Differentiating Language Development in Elementary Schools

Promoting Oral Language Development and Reading Comprehension
Language precedes thought. Abstract thought requires words as vehicles for thinking. Language enables us to link with the thinking and experiences of other human beings, generate new ideas and concepts, and transcend and expand on our own thoughts.

Jerome Bruner
Research on Vocabulary Development: Impact of Poverty

Recorded Vocabulary Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Words</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>500</td>
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<td>1000</td>
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<td>1500</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>2500</td>
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Hart and Risley, 1995
Research on Vocabulary Development: Impact of Poverty

New Words Per Grade Level

Grade 1
Grade 2
Grade 3

Disadvantaged
Middle Class

Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1997

Colorado Reading First

Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1997
Research on Vocabulary Development: Impact of Poverty

- By the age of 3, the average child of a professional has heard about
  - 500,000 encouragements and
  - 80,000 discouragements.

- By the age of 3, the average low-income child had heard about
  - 75,000 encouragements and
  - 200,000 discouragements.

Hart & Risley
Thinking about the earlier article on the needs of ELLs and this research on the language development of students of poverty,

What are the implications for schools?
Oral comprehension typically places an **upper limit on reading comprehension**; if you don’t recognize and understand the word when you hear it, you also won’t be able to comprehend it when reading. Oral comprehension needs to be developed in our youngest students if we want them to be good readers.

Thomas Sticht
Concerns

- Students in early grades are moving up reading levels, but their **language isn’t expanding**.

- Students reach a plateau in reading, and **their progress stalls**.

- Students are able to word call, but they aren’t **able to retell or talk about what they read**.
Elementary Curriculum Resources

- Avenues Program
- Oral Language Assessment
- Let’s Talk About It
Avenues

- English Language Development Program
  - Builds basic and academic vocabulary by including:
    - Paired fiction and nonfiction literature
    - Connections with science and social studies content
    - Language-Rich Resources

- All English Language Learners receive ELD instruction
  - 45 minutes every day
  - Sheltered instruction throughout the day
Oral Language Assessment

**ORAL LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT**

Name: ___________________________ Age: ___________________________
Date: ___________________________ Grade: ___________________________

**SET 1**

1. The puppy's tail is curly.
2. Mommy is baking a cake.
3. The teacher told them a story.
4. There are the children.
5. She's eating her lunch slowly.

**SET 2**

1. That red bike over there used to be my uncle's.
2. The girl in the car is waving her hand.
3. Over the weekend Jane brought us some cookies.
4. Here comes the machine that digs the big holes.
5. The bird built a nest high in the tree.

**SET 3**

1. Be ready to come inside when the bell rings.
2. The car and the truck were carrying some large boxes.
3. The brave fireman showed our class the big red truck.
4. There go the men who clean the playground at our school.
5. My friend likes to eat ice cream when it's very hot out.

**TOTAL SCORE**
Oral Language Assessment

- Assesses student’s receptive language by having student repeat sentences of increasing grammatical difficulty
  - Student must get whole sentence correct to get a point.
  - Student must have control of language structures in order to repeat them.
- Offers teachers a quick way to evaluate the student’s receptive language and to plan for next steps for instruction.
## OLA: Oral Language Assessment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0-5</strong></td>
<td>This student has a limited control over the structures of oral English and would be unable to follow simple instructions or a story read in class. Guided reading is not effective for this student. Needs intensive oral language development in small groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6-10</strong></td>
<td>If this student is in Grade 1, he or she is at risk and requires intensive small-group intervention. May begin guided reading with this student.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>11-15</strong></td>
<td>If this student is in Grade 2 or beyond, he or she is at risk and requires intensive small-group intervention. Continue guided reading as well.</td>
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**Minimum standards:**  
End of Kindergarten: 7 sentences  
Mid First Grade: 15 sentences
Oral Language Assessment

- Wake-up call for teachers
- Raised questions around:
  - Teacher instructional language
  - Selection of texts to use with students
  - Using small groups to support more oral language opportunities for students
  - Need for assessing oral language of Spanish-speaking students
### Grupo 1
1. La casa de María es bonita.
2. La maestra está enseñando inglés.
3. El payaso les contó un chiste.
4. Ahí están las ardillas.
5. Ella está dibujando con mucho cuidado.

### Grupo 2
1. La bicicleta roja que está allá era de mi hermana.
2. El perro en el jardín está jugando con el niño.
3. Durante las vacaciones mi tía nos compró unos patines.
4. Aquí viene el maestro que nos enseña la clase de matemáticas.
5. En el parque Juan le quito la pelota a su amigo.

### Grupo 3
1. Cuando oigas la campana entra al salón y siéntate en la alfombra.
2. El niño y su papá estaban recogiendo las hojas secas en el jardín.
3. La artista talentosa les enseñó a los niños sus hermosas pinturas.
4. Ahí van los hombres que construyen las casas en nuestro barrio.
5. Cuando hace mucho calor afuera a mi amigo le gusta ir a nadar.
Administering the OLA with Eric (Grade 1, Mid-Year)

Task

- Listen to Eric on the video and mark the OLA form the way you code a running record.
- Score the form with a partner.
- Evaluate the Eric’s language and types of errors.
Analyzing Eric’s Performance

What do you notice about Eric?

- What strengths does he have?
- What needs does he have?

Look at the K-2 ELD Indicators for Speaking and Listening

- At what stage of language development does he seem to be functioning?
What about Expressive Language?

All grade 1-2 teachers were given a copy of *Balancing Reading and Language Learning* with their literacy resources for Planning Guides.

The Appendix has forms for evaluating students’ expressive language as you converse with them.
Differentiating in the Classroom

- How can we ensure that students like Eric have opportunities in the classroom
  - To have comprehensible instruction
  - To interact with others
  - To do higher order thinking
  - To build academic language and vocabulary
- Select one of these issues to discuss.
- We’ll chart you ideas in the PowerPoint.
What can teachers do to make their instruction *comprehensible* for our student?
What can teachers do to offer our student opportunities to **interact** with others?
What can teachers do to offer our student opportunities to **do higher order thinking**?
What can teachers do to build our student’s academic language and vocabulary?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Comprehensible Input for all</th>
<th>Interaction</th>
<th>Higher Order Thinking</th>
<th>Academic Language and Vocabulary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Intermediate</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Advanced</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>English-speaking students with limited language</strong></td>
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Let's Talk About It

This Eskimo builds his home out of ice. It is called an igloo.

This Eskimo has made the igloo from blocks of ice. The ice house will keep him warm.
Let’s Talk About It purchased for all classrooms, Grades ECE-2nd.

Written into Planning Guides as one option for small group instruction.
  - Critical for students scoring at a level indicating they’re not ready yet for guided reading

Some professional development offered (district classes; Response to Intervention Core Instruction classes for RtI schools)
Why Let’s Talk About It?

- Provides students with the two most important elements of oral language development: comprehensible input and social interaction.
- Provides a safe environment that values students’ approximations.
- Allows students to move into reading and writing using their own language.
- Builds students’ increasingly sophisticated vocabulary and language structure.
Session 1
Generate a Discussion

Set norms for conversation.

Reveal the picture.

Have students share their thoughts and reactions.

Encourage students to take turns sharing and listening.

Use open-ended prompts and wait time.

What I think, I can say.
Teacher Moves To Encourage Accountable Talk

- **Keeping the channels open:**
  - “What did Maria just say?”
  - “Maria, can you say that again so everyone can hear?”

- **Keeping everyone together:**
  - “Can you repeat what Tyrone just said in your own words?”

- **Linking contributions:**
  - “Who wants to add on to what Kelly said?”
  - “Who agrees or disagrees with that?”

- **Verifying and clarifying:**
  - “So, are you saying _____?”

- **Recapping or summarizing:**
  - “So what we have been talking about is _____.”
  - “To recap, we seem to have reached an agreement that _____.”
Session 2
Record their thoughts

Return to their ideas from Session 1.

Help students to shape their ideas orally.

Record their ideas on chart paper.
  • Individual ideas
  • Combined
  • Could use interactive writing

Read the chart and encourage students to read with you.

What I think, I can say.
What I say, I can write.
What I write, I can read.
Findings Reported by Teachers Focusing on Oral Language Development

- Students initially had difficulty with listening and having a conversation - it needs to be taught.

- At times, it’s important to group students at similar language levels if you want to focus on the opportunity to meet the needs of students with lower language levels.

- As students participated in small group oral language development instruction, they gained in both their language and their literacy.
Findings (continued)

- OLA worked reliably to determine language dominance at the beginning of school for bilingual students.
- Examining data from different sources with the OLA supported differentiation.
  - DRA2 Text Reading
  - DRA2 Word Analysis Tasks (Letter I.D., Concepts of Print, High Frequency Words, Phonological Awareness)
Findings (continued)

- OLA was an important first lens in grouping students for differentiation because the DRA2 Text Level sometimes didn’t correlate with the OLA.
  - Students actually needed lower level texts. Why?
  - Texts for guided reading needed to be analyzed in terms of language structures, not just text and concept features.
Oral Language and Reading Comprehension

- Books for guided reading need to align and support the students’ oral language.

- It is important for teachers to take students’ language proficiency into consideration when selecting books.

- A good professional development activity is to have teachers look at a student’s language level and their reading books and discuss which books seem most appropriate for them.
One more interesting finding…

- Let’s Talk About It can also be effective with older students who are transitioning from Spanish to English.
In closing…

From the earliest ages, reading is much more than decoding. From the start, reading is also accessing and further acquiring language knowledge and domain knowledge. This means that instruction and practice in fluency of decoding need to be accompanied by instruction and practice in vocabulary and domain knowledge…
If we want to raise later achievement and avoid the fourth-grade slump, we need to combine early instruction in the procedures of literacy with early instruction in the content of literacy, specifically: vocabulary, conventions of language, and knowledge of the world.
Discuss:

- How are teachers in your school using *Avenues* and *Let’s Talk About It* to build students’ oral language?
- Do you see development of vocabulary occurring in your schools?
- How can you support your school to ensure that all students have opportunities to increase their language and literacy skills?