

Teaching reading and the available teacher training materials

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Language literacy and its impact

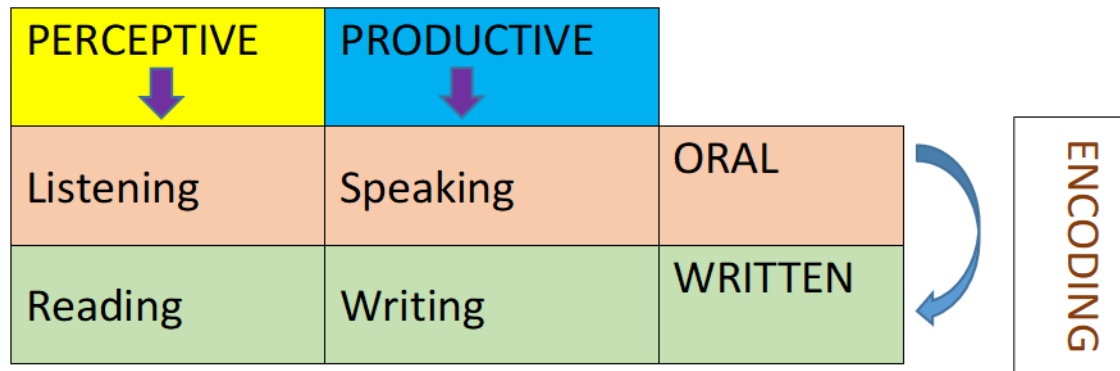
- Language literacy focuses on the ability to listen and speak and read and write. L&S takes place due to exposure; **R&W needs to be taught.**
- **Learners who do not learn to read, cannot read to learn.**
- Research has unequivocally shown that learners who cannot read, become frustrated (even aggressive); they do not complete school; struggle to get a job; often become delinquent; are more likely to end up in jail.
- The child's whole future revolves around being able to **R&W.**
- This places an **enormous responsibility on us** who are in the teaching profession.

Basis for writing in alphabetic languages

- The principle of writing in alphabetic languages is based on using the 26 letters of the alphabet to represent all the speech sounds of that language. It is a conventionalised grapheme – phoneme relationship.
- Most languages have more speech sounds than the 26 letters – that complicates the coding system.
- To resolve this challenge, some languages employ diacritics with certain letters to denote different sounds; use a combination of letters to represent a sound; (denote different sounds using the same letter; use different letters to denote the same sound; do not indicate sound variations. The latter creates particular challenges for reading and writing).
- IsiZulu is a highly transparent language – there is a near 1-to-1 relation between the graphemes and the phonemes they represent.

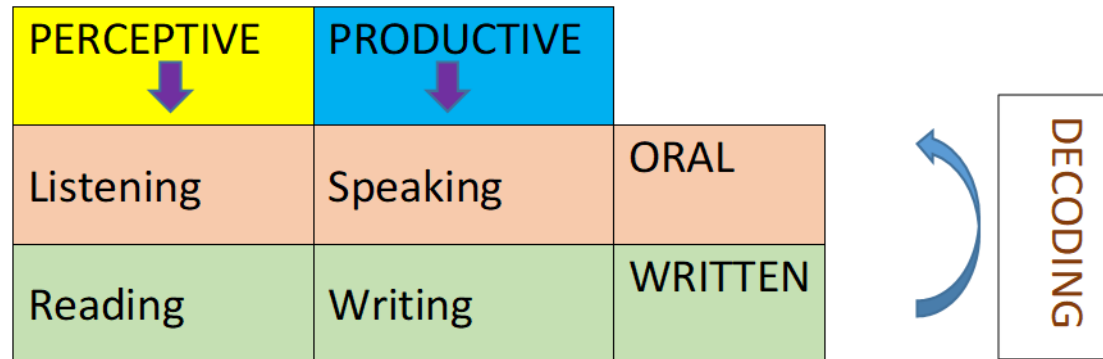
What is writing?

Printed text is a code system invented (about 6 000 years ago) to represent spoken language in written form. **Encoding** is the process of **converting spoken language into written language**:



What is reading?

The first step in reading is the reverse process of writing. Reading is the conversion of written language into spoken language:



How do we read (decode)?

- Reading is the most complex achievement the human brain has to master.
- Early years of reading instruction are critical. If a child falls behind it becomes extremely difficult (if not impossible) to catch up.
- In alphabetic languages, reading is all about segmenting written words into graphemes (letters) and mapping the individual sounds that are represented by those graphemes onto them and then blending the sounds to form a word. (This process is referred to as ‘sounding out words’.)

How do we read (decode)? (2)

Let us illustrate reading with the sentence:

Inja idla iqanda

- The child's first task will be to identify the individual words.
- The second task is to divide each word into graphemes (units representing an individual speech sound). Consider the first word *inja* > /i/ /n/ /j/ /a/.
- The third task is to map the right sound to each grapheme
- [i] [n] [j] [a].
- The final step is to put these sounds together to form (pronounce) the word, thus *inja*.
- The child has to repeat this process for each word.

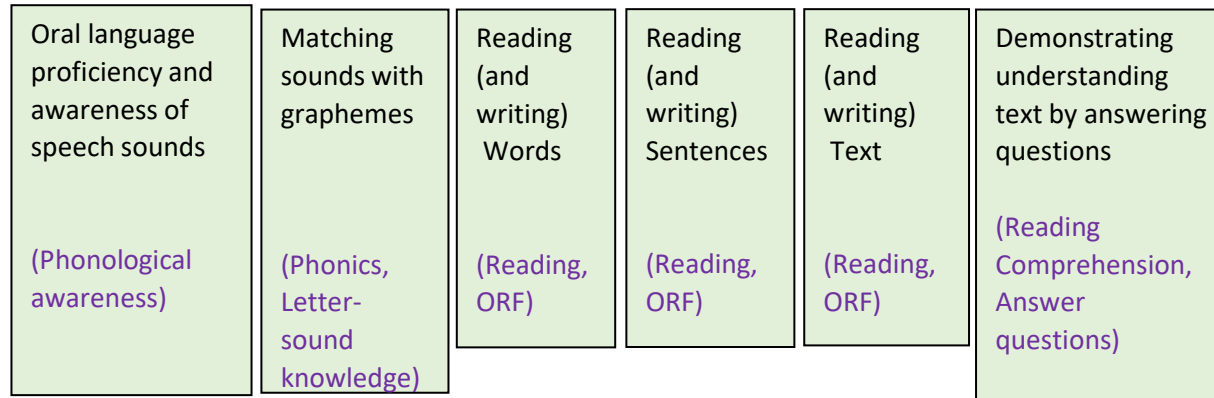
Competencies in Phonological Awareness and Phonics

The competencies needed for PA and phonics in terms of phonemes and syllables are the same, namely:

- ✓ Identification (recognizing similar of different forms)
- ✓ **Segmenting** (breaking up or distinguishing)
- ✓ Substitution (replacing)
- ✓ Deletion (omitting)
- ✓ **Blending** (putting together)

The two most important competencies remain **segmenting** and **blending**.

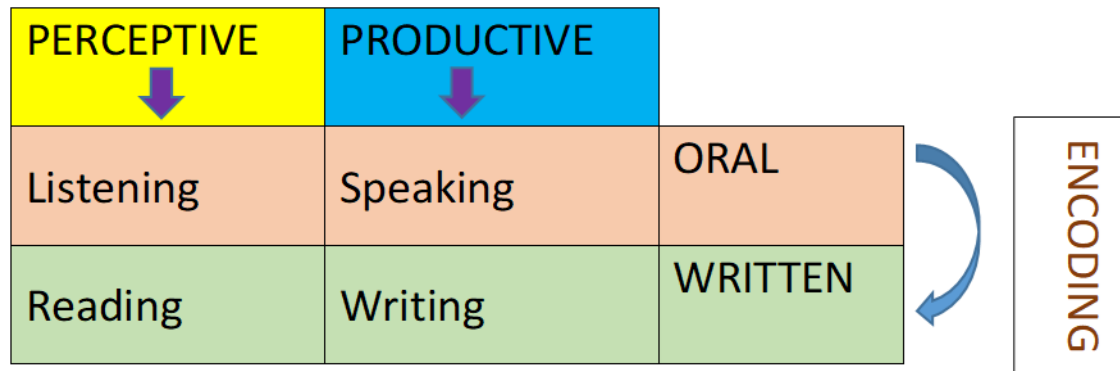
The development of reading



Motivation for reading, vocabulary building, language comprehension, background knowledge, print knowledge, general cognitive development

What is writing?

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Dehaene (2009: 219):

The goal of reading instruction is clear. It must aim to lay down an efficient neuronal hierarchy, so that the child can recognize letters and graphemes and easily turn them into speech sounds. All other aspects of the literate mind depend on this crucial step. (My emphasis.) ...



The development of reading: Grades R & 1

- Grade R & beginning of Grade 1: Focus on
 - Oral Language Proficiency
 - Vocabulary learning
 - Develop background knowledge and cognition
 - Develop language comprehension
 - Phonological awareness – phonemes & syllables
 - Reading: Read Alouds, Shared Reading, ~~PR~~, ~~IR~~
 - (Assess oral language proficiency)
- Grade 1: Focus on
 - Phonological awareness
 - Vocabulary learning
 - Alphabetic knowledge
 - Word identification
 - Decoding: Phonics – grapheme-phoneme relationships
 - Reading: Read Alouds, SR, GGR, PR, IR & Writing
 - (Assess ORF: grapheme-phoneme knowledge, word reading, [reading short sentences & RC])

The development of reading: Grades

■ Grade 2: Focus on

- Phonological awareness
- Vocabulary learning
- ~~• Alphabetic knowledge~~
- ~~• Word identification~~
- Decoding: Phonics – grapheme-phoneme relationships
- Reading: Read Alouds, SR, GGR, PR, IR & Writing
- (Assess ORF: word reading, reading sentences, RC)

■ Grade 3: Focus on

- ~~• Phonological awareness~~
- Vocabulary learning
- ~~• Decoding: Phonics – grapheme-phoneme relationships~~
- Reading: Read Alouds, SR, GGR, PR, IR & Writing
- (Assess ORF: reading sentences, reading text, RC)

Development of reading: All grades

Throughout the FP grades, focus must be on

- Motivation for reading
- Vocabulary building
- Language comprehension
- General cognitive development
- Develop children's background knowledge
 - Expose children to quality information texts as well
- Developing knowledge of print
- Exposure to different kinds of texts and different genres

Willingham (2017:146) The virtuous cycle of reading:

“The more often a child reads, the better she reads, the better she reads the more she enjoys reading, the more she enjoys reading the more positive her attitude towards reading becomes which prompts her to see herself as a reader which compels her to read even more frequently.”



Dividing the word into smaller parts

While we focus on the phonemes within words initially, we need to understand that words can be divided into smaller parts or units in three different ways. We can divide a word into **phonemes** (imisindo/amafonimu), **syllables** (amalunga), and **morphemes** (izakhi) and all these units are (eventually) relevant for reading.

Consider the table below:

	Noun	Analysis	Verb	Analysis
Phonemes:	ihlathi	/i/hl/a/th/i/	sisengile	/s/i/s/e/ng/i/l/e/
Syllables:	ihlathi	/i/hla/thi/	sisengile	/si/se/ngi/le/
Morphemes:	ihlathi	i-(li)-hlathi	sisengile	si-seng-ile

Dividing words into their components

Phonemes, syllables and morphemes are important for reading, Initially the **focus must be on the phonemes** (in alphabetic languages each speech sound is represented by a letter or grapheme). **Then focus on syllables** (because syllables determine the metre of the language and makes it easier to break up long words when we read them). **Morphology is important, but is introduced later.** (Morphology is very important for vocabulary building and for determining word meanings and understanding grammatical categories such as mood, tense, aspect, genus, etc.)

Oral Reading Fluency: Minimum threshold levels

- Learners in Grade 1 must know the phonemes (sounds) and the graphemes that represent them. By the end of **Grade 1 learners** must be able to **identify a minimum of 40 sounds** represented by letters/graphemes correctly **in one minute**.
- From Grade 2 to Grade 3 reading is assessed as oral reading fluency (*the number of words read correctly in one minute*). By the end of **Grade 2, learners** are expected to **read a minimum of 20 isiZulu words** correctly **per minute**.
- By the end of **Grade 3, learners** are expected to **read a minimum of 35 words** correctly **per minute**. (The focus shifts more and more to determine whether the learner can read with comprehension.)
- (These threshold levels are for isiZulu.)

Assessing grapheme-phoneme knowledge: Grade 1

- Because Grade 1 learners are still learning the **relationships between the graphemes and phonemes** they are tested on their knowledge of these relationships.
- From Grade 2 onwards the assessment focuses on PRF and RC.
- The minimum threshold level for Grade 1 learners is that they should be able to identify **the sound of at least 40 graphemes correctly in one minute, at the end of the grade.** (This benchmark is for all African languages.)
- How do we assess this competency?

Oral Reading Fluency: Assessing Grades 2 & 3

- Remember that ORF is all about how accurate and fluently the learner can read text with the correct prosody (and understand the read text).
- Grades 2 and 3 learners are tested on the number of words they can read from a grade-appropriate text in one minute.
- The minimum threshold level for Grade 2 isiZulu learners is that they should be able to **read at least 20 words correctly in one minute, at the end of the grade.**
- The minimum threshold level for Grade 3 isiZulu learners is that they should be able to **read at least 35 words correctly in one minute, at the end of the grade.**
- **How do we assess this competency?**

Major shortcomings in PD training materials

- Neglecting oral language proficiency, basic alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness in Grade R
- Confusing isiZulu phonemes and consonant blends
(Not a single proper training session on teaching isiZulu phonics)
- Too much emphasis on teaching syllables instead of phonemes
- Reading and writing not integrated enough
- Absence of decodable texts for Grade 1 and beginning of Grade 2
- Inappropriate pedagogy for teaching grapheme-phoneme relations
- Inappropriate teaching of ‘look-and-say words’
(Leads to confusion and frustration – mixing of opposing approaches)
- A lack of systematic scaffolding of reading comprehension
- Not utilizing the different forms of reading (SR, GGR, etc.) maximally.
- Insufficient ORF assessment

Coyi, cosu cosu, yaphela.

Ayilwe ngolwazi olujulile!

