


Provincial Outreach
Program for the Early Years





Chilliwack
School District


Diving into Oral Language,
Vocabulary and
Comprehension


April 30, 2025

Presenter:
Jacquie Anderson


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1





Our learning objectives


Today we will explore some evidence-based strategies and routines to help us support young readers to strengthen their word solving skills and reading comprehension by:


- Understanding the role of oral language in comprehension
- Making our vocabulary instruction intentional
- Recognizing the importance of knowledge and its impact on comprehension




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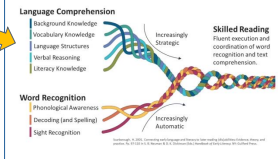
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The Research


Early oral language abilities help predict reading skills.
Kindergarten oral language scores are highly
predictable of later (gr. 4 and 7) reading
comprehension and vocabulary scores.
Comprehension builds comprehension...






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The Beginning...

- Oral Language provides indirect pathways to reading
It is the Foundation for word reading and language comprehension.
- FIVE DOMAINS:
 - Phonology
 - Syntax
 - Semantics
 - Morphology
 - Pragmatics




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What We Know...





What the Research Says:

- Oral language and reading are related
- Early oral language abilities help predict reading skills
 - Kindergarten oral language scores are highly predictable of later (gr. 4 and 7) reading comprehension and vocabulary scores.
 - Comprehension builds comprehension...
- We can improve oral language skills


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The Role of Oral Language in Comprehension

Comprehension begins with oral language and the capacity to understand spoken language (listening comprehension):

- through conversation
- through hearing & sharing personal stories
- through interactions with rich text




then children can access these for themselves by reading increasingly complex texts





it exposes children to


- new ideas
- new vocabulary
- new concepts

Treat oral language development as an essential ingredient for comprehension.

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Strategy: Dialogic Conversations

1 Engage

• verbal interaction around a text or general conversation

• may involve asking children's opinion, to name or recall something from a text, or to make a connection

2 Repeat

• repeat, embedding the child's response in a natural way

• repeat only the correct part of a student's response, or integrate a correction into this step

3 Expand

• as you repeat, say a little more

• expand the language to include a new word, phrase or idea

Dialogic Conversation to Build Oral Language

THINK

EXPAND

REPEAT

STRIVE FOR FIVE CONVERSATIONS

SHIFTING THE BALANCE

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Strategy: Interactive Read-alouds

Interactive Read-Alouds

• Engage thinking stopping points to discuss both high-level and low-level questions

• Focus more on high-level to encourage development of big ideas

Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the thinks you can think up if only you try!

Dr. Seuss

Dr. Seuss Quotes (n.d.) BrainyQuotes.com Retrieved April 16, 2025, from BrainyQuotes.com Web site https://www.brainyquotes.com/quotes/dr-seuss_106026

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Your turn: Dialogic Conversation

Try it with a partner, repeating and expanding on what they say. Then switch so you each get a turn. You can play a student and teacher role if you choose.

Sample Prompts

• What did you do last night?

• What's your favourite book?

1 Engage

Engage children in a verbal interaction around a text or general conversation. This may involve asking the child's opinion, asking the child to name or recall something from a text, or asking the child to make connections to general experiences.

Sample Prompts

• What are you thinking about?

• How do you feel about it?

• What did you think about?

• What do you think the author meant?

• What do you think the author said?

2 Repeat

Repeat what children say, embedding it in your response in a natural way. If the student's response includes a correction, repeat the correct part or integrate a correction into this step.

Sample Prompts

• As you repeat, say a little more.

• Put what the child said.

• Expand the language to include new words, phrases or ideas.

• Then begin the process again!

3 Expand

Expand the language to include a new word, phrase or idea.

Dialogic Conversation

1 Engage

What was your favourite part of the book?

2 Repeat & Expand

Oh, when the mouse asked the cat that was so surprising!

3 Engage

How do you think the mouse felt?

Happy

Dialogic Conversation Tips

1. Adjust your responses and language based on the age of the child.

2. Make your conversation authentic. Show interest in the child's conversation, and/or the text.

3. Be intentional! This process is simple to understand but takes [time, consistency and practice](#).

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9

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Rethinking Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension differs from language comprehension in that it **RELIES ON PRINT**

- A reader needs to be able to read a text accurately and fluently to comprehend the text.
- Listening comprehension exceeds reading comprehension for young readers.



"There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can't read the words."
—Archer, 2001

7 Mighty Moves – Kennedy

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
10

Rethinking Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is complex and is not a single "skill" or set of strategies. Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**.

Reading Comprehension is a combination of:

- **The Reader** brings their own knowledge and interests
- **The Text** vary in genre, topic and difficulty
- **The Activity** varies depending on the purpose for reading

Reach All Readers – Gager

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11

Vocabulary Instruction: Why It's So Important

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading comprehension – in primary, intermediate, and high school students, and in adults. Beck et al. 2013

Vocabulary can be developed


- **DIRECTLY** – explicitly teaching individual words and word-learning strategies
- **INDIRECTLY** – by engaging in daily oral language with peers and adults, by listening to reading and by reading extensively on their own




Lexia Literacy – Effective Vocabulary Instruction

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12




Why Teach Vocabulary?



SHIFTING THE BALANCE

"The goal of vocabulary instruction is not to learn words for their own sake. The goal is for students to apply knowledge about words and their meanings to better understand what they're reading and to expand the possibilities for expressing their own ideas."

Shifting the Balance 3-5 Burke, Cunningham & Yates

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13



How do we learn new words...?

...when we are engaged in conversation

What can this look like in the classroom?

- ✓ Regularly and intentionally using sophisticated language throughout the day for students of all ages
- ✓ The more interesting words we use around students, the more words they will pick up and use themselves.



A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day – Wright

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How do we learn new words...?

...when we are read to and read a lot ourselves

What can this look like in the classroom?

- Read aloud in a fantastic way to explicitly teach new vocabulary:
 - select texts with intention – relate to content area
 - read first for enjoyment, then re-read across days
 - plan ahead for student-friendly definitions
- Independent reading time, small groups, partner reads



A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day – Wright

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Tiered Vocabulary

- Tier 1 words**
everyday speech, familiar to most students
- Tier 2 words**
robust high-utility words used in multiple contexts
- Tier 3 words**
low frequency words, subject specific

Tier 1

- body
- house
- fun

- These are the most basic words. They make up the vast majority of words we use in conversation.
- These words rarely need to be taught to native English speakers because they are familiar to most students. English as an additional language learners may benefit from explicit instruction of tier 1 words.

Tier 2

- fortunate
- meanwhile
- analyze
- abundant

- These words are commonly used in quality children's literature or across domains in academic texts.
- These words are more sophisticated than the basic tier 1 words. It is less likely that students will already know the meanings of tier 2 words.
- Focusing intentional instruction on tier 2 words will improve students' overall language knowledge and reading comprehension.

Tier 3

- outpace
- lethal
- permeable

- These are specific technical words. These words are much less frequent than tier 1 and tier 2 words, and are likely related to specific academic content areas.
- Instruction of tier 3 words will be based on specific grade level curriculum outcomes in other subject areas.

Tiered Vocabulary | www.pokey.ca | @pokeybc | @POPEYEC | POPEY

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Active Processing & Engagement with Words

Children are more likely to learn when they can actively engage with a word and its meaning, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher.

- ✓ Discussing images related to a new word
- ✓ Discussing and exploring objects, e.g. a thermometer
- ✓ Using movement – demonstrating migration by walking from one side of the room to the other
- ✓ Thinking of real life examples – a time when you felt exuberant
- ✓ Discussing multiple meanings of a word – season (your food), season (winter, spring)
- ✓ Thinking about and noticing meaningful parts of words (morphology) – tricycle, triangle, tripod
- ✓ Using new vocabulary in writing

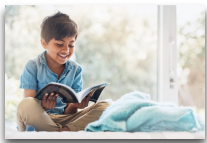
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17

How do we learn new words...?


...when we learn new things!

What can this look like in the classroom?




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18




 **Strategy: Content Area Learning**


What can this look like in the classroom?

- First, we want to identify the content we want to learn
- next, curate informational text sets
- then, make an ambitious list of words to teach
- consider how and when you will teach the words
- finally, plan for ways students will be actively engaged in word learning




A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day - Wright

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19




 **Strategy: Content Area Learning**


What can this look like in the classroom?

Identify the words to teach from your stories in advance



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20

 **Strategy: Engage with the Page Type Activities**

To inspire WORD STUDY



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21

Strategy 5: Word Solving (and spelling)

Explicit Morphology Instruction
•Teaching one new affix or root per week adds to their word solving toolkit

Morphology

The study of how morphemes are combined to form words.

Words are made up of morphemes:

Prefixes Roots/Bases Suffixes

Morphemes are the smallest unit of *meaning*.

un pre dict able dis tract ion s

"not" "before" "to say" "able to" "away" "pull, drag" "state of" "part"


Image From: <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Explicit-Morphology-Instruction-11111111>

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22

In the classroom - inspiring word study

Word Inquiry can support students as they study the structure of words.



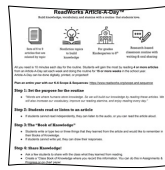
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23

Strategy: Text Sets

A text set is a collection of sources that support a **common theme, issue or topic**.
Text sets should include a **variety of genres**, text types, levels and formats, such as...



- fiction
- nonfiction
- articles
- websites
- apps
- artwork
- poetry
- songs
- images



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24

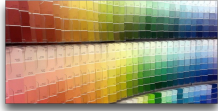
Strategy: Word Study to Build Students' Word Wealth

Shades of Meaning:

- Teaches that synonyms can be closely related but still differ in small ways
- Helps understand nuances as readers
- Supports strong word choice as writers

synonyms for wild

fierce
untamed
ferocious
rough
rugged



synonyms for nice

pleasant
fine
neat
enjoyable
lovely
delightful
acceptable
satisfying

Shifting the Balance: Burkins & Yates

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25

Cognitive Load Theory

the amount of information the working memory can hold
—Sweller, 1988

Intrinsic Cognitive Load

- the difficulty of any task compared to the background knowledge of the learner

Extraneous Cognitive Load

- anything that makes it harder for a student to learn

Reach All Readers – Gager

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26

Cognitive Load Theory

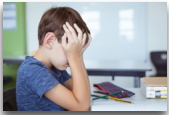
the amount of information the working memory can hold
—Sweller, 1988

When **INTRINSIC & EXTRANEIOUS** factors

>

working memory capacity = **LEARNING ISSUES**

By using explicit instruction methods, we can decrease students' extraneous cognitive load. This isn't just a strategy, but a necessary approach.



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27

Skilled comprehenders use these strategies

CONNECTING to prior knowledge (schemas)	SELF-QUESTIONING ask themselves questions about the text, plan to understand	PREDICTING using prior knowledge & clues from text to make hypotheses
TEXT STRUCTURE use & organize text information to make meaning	VISUALIZING mental imagery to remember information from texts	MAKING INFERENCES integrate bits of info and fill in the gaps
SUMMARIZING prioritize the importance of info to get the 'gist'		

We can explicitly model these comprehension skills and engage students in conversations that allow them to practice comprehension

Executive Skills & Reading Comprehension - Copyright © POPEY

28

Strategy: Pause, Look, Think

For building stamina, engagement and self-regulation (AVR)

Research Link
 A series of studies revealed that when an adult uses thoughtful verbal and gestural supports to help young children maintain their attention as they share and talk about books, children comprehend better and acquire more language (Landry & Smith, 2000).

As you look at the book with the child, model these skills:

- Move your finger around the page: "what do you see?"
- Say, "not so fast! Stay on the page and look around."
- What can you say about it?

Tip: start by modeling this with the whole class during booktime or a read-aloud

The Reading Strategies Book 20-26 months | Learn75 | www.popey.ca | @popeybc | @POPEYBC POPEY

29


Mental Model / Situational Model

Mental Model =
a literal representation of text + background knowledge

As a good reader, you are constantly creating a mental model while you are reading.



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30


Strategy: Read, Think, Write


AKA "four squares"

- Prepare** ahead of time the places you want to stop in the book.
- Discuss** what did we learn in this part? What was interesting to you? What was the main idea? Turn and Talk.
- Quick draw/write** No colouring—not a best drawing! 4 mins max.
- Return to the carpet for more reading. **Repeat**.
- At the end, **share** their papers with a neighbour.

Tomorrow's Classrooms Today-Faye Bravender, Susan Ocas, Linda Wingren
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31



Strategy: Think aloud

Comprehension is fostered through teacher modelling of purposeful strategies.

- comprehension monitoring: noticing when you don't understand and going back to figure out why
- stopping and summarizing while reading
- asking questions of the text while reading
- using text structure as an aid

The More You Read, The More You Know Best Practices for Comprehension Instruction
 Dr. Holly Ness, Presentation at the 2024 Reading League Conference in Charlotte, NC
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32


Strategy: Think alouds

Think alouds are a key foundation to modelling and building comprehension – a proficient reader models their thinking out loud as they interact with the text.

How do your students participate in "independent reading"?

The More You Read, The More You Know Best Practices for Comprehension Instruction
 Dr. Holly Ness, Presentation at the 2024 Reading League Conference in Charlotte, NC
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33

**Books**

Bringing Words to Life: Beck, McKeown, & Kucan
Differentiating Phonics Instruction for Maximum Impact: Blavins
Tomorrow's Classrooms Today: Faye Brownlie, Susan Close
Shifting the Balance K-2: Burkens & Yates
Shifting the Balance 3-5: Burkens, Cunningham & Yates
Reach All Readers: Geiger
7 Mighty Moves: Kennedy
Presentation: The More You Read, The More You Know – Best Practices
for Comprehension Instruction: Dr. Molly Ness
The Reading Strategies Book 2.0 – Jennifer Serravallo
A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day: Wright
Strive for Five Conversations: Zucker & Bell



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34


**Online Resources**

[Reading Science Academy](#)
[Keys to Literacy – Effective Vocabulary Instruction](#)
[TheSixShifts.com](#)
[ReadWriteThink.org](#) – Creating Text Sets for Your Classroom
[Word Toss](#)
[Can Do Kids Academy](#)
[Word of the Day – YouTube](#)
[Mills Library at SUNY Geneseo – Text Sets](#)
[Logic of English](#)
[What Good Readers Do – Dr. Neil Duke](#)


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36
