

Volume 3 / Spring 2023

THE COLLECTION

A periodic publication of
curated articles from the
Virginia State Literacy Association



Virginia State
Literacy Association

VSLA

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March 2023

Dear Fellow Educators,

We proudly present the third edition of VSLA's *The Collection*, a publication series dedicated to delving into a single, rich literacy topic intended to meet the needs of educators. VSLA's mission is to lead the advancement of literacy across the Commonwealth of Virginia and through this publication, we share pertinent information on the Science of Reading.

This edition focuses on building language comprehension which is critical to the background knowledge component of the Science of Reading. The first article by Abda Gupta Ph.D. examines the importance of building academic language and offers teaching techniques designed to build the academic language of English Learners. Next, J. Richard Gentry Ph.D. asserts that the knowledge of spelling is critical to the brain's reading architecture; hence, he makes the case for the explicit teaching of spelling. Finally, Austen Hecker M.Ed. and Christa Beil Ph.D. explore the role of language comprehension in reading development and highlight the importance of read-aloud practices.

I hope you enjoy this third edition of *The Collection* and find it enlightening. The next focus will be decoding as a component of the Science of Reading. In addition to *The Collection*, we continue to annually publish our well-loved journal, *Reading in Virginia*.

Thank you for all *you* do to promote literacy!

Best wishes,

Laura Labyak

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CONTENTS

- 5 Building Academic Language Proficiency for English Learners
- 11 Explicit Spelling Instruction Is Essential for Building Language Comprehension
- 16 Strengthening Language Comprehension Through Read-Alouds



Building Academic Language Proficiency for English Learners

Abha Gupta Ph.D.

Abstract

Academic language proficiency is essential for success in school, especially for English Learners (ELs). However, it is a skill which receives little attention. Many ELs frequently exit from language assistance programs because they perform well on social language tests and sound proficient in language interchange, due to strong basic interpersonal communication skills. However, they may still struggle in content areas due to poor academic language proficiency. This article's main goals are to illustrate the value of academic language comprehension and offer teaching techniques that will help ELs develop this skill. These strategies, which play to English Learners' strengths, incorporate cognates and academic word lists into instruction.

Introduction

Language development is essential to reading and writing. The four primary language skills— listening, speaking, reading, and writing — are integrated into language and literacy acquisition. Students get better at decoding and comprehending texts in speech or print as their language skills grow. Focusing on language comprehension early can have a significant impact on individuals' literacy skills. Understanding vocabulary and semantics as well as how morphology and syntax influence meaning are all essential components of language comprehension (Scarborough, 2001). These competencies predict reading comprehension, and students who struggle with them frequently experience difficulties with elementary reading comprehension beyond the classroom (Adlof et al., 2010). While some students quickly pick up language comprehension, others require explicit support during an intervention to develop the cognitive skills necessary to understand difficult texts and to learn from them (Connor et al., 2011). An important finding from the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP 2008) report indicated that measures of complex language are powerful predictors of subsequent reading abilities. According to research, language and reading comprehension can be supported by

explicit instruction on the components, namely, vocabulary, semantics, morphology, and syntax (Silverman, et al, 2020).

This article draws on existing literacy research to build language comprehension of English Learners (ELs). It is embedded in the framework of the 'robust and socially just science of reading' proposed by Auckerman & Schuldt (2020). They recommend that "reading education should attend closely to linguistic, cultural, and individual variation, honoring and leveraging different strengths and perspectives that students bring to and take away from their learning, particularly for student from nondominant cultures." The article begins with information on ELs, continues with a brief explanation of the funds of knowledge and understandable input/output theory, and then carries on to strategies for developing academic vocabulary via cognates and tier-vocabulary.

English Learners

Due to their increasingly diverse environments, today's classrooms provide numerous opportunities for teachers and students to engage in effective learning. According to NCES (2012) data, 10.9 million students, 21% of the school enrollment in the age group of 5 to 17 are English language learners (ELLs) (Li, 2015; NCES, 2012). Given the rising number of English learners (ELs), it is crucial that language and literacy programs consider the students' language and culture in an inclusive learning environment (Brooks, et al 2010; Gupta, 2015, 1999).

We know as educators that ELs must put in extra work to acquire new content through the academic vocabulary used in the classroom. ELs have twice as much work to complete than native English speakers, claim Freeman et al. (2010). They must learn both English and academic content in the English language. Additionally, they frequently reside in areas with underfunded schools that are likely staffed by less experienced teachers. In a similar vein, teachers have a dual responsibility to collaborate with ESOL teachers to teach

English while also imparting the essential competencies mandated by the curriculum in order to meet the standards. It increases the burden on teachers to raise students to grade-level standards.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) compares state-by-state student success in reading, writing, and mathematics for students in grades 4, 8, and 12. The findings from the NAEP report (2019) indicate a drop in reading scores nationwide. In comparison to 2017, the 2019 reading scores were lower in 17 states at grade 4 and 31 states at grade 8. The reading statistics for Virginia are summarized below.

- According to the NAEP results (2019), the average reading score of 4th grade students in Virginia was 224. Although this score is higher than the national average of 219, it is lower than the Virginia average score of 228 during the previous cycle in 2017.
- The average score of 8th graders in Virginia is 262, i.e., the same as the national average. However, this is the first time in last twenty years that Virginia's average reading scores have dropped to the national average.
- The 8th-grade scores showed an increasing racial disparity, which is concerning. White students' scores dropped by 4 points, but the scores of Black and Hispanic students dropped by 8 points and 12 points, respectively.
- English Language Learners in 8th grade saw a 20-point decline between 2017 and 2019 in comparison with a 5-point drop for non-English learners.

The aforementioned data offer compelling support for working effectively with all students, especially English Learners in their early years, so as to counteract the clear decline in the reading scores.

Funds of Knowledge

Recognizing the knowledge, and abilities that a student already possesses is essential for effective teaching of ELs using their language as a resource rather than a deficit. Moll et al. (1992) refer to this accumulated body of knowledge including cultural and linguistic experiences as “funds of knowledge.” Learners’ funds of knowledge should be incorporated into instruction, to give value

to the life experiences of the students and to support their academic learning. For instance, a recent immigrant may have beginner-level proficiency in English but show strong

technology skills. Teachers can then build on those technology skills by integrating web-based interactive platforms like Kahoot, podcasts, or use a learning app to advance ELs language skills.

Comprehensible Input and Comprehensible Output

Stephen Krashen (1982) developed the linguistic idea of comprehensible input for language learners. The comprehensible input theory maintains that in order for second language learners to understand new input, they must be exposed to linguistic input that is only slightly above their current language level. Language learners need to be challenged, but with support and assistance that allows them to perform at the next level, called scaffolding. Vygotsky (1962) referred to this as the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The notion of comprehensible input serves as the foundation for specially designed academic instruction in English that emphasizes the following teaching strategies (Peregoy & Boyle, 2017):

1. Focus on communication, not grammatical form;
2. Allow students a silent period rather than forcing immediate speech production; and
3. Create a low anxiety environment.

Comprehensible input helps learners generate comprehensible output, i.e., speaking and writing (Swain, 1985). Deeper language processing is necessary as learners actively choose the lexical items, phonology, syntax, semantics, and vocabulary that best represent their ideas while speaking or writing in a new language. When a teacher provides directions to students in class or explains a concept to them, learners must be able to fully comprehend the directives or explanation supplied by the teacher. Building meaningful vocabulary for understandable input (hearing and reading) and understandable output (speaking or writing) is essential to gaining a knowledge of language comprehension. Techniques that can be used to encourage comprehensible input and output include cognates, developing academic language and vocabulary, and using tiered academic vocabulary.

Building Vocabulary using Cognates

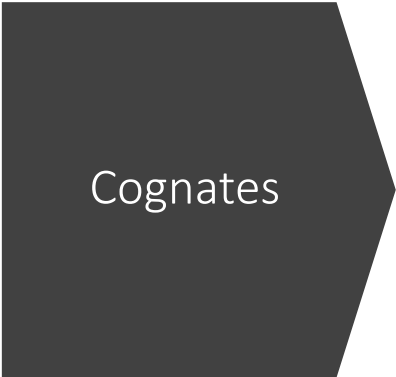
Issues with reading comprehension are frequently brought on by a lack of vocabulary, which hinders fluency and comprehension. In other words, for students to become proficient readers, they must integrate all of their skills involving word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. One way to build vocabulary with ELs is by showing semantic connection of the target language with their first language, called cognates. Cognates are words in different

languages that are derived from the same original word or root. These words have the same meaning and similar sounds. For example, the words /action/ in English and /acción/ in Spanish. It helps ELLs when teachers explicitly and directly advise students on identifying and utilizing cognates in class. With the use of cognates, students can familiarize themselves with and translate related words from their native tongue into English. Students also need to be made aware of false cognates, also known as “false friends”, which are words that look and sound similar in two languages but have very different meanings. For example, the word /exit/ in Spanish means success, and not ‘exit’ as in English. In their journals, students can compile a list of words they think are true and false cognates.




If the focus is on Spanish cognates, students could examine definitions from a Spanish language dictionary with a partner for five minutes at the conclusion of each reading session. The chosen words can then be written on a word wall or a classroom board, where new words can be added every day. Students can use the cognate word wall in class since they can see it visually.

To learn the English language more quickly and better grasp the terms, students can add pictures to the word wall. To build academic vocabulary using academic cognates, here is a sample chart that teachers and students can continue to add words to throughout the year.

Figure 1



Cognates

English	Spanish	Visual
Family	<u><i>familia</i></u>	
Circle	<u><i>círculo</i></u>	
Insect	<u><i>Insecto</i></u>	

ACADEMIC
LANGUAGE
COGNATES

English	Spanish
Cause	Causa
Classify	Clasificar
Antecedent	antecedente
Compare	Comparar
Adverb	Adverbio
Electrode	Electrodo

Figure 2



Building Academic Vocabulary

An important aspect of language comprehension is competence in academic language, the language used in schools for teaching and learning in subjects such as language arts, math, social studies, science, and history. Academic language is the set of words and phrases that describe content-area knowledge and procedures (Zweirs 2005). It tends to be more complex, abstract, and decontextualized. The importance of explicit teaching of academic language is critical for school success. Jim Cummins (1980) pointed out a broad distinction between academic and conversational language and called it Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to “social English or “playground English” which ELs pick up more quickly than academic language. According to research, academic language proficiency takes at least five to seven years to develop for ELs, whereas interpersonal and social language development takes two to three years (Thomas & Collier, 2002). However, ELs frequently leave language assistance programs because they perform well on social language tests and sound proficient in language interchange (Butler, et al. 2007).

Frequently used words in English make up about 85% of the words we use in conversation and 80% of the words from the texts in school (Nation & Waring, 1997). Many of these high-frequency words are function words that cannot be easily learned except through exposure and use in a meaningful context (e.g., the, and, have, was). What crucial vocabulary should we teach our students, then? The words that are used the most frequently should be taught to the beginners first, followed by terms that may be visualized, such as cat, book, and tree. The following link contains the 2000-word New General Service List in English:

https://cdn.learningvillage.net/sites/default/files/highfrequencywords_2000_1.pdf

Academic words can be generally classified into three tiers (Beck et al 2002). Tier 1 vocabulary consists of everyday words including high-frequency sight words. Tier 2 words include cross- curricular vocabulary that shows up across content areas. The words can have multiple meanings across different subject areas. Tier 3 words are domain-specific words in a content area.

Table 1 - Tiers of Academic Vocabulary

Tier	Description	Example
Tier-1	Everyday basic familiar words, high frequency	draw, next, circle, list, highlight, underline
Tier-2	High utility words including cross curricular words	summarize, contrast, antonym, italics
Tier-3	Technical words from a specific subject	circumference, volcano

Coxhead (2000) examined a large corpus of millions of words to identify words that were commonly used across academic areas. The Academic Word List (AWL) at https://simple.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Academic_word_list is organized by frequency of use from most to least.

Additionally, there is a free online tool that can assist teachers in selecting academic words to concentrate on while developing vocabulary as a prereading exercise (<https://achievethecore.org/academic-word-finder/>). By entering the text in the box and choosing the grade level, the weblink enables teachers to locate high-value academic words in the text that students may encounter before the lesson is presented.

Figure 3

Summary

Several recent studies have found that a third of students in the youngest grades are falling short on reading criteria, a considerable increase from before the pandemic (Curriculum Associates, 2021). Because reading proficiency affects learning in a variety of subject areas, low literacy accomplishment among students is a serious concern. Reading is not only a fundamental ability but also an essential skill for success and personal growth. Building strong academic language is important for being able to access challenging content and fully engage in classroom learning, and literacy skills are one of the best predictors of academic success. According to WIDA (2012), the academic language register differs from the social language in terms of grammatical structure, vocabulary usage, discourse, and social complexity. It is frequently abstract and less contextualized. Consequently, it necessitates higher-order cognitive functions such as evaluating, comparing, and synthesizing. Academic language is not limited to written language alone. Students need to understand oral instructions, explanations, podcasts, and even YouTube tutorials in subject areas. As discussed in this article, academic vocabulary is one facet of

academic language that allows one to access challenging subject area content. For all students, not just English language learners, a collaborative teaching strategy can be successful in dividing up the responsibilities of instruction between content and ESOL teachers.

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Explicit Spelling Instruction Is Essential for Building Language Comprehension

J. Richard Gentry Ph.D.

You may not be expecting to see an article focusing on explicit spelling instruction in the “Building Language Comprehension” themed issue of *The Collection*. When thinking about SoR Tier 1 instruction for improving reading and language comprehension, I suspect most teachers’ thoughts first gravitate toward other instructional practices—not explicit spelling instruction. That’s precisely the problem. For three decades we have had unacceptable reading scores in America when developmental and cognitive science say 95% of students should learn to read with proficiency and comprehension. A big part of the problem is that we still haven’t grasped the essential role of spelling knowledge in the brain’s reading architecture. In far too many schools which I have visited across America, reading scores are an abomination, especially for children vulnerable to reading failure. Call me an eyewitness. Schools aren’t teaching spelling.

“Oh, I have a spelling list in my reading program” you might say. But how are you using it? Is it an evidence-based list with the right words at the right time? Or did you get it from random grade-level lists on the internet? Are you following evidence-based Tier 1 practices which I will outline in this article? What changes are needed in your spelling instruction for better comprehension outcomes?

Before going further, memorize the following quote. It’s one of the most eloquent and relevant quotes I can recall about building language comprehension. It’s from a revered thought leader in the Science of Reading movement, Dr. Linnea Ehri, who has conducted decades of research on the reading brain.

“Spelling knowledge is essential to the brain’s reading architecture. To connect the alphabet code the reader sees on the page to circuitry enabling reading comprehension, the reader must use knowledge of spelling.” (Ehri, 2022)

So the question becomes what are we doing with spelling? If spelling is that important for reading, how can we upgrade our spelling instruction?

First of all, we need to embrace “spelling to read” methodology. We need a resurgence of teaching English spelling in today’s classrooms. Spelling instruction spotlights the importance of spelling for orthographic mapping and spelling’s role in automatic word reading which drives reading comprehension. The critical role of spelling for reading is a focus in my latest book coauthored with Canadian reading scientist Dr. Gene Ouellette entitled *Brain Words: How the Science of Reading Informs Teaching* (Stenhouse, 2019). It’s a teacher friendly short read and includes research-based classroom practices such as a five-step spelling pretest appropriate at any grade level. You’ll also find a flip-folder spelling word study technique that your students can use at the word study station in your classroom or for homework.

Spelling to read is currently trending in referred education journals as well as in scientific journals in neuroscience and cognitive psychology. (See for example Seidenberg, 2017; Ouellette and Sénéchal, 2017; Moats, 2020). Remarkably the call for explicit spelling instruction is also trending in news reports, the media, and with dyslexia advocates and parent groups.

What happened to spelling instruction over the last three decades?

Explicit spelling instruction has been eliminated from the curriculum in many schools over the last three decades. In a nutshell, what happened was that reading education in America was powerfully impacted by the late Ken Goodman’s theories. In the late 1980’s I was a part of his monumental movement. I was fortunate to study with Professor Goodman in the late 80’s and greatly admire his many worthy contributions to reading education such as promoting humanism and equity for all children, respect and advocacy for teachers, support for writing as a process, and other positive ideals. But today we know Professor Goodman was wrong about spelling, phonics, and handwriting. His calls for eliminating explicit spelling and phonics instruction (see Goodman, 1986) are no longer supported by neuroscience

and cognitive developmental science. The results of eliminating explicit spelling instruction and phonics from the curriculum have been devastating for reading scores and English language comprehension. [For the whole story see (Gentry, 2022) in the reference list below.] We must correct these missteps.

If you are not convinced that we need more emphasis on spelling instruction, here are some sustaining nuggets of wisdom from notable scientists and researchers on the role of spelling for reading:

From cognitive psychologist Dan Willingham, *Raising Kids Who Read* (2015):

Professor Willingham writes that good readers all read by matching what's on the page with spelling images in the brain. "Using word spellings to read requires very little attention, if any. You see it [the word on the page] in the same way you just see and recognize a dog." [It happens automatically and you aren't aware that you use the visual spelling representation in your brain.] "As your child gains reading experience, there is a larger and larger set of words that he can read using the spelling, and so his reading becomes faster, smoother, and more accurate. That's called fluency." [I call these Visual spelling representations that you automatically recognize and spell correctly "*brain words*."]

From reading scientist and thought leader in the science of reading Professor Mark Seidenberg, *Language at the Speed of Sight: How We Read, Why So Many Can't, and What Can Be Done About It*. (2017):

"In neuroimaging studies, poor readers show atypically low activity in a part of the brain that processes the spelling of words." (p. 10)

From Professors Gene Ouellette and Monique Sénéchal's landmark study in *Developmental Psychology* (2017):

"...spelling practice transfers to reading improvement in general; recent meta-analyses have shown that spelling instruction benefits word reading across the school years (Graham & Hebert, 2010), and also specifically in the elementary years (Graham & Santangelo, 2014)." (p. 29)

From learning disabilities experts, professors Nancy Mather and Lynne Jaffe (2021):

"Spelling requires a much more rigorously established memory of the sequence of letters in a word [than does reading the word] because it requires the student to recall the se-

quence in its entirety. Reading requires orthographic recognition, while spelling requires orthographic recall and application." P. 15)

From renowned reading researcher Dr. Louisa Moats, a long-time proponent of spelling books and a leader in the science of reading movement (2005,2006):

"As a general guide for covering the proposed content [a grade-by-grade spelling curriculum] about 15-20 minutes daily or 30 minutes three times per week should be allocated to spelling instruction. Application in writing should be varied and continual." (p. 42-43).

Here are seven Tier 1 instructional strategies for building language comprehension:

1. Teach English spelling 20 minutes a day in grades 1-8 (Moats, 2005/2006, p. 42-43). Recognize that spelling instruction and practice transfer to reading improvement and benefits word reading throughout elementary school (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Graham & Santangelo, 2014). Think of those 20 minutes a day as a wise investment of time enabling the teacher to integrate essential components of reading in every weekly spelling lesson such as phonological awareness, a deeper level of phonics knowledge, sentence building and grammar, plus sight word and vocabulary building. The integration of this word study in spelling lessons as opposed to teaching each of these components as separate subjects saves valuable teaching time in the reading and language arts schedule.
2. Use spelling books and weekly posttest assessments to gather data and monitor each child's individual progress. A child's spelling is a window into the mind of how the child is internalizing spoken and printed English. Use a spelling book curriculum as a resource for providing early identification of students including English learners who may be having problems and be in need of early intervention. Beyond assessment, modern spelling books come in both print and digital formats with options for long distance learning and student self-pacing—a boon for English learners and others.
3. As you know, monitoring progress is essential. Use each child's spelling data to explicitly show what word study, including phonics and pronunciation awareness, she or he needs to be taught in English. At each grade level up through high school, there's a common thread in the spelling of students: the spelling reveals foundational English word knowledge the student already knows or will need to learn for continual development as a fluent reader, writer, and even speaker of English.

4. Embrace Tier 1 explicit spelling instruction to promote equity and close the widening achievement gap. “What’s the connection to equity?” you might ask. In the words of Professor Moats: *Students who are African American, Hispanic, learning English, and/or from impoverished homes fall behind and stay behind in far greater proportion than students who are white and middle class...The rate of weak reading skills in these groups is 60–70 percent, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress.*” (Moats, 2020, p. 42-43) In too many schools these students aren’t getting explicit spelling instruction as recommended above.

5. Recognize that the history of reading education in America backs the current cognitive science and neuroscience by providing strong evidence of the value of spelling books for literacy success. From Noah Webster’s Blue-Backed Speller which taught over 80 million Americans to read in the 1800s, to the emergence of Ernest Horn’s research-based spelling books considered essential for reading instruction in the early 20th century, the spelling book was front and center in reading education. Yet spelling books and explicit word study anchored in spelling instruction are absent from curricula used in four of the current most popular reading programs across America. (See Gentry, 2022; Swartz, 2019). These programs need to be supplemented with explicit spelling instruction.

6. Know that investment in spelling books and explicit word study for spelling is money well spent. You don’t have to wait. These resources are available and ready-to-use to supplement any reading program.

Integrated spelling instruction is a powerful Tier 1 teaching tool for enabling English learners and other vulnerable populations to learn, correctly spell, automatically read, and speak new English vocabulary; this intense word study activates automatic word reading fluency and connects to comprehension. For example, note how a third grade spelling book lesson on single syllable homophones such as *role, roll, cent, sent, way, weigh, grate, great, sail, cell, and sell* enables immediate gains in spoken vocabulary and reading fluency in just one weekly lesson. These words become brain words for automatic use.

7. Try this Five-Step Science-Based Spelling Pretest (For All Grades)

On the Monday pretest take the student through these five steps with each word: Hear It, Say It, Write It, Read It (and Self-Correct) Use It.

Figure 1

Step 1) Hear It	Model phonological awareness of correct pronunciation ; give a sentence for the word’s meaning .
Step 2) Say It	Have students repeat the word orally to check phonemic awareness and activate speech production centers .
Step 3) Write It (Try spelling it.)	Have the student attempt to write the correct spelling from memory or map the word’s sound to letters . This is the initial pretest spelling attempt.
Step 4) Read It and Self-Correct	Show the word and allow the student to see the correct spelling for the first time, then have the student self-correct engaging in internal word analysis as opposed to simply copying the correct spelling.
Step 5) Use It	Have students use the word throughout a weekly unit of spelling word study in order to commit the correct spelling and pronunciation to long term memory .

(Adapted from *Brain Words: How the Science of Reading Informs Teaching* (Stenhouse, 2019).

Embrace the spelling-for-reading solution in 2023 by providing systematic, explicit, structured spelling instruction in a grade-by-grade curriculum as an essential step in building language comprehension. Celebrate a comeback in spelling books and in explicit spelling instruction to revitalize equity in reading education for children vulnerable for reading failure.

Parts of this article are adapted from Developing Readers, Writers, and Spellers, my *Psychology Today* education blog. For digging deeper link to:

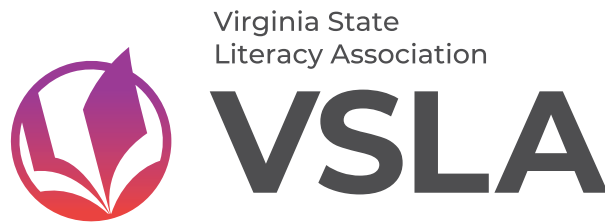
“Vulnerable Students Need Explicit Spelling Instruction”
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/raising-readers-writers-and-spellers/202208/vulnerable-students-need-explicit-spelling>

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Mission

The mission of Virginia State Reading Association, as an authority on literacy education, is to lead in the advancement of literacy across the Commonwealth.

TITLE: *The Collection* (volume 4): The Science of Reading, Summer 2023

Summer 2023 Publication Topic: Word Recognition

- Submissions should focus on expanding the reader's understanding of the topic. Additionally, articles should focus on implementing SoR into tier 1 instruction. Articles that focus on the ways to engage students in learning foundational skills will be prioritized.

PROCESS for REVIEW/SELECTION:

Our articles are generally between 1000-2500 words in length and conversational, insightful, and helpful to K-12 educators. (Submissions that exceed 3000 words will not be considered.) Articles should be research-based and give concrete guidance that school leaders and educators can use to improve their practice. Moreover, articles should be written in a straightforward manner. Submissions should be relevant to a national audience interested in our given theme. You are addressing teachers, school administrators, researchers, and other stakeholders in the education community, so remember your audience.

What we look for:

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- An informed perspective on this subject/controversial topic (evidence-based information that is practical for classroom instruction).
- An emphasis on the interpretation of the research rather than strict pedagogical theory
- Authentic examples or experiences from work in schools
- Useful articles with strategies/approaches that can be replicated in the everyday classroom

Avoid:

- Self-promotion or pushing a program or product
- Articles promoting your personal opinion
- Please do not include jargon. This is intended as a straightforward explanation of the topic.
- Submitting articles that are in the process of being reviewed for another publication.

How to Submit:

Timeline:

7/15/23 – Deadline for submissions

7/16/23 – 6/15/23 – Review of Submissions

7/31/23 – Acceptance notification

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Strengthening Language Comprehension Through Read-Alouds

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Reading aloud to students offers a powerful tool for enhancing comprehension. However, as former educators, we also recognize that many students become mired in the words without knowing how to disentangle the narrative from unfamiliar vocabulary and complex syntactical structures. While reading aloud to students removes the burden of decoding, it does not ensure equal access to meaning. Thus, as teachers of reading, we become cartographers as students navigate the labyrinth of language.

Evidence demonstrates that reading aloud can improve print awareness, expand student vocabularies, and support listening comprehension skills (Hargrave & Sénéchal, 2000; Justice et al., 2008; Levy et al., 2006; Mol et al., 2009; Silverman, 2007; Stanovich et al. 1998; Wiseman, 2011). Skill and language development are enhanced through interactive discourse about the text and interpreting meaning (Mol et al., 2009; Teale, 2003; Wiseman, 2011). In order to maximize instructional time, it is, therefore, imperative to intentionally design and plan for read-aloud experiences that facilitate higher level literacy practices aimed at negotiating meaning from text, and developing oral language through rich meaningful interactions. Prior to highlighting several strategies for designing and implementing such an experience, we will explore the role of language comprehension in reading development as a means of further illustrating the need for these recommended read-aloud practices.

The Role of Language Comprehension

According to Gough and Tunmer's Simple View of Reading (SVR), reading comprehension is the product of word recognition and listening or linguistic comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986). Within the Simple View framework, students who experience difficulties with reading comprehension fall into two broad categories, namely those who struggle with word reading and those with specific comprehension difficulties (Catts et al., 2006). The Simple View posits that the students who struggle with comprehension despite proficient word reading abilities have difficulties with linguistic

comprehension. Whereas a growing body of research demonstrates the factors that underpin decoding difficulties, the components of language comprehension have received relatively less attention in the literature (Hogan et al., 2014). However, its essential role in reading comprehension merits and necessitates further research related to the factors that influence language comprehension.

In broad terms, language comprehension involves deriving meaning from linguistic information (Catts et al., 2006). Using concurrent and retrospective comparison of eighth-grade students with poor comprehension skills, poor decoding skills, or typical reading skills, Catts et al. (2006) found that poor comprehenders exhibited difficulties with language comprehension in kindergarten, second, and fourth grade. Evidence, thus, supports the reader profiles established by the Simple View, as well as highlights the significant role that language comprehension plays in reading comprehension.

In the early grades, as students learn to read, reading comprehension is confined by an individual's decoding skills, but as students become more automatic in their decoding, texts become more linguistically complex and the influence of listening comprehension on reading comprehension increases (Catts et al., 2005). While listening comprehension skills develop from birth, these skills become more critical to reading comprehension and instruction in the later grades, as the texts and questions become more challenging (Hogan et al., 2014).

While the SVR highlights the primary skills which account for individual differences in reading comprehension, it does not account for the variance in reading comprehension associated with text features, including text complexity, genre, and cohesion (Francis et al., 2018). Francis et al. (2018) propose an extension to the Simple View, known as the Complete View of Reading (CVR) which includes these elements of text. Over a decade before Francis et al. proposed the CVR, Catherine Snow (2002) similarly conceptualized reading comprehension as the interrelationship between the

text, the activity, the reader, and the sociocultural context. Snow's model offered a means of organizing and discussing the factors that comprise reading comprehension. When considering instructional strategies for supporting language comprehension, this research necessitates consideration of text-based factors in addition to individual student needs.

Components of Language Comprehension

In 2001, Scarborough used a rope to depict how myriad skills and abilities interact to build effective comprehension. Like the Simple View, the "Reading Rope" broke reading comprehension down into two major components: Word Recognition and Language Comprehension, each with component skills (2001). Effective word recognition relies on readers having sufficient alphabet knowledge, a strong grasp of phoneme-grapheme correspondences, the ability to identify and manipulate individual sounds and understand how these sounds work together to build words – phonemic awareness (Ehri et al., 2001; Ehri, 2014). The Language Comprehension segment of the rope takes into account the roles of background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge (e.g., print concepts). This depiction supports the complex nature of reading comprehension and highlights the important role of oral language in this process.

Hogan et al. (2011) further differentiate the skillsets that comprise language comprehension into two levels including lower and upper-level language skills. Knowledge of vocabulary and syntax represent lower-level language skills, insofar as these skills help the listener or reader to decipher the literal meaning from words and sentences. Inferencing, comprehension monitoring, and text structure knowledge compose the upper-level language skills because these skills are necessary in order to create a mental model of the overall meaning and message (Hogan et al., 2011). Both lower and upper-level language skills are necessary in order to comprehend oral discourse and text.

Read-Aloud Strategies

Reading stories aloud to students removes the burden of decoding and thus allows students to focus on the meaning. As previously discussed, listening comprehension involves the application of multiple skills, including vocabulary, syntactical knowledge, inferencing, background knowledge, working memory, and attention (Hogan et al., 2014). Reading aloud to students can improve many of these skills (Lane and Wright, 2007). For example, evidence demonstrates that reading aloud to children can promote their syntactic development, increase their vocabulary, and support their word recognition (Beck et al., 2002; DeTemple & Snow,

2003; Stahl, 2003). In order to maximize the potential benefits of reading aloud to students, we have organized several recommendations for instructional practice. These recommendations are specifically intended to support students' vocabulary, comprehension monitoring, and inferencing. Whereas listening comprehension involves the application of skill sets beyond the ones targeted here, we selected these strategies due to their evidence-base for utility during interactive read-alouds. As previously noted, it is also critical to consider the text itself, its complexity, and features (Francis et al., 2018). However, considerations for text selection are beyond the scope of this paper.

Vocabulary

Children's books are a valuable source of rich vocabulary. As reading to children is an activity frequently and easily woven into the school day, this is an opportune time for vocabulary instruction. Research suggests there is room to improve here. A study by Wright & Neuman (2010) found that in an average kindergarten classroom, eight episodes of word instruction occurred on a typical day. Similar observations report children receive an average of one (.94) vocabulary explanations during a typical pre-kindergarten read-aloud (Zucker, et. al., 2011; Pentimonti & Kaderavek, 2011).

While providing the definition of newly encountered words during a read-aloud is important, Collins (2010) found that going beyond providing a simple definition, but rather providing a synonym, using gestures, and using the word in varying contexts promoted greater word learning for higher level vocabulary. Vadasy and colleagues (2015) suggest a simple procedure to help students solidify new words in their lexicon:

- Provide an illustration and student-friendly definition of the new word
- Have the students interact with the word (decode, spell, cloze exercise, use in a sentence)
- Have the students read a brief decodable story containing the word
- Have students select a picture of the words from a group of examples/non-examples

Using new vocabulary words with students throughout the day and providing opportunities for them to use them in a variety of contexts allows children to both solidify and refine their understanding of new words.

Comprehension Monitoring

In the IES Practice Guide on improving reading comprehension for students in grades K-3, Shanahan et al. (2010)

recommend teaching students to use comprehension strategies. This is the only recommendation supported by a “strong” body of evidence according to What Works Clearinghouse standards (Shanahan et al., 2010). The authors define comprehension strategies as “intentional mental actions during reading that improve reading comprehension,” (Shanahan et al., 2010, p. 11). One of these strategies includes monitoring comprehension and clarifying meaning when inconsistencies are noted in the text. Hogan et al. (2011) further define comprehension monitoring as the capacity to reflect on one’s own thinking and apply fix-up strategies as needed.

Both the IES Practice Guide (2010) and Hogan et al. (2011) highlight retelling and summarizing as strategies to support comprehension monitoring. By pausing periodically throughout a text and prompting students to summarize what has happened, the teacher can determine whether or not students are able to successfully identify the salient points of the story (Hogan et al., 2011). Teachers can also model summarizing at predetermined points in the story through think-alouds. Hogan et al. (2011) additionally suggest that teachers intentionally include misinformation within these think-aloud summaries to formatively assess students’ error detection.

Another method for comprehension monitoring involves asking question during read-alouds (Beck & McKeown, 2006). Questioning the author occurs when the teacher pauses at predetermined places in the text to ask open-ended questions regarding the events in the text and its meaning. Like summarizing, questioning the author should be modeled through teacher-led think-alouds (Hogan et al., 2011). Think-alouds provide a means of gradually releasing control to students, so that they are able to develop their own questions when engaging with text independently.

Inferencing

Inferencing involves going beyond the literal meaning of the words and actively applying background knowledge to construct a cohesive mental representation of what was read or spoken (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2005). Inferencing occurs at multiple levels, insofar as a listener must form inferences to discern the connotative meaning of a word, to connect pronouns with their antecedents, and to predict or elaborate on given information (Hogan et al., 2014). Inferencing is, therefore, an active process, and research suggests that while skilled readers automatically integrate information at the word- and sentence-level, they rarely make predictive or elaborative inferences unless prompted to do so (Graesser et al., 1994). Thus, it is imperative to model and prompt this sort of inference-making.

Students who struggle with inference making generally either lack accurate background knowledge or struggle to apply appropriate background knowledge in order to make an inference (Carlson et al., 2014; Oakhill & Cain, 2007). By strategically planning interactive read-alouds, Kelly and Barber (2021) propose several strategies for supporting students with inference making, including:

- Setting a clear purpose for the read-aloud
- Designing inference-making questions prior to the read-aloud
- Scripting feedback for correct and incorrect student responses
- Providing students with graphic organizers to visually organize each inference
- Posing questions to activate background knowledge prior to posing questions that integrate background knowledge with information from the text

By carefully selecting texts for read-aloud, preparing questions in advance, and scaffolding the task using visual representations and scripted feedback, teachers can support students’ inference making and improve listening comprehension (Kelly & Barber, 2021).

Shared Reading Strategies

In addition to the previously listed strategies for promoting inference making, shared reading strategies can support students’ listening comprehension through teacher modeling of comprehension strategies, self-monitoring, and explicit discussion of text structures (Fisher et al., 2008). In their observational study of shared reading practices in 25 classrooms, Fisher et al. (2008) identified four common elements of instruction targeted by teachers during shared reading, including vocabulary, comprehension strategies, text structures, and text features. While the authors underscore the importance of teacher modeling during shared reading, they also describe the use of questioning to engage students throughout this process. In the next paragraph, we unpack one common method for promoting student participation during shared reading known as dialogic reading.

Developed by Whitehurst et al. (1988), dialogic reading provides a framework for eliciting active participation during shared reading. The acronyms PEER and CROWD help organize and sequence the prompts included within dialogic reading. PEER stands for prompt, evaluate, expand, and repeat. By prompting students to reflect on a question and by expanding upon their responses with informative feedback, dialogic reading promotes active engagement and dialogue (Pillinger & Vardy, 2022). The acronym CROWD offers a

means of remembering the various prompts utilized within dialogic reading, including completion, recall, open-ended questions, wh- questions, and distancing questions (Lane & Wright, 2007). By incorporating these different types of prompts and elaborating on student responses, dialogic reading inspires sustained interaction between the students, the teacher, and the text.

Conclusion

Language is an integral part of the reading comprehension equation. Students who lack sufficient language comprehension lag behind typical peers in their ability to make meaning from decoded text. Teachers can help prevent or decrease these difficulties by intentionally and explicitly building language instruction into their day. Read-alouds provide a prime opportunity to embed language instruction. Within the context of a read-aloud teachers can provide rich vocabulary instruction, strategies for comprehension monitoring, and opportunities to practice making inferences. As students strengthen these skills they will become more effective and efficient comprehenders.

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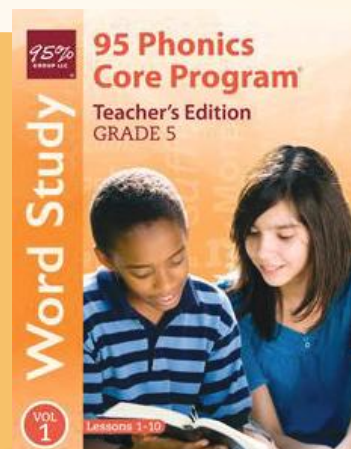
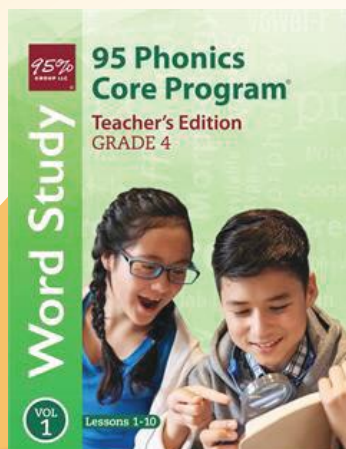
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