming books or books that highlight a special letter. When they do these activities, children use a set of pictures that includes some distracters. For example, on a day when they are making a book of favorite *P* words, they also have pictures of words that start with *S*. That way, children have to first decide whether the name of the picture starts with their target sound. They typically do this by saying the word over and over, and Maria can help them to accentuate and isolate the first sound.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Web-Based

- Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement
  www.ciera.org/library/instresrc/index.html
- Florida Center for Reading Research
  www.fcrr.org
- Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening
  www.pals.virginia.edu
- Reading Rockets
  www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/phonologicalphonemic
- Washington Learning Systems
  www.walearning.com

Text-Based

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- Blevins, W. (1999). *Phonemic awareness activities for early reading success*. New York: Scholastic.

- Silberg, J. (2005). *Reading games for young children*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House.
- Strickland, D. S., & Schickedanz, J. A. (2009). *Learning about print in preschool: Working with letters, words, and beginning links with phonemic awareness* (2nd ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.