

TUNING TINY TONGUES: TEACHING THE TOOLS OF PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

by:

Jhonalyn M. Tepace

Teacher I, Kaparangan Elementary School

During early years of formal schooling, kids are introduced to the world of literacy and language. In the Philippines, they do so in kindergarten, where they prepare the path in reading through an essential but overlooked aspect of early literacy – phonological awareness. This ability, which is the capacity to identify and play with the sound patterns of spoken words, is at the core of the Department of Education's (DepEd) K to 12 Kindergarten Curriculum.

Phonological awareness refers to child's mindfulness of the sound pattern of spoken words. It involves identifying rhymes, hearing and clapping syllables, finding the first and last sound of words, and blending or segmenting sounds individually, or phonemes. It differs from phonics since phonological awareness is not concerned with letters or written symbols; it is just an auditory experience. For kindergarten students, particularly those in DepEd's mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) classrooms, phonological awareness is a stepping stone to reading readiness and future academic achievement.

In the Philippine context, the significance of phonological awareness is well-established in the Kindergarten Curriculum Guide (2015), where language, literacy, and communication (LLC) is one of the major learning domains. This learning strand facilitates the overall child development by establishing the foundation for more formal reading and writing competencies taught in subsequent grades. Local studies from institutions like the Philippine Normal University and SEAMEO INNOTECH emphasize that children who acquire good phonological skills during the early years are more likely

to become good readers, a vital necessity in the country's bid to enhance national literacy levels.

Even with such acknowledgment, Filipino kindergarten teachers themselves still face numerous challenges in establishing effective phonological awareness instruction. One is the overcrowding in classrooms where learner numbers climb up to 30 to 50 per room, which results in the provision of individual instruction being challenging. In other situations, there is an insufficiency in the number of teaching and learning materials, especially those based on local dialects or mother tongues. Consequently, it results to a gap between the objectives of the curriculum and what is being achieved in the classroom. Furthermore, although teachers are committed, not all have been adequately trained in phonological awareness strategies or the application of sound-based instruction within a classroom.

However, most kindergarten teachers have been resourceful enough to be able to use innovative and culturally appropriate means to build phonological awareness with common resources. Chants and oral games using local rhymes or folk songs are the most common methods employed to make children aware of rhymes and repeated sounds. Teachers employ simple exercises of sound identification during daily routines, having learners listen for initial or final sounds in words that children already know.

Picture cards are also employed to assist children in sorting things according to sound so that they may learn to identify initial sounds. Teachers expose children to language with rich rhyme, rhythm, and repetition through reading aloud and stories.

DepEd recommends incorporating these activities in the context of thematic, play-based pedagogy. Phonological awareness need not be an isolated lesson—it can be incorporated into songs, routines, and transition activities during the school day. For example, a farewell song can involve rhyming sounds or alliteration, and a weather chant

can focus on certain sounds. These natural hooks support the skills in a developmentally appropriate and engaging manner, consistent with early childhood education principles.

Phonological awareness in the Philippine kindergarten is usually assessed informally. Teachers are prompted to pay attention through observation, observing the way learners react to sound-oriented activities in the classroom. What they observe serves as part of the child's learning portfolio and informs the teacher in planning instructional lessons

Finally, it is a vital component in getting children ready for reading and learning all their lives. In the Philippines, where reading difficulties in early school life have been a national issue, emphasis on phonological awareness in kindergarten years is a strong and wise initiative. With imagination, relevance to culture, and dedicated teaching support, we can guarantee each child starts schooling with ears attentive to the rhymes of words and voices able to read, talk, and communicate the whole of their thinking.

The Official Website of DepED Division of Bataan

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