

***OLSEL Project***  
***Colourful Semantics Strategy***  
***Supporting Classroom***  
***Practice***

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# Outline

- What is oral language
- Oral language difficulties
- Links to literacy
- What is 'Colourful Semantics'?
- Aims of program
- ILP development



# What is Oral Language?

Receptive Oral Language

Expressive Oral Language



# Receptive Language

Refers to the understanding of oral language and includes the ability to:

- follow oral instructions;
- understand a range of different spoken sentence and question forms;
- listen to and comprehend stories;
- understand the meaning of spoken words; and word relationships.



# Expressive Language

Refers to language production and includes the ability to:

- use the correct words (*grammatical structures*) in oral sentences;
- connect ideas together using conjunction words (*eg. and, because*);
- sequence information to describe an object;
- tell stories or recount an event; and
- name vocabulary.



# Children with oral language difficulties often:

- Have difficulty following instructions.
- Have difficulty remembering and understanding stories and/or formulate and sequence stories in an oral/written form.
- Have difficulty understanding abstract language i.e. *“I want to be able to hear a pin drop in here.”*
- Respond inappropriately to questions.



- Use short sentences and/or make grammatical errors.
- Tend to use non-specific vocabulary e.g. “*thing*” and “*stuff*”.
- Children may find literacy development difficult if they do not have adequate oral language skills.
- This can result in problem behaviour in the classroom and socially in the playground – they can become angry and frustrated.



# Links to Literacy

- A key factor in successful early literacy acquisition is immersion in a rich oral language environment (*Handbook of Early Literacy Research*).
- Development of communicative competence through immersion in oral language becomes an important building block for early success in literacy (*Rita Watson: Literacy and Oral Language: Implications for Early Literacy Acquisition*).





# The **OLSEL** Research Project

Findings thus far have determined that the following four key elements of oral language ability that have been identified as explaining the most variance in students' early reading acquisition



# Five Key Elements:

1. Vocabulary development
2. Comprehension and use of longer and more complex sentences
3. Story grammar
4. Phonemic and phonological awareness



**Colourful Semantics** is an effective way to increase the exposure and facilitate the development of oral language in the classroom.

In turn, as researchers such as Watson and Munro have suggested this will enhance success in **literacy** acquisition



**Colourful Semantics** (CS) addresses three of the four key elements:

- Vocabulary development
- Comprehension and use of longer and more complex sentences
- Story grammar

*The CS program does NOT address phonemic and phonological awareness, but it does address self-talk.*



# What is 'Colourful Semantics'?

- A method of teaching children how to understand and construct sentences  
(**syntax vs. morphology** – grammar is modeled not explicitly taught e.g. 'the, -ing, auxiliary verb *is*')
- A therapy technique that uses colour-coded cue cards that 'show' the structure of a sentence; each card represents a word or part of a sentence
- Tunes the child into key words in sentences (oral/written)



- CEOM 'Colourful Semantics' Language Program has been developed with an **oral language** focus although has potential for use in written language tasks.
- Can be used in 1:1, group or whole class situations
- Each stage of the program contains steps to follow and accompanying pictures.



# Activities aim to help children to:

- Understand instructions and sentences;
- Follow discussions and to communicate their own ideas effectively;
- Use different modalities to learn about making sentences;
- Develop competent use of simple sentence structures and complex grammar with more advanced vocabulary; and
- Develop a concept of narrative (e.g. what makes up a 'story').



- Produce grammatically correct sentences in written form
  - Develop **literacy skills** by building a strong foundation in oral language:
    - John Munro's 'multiple levels of text processing' (MLOTP) model outlines the importance of using *existing oral language skills* to comprehend text
- <https://students.education.unimelb.edu.au/LiteracyIntervention/redliteracy/contents/underrd/framework.html>





# Colourful Semantics & Literacy

- **Colourful Semantics** can be used to develop these oral language skills by targeting 'levels of text' required for reading comprehension:
  - word level
  - sentence level
  - conceptual level
  - topic or theme
  - pragmatic or dispositional level



# Colour Cue Cards

**'WHO'** = orange = nouns



Can include:

- **people** e.g. man, baby, Grandma
- **animals** e.g. horse, dog, butterfly
- **occupations** e.g. clown, hairdresser, doctor
- **pronouns** e.g. he, she, it, they
- **describing words** e.g. big man, brown horse, sad girl





horse



family



people



sister



stranger



men



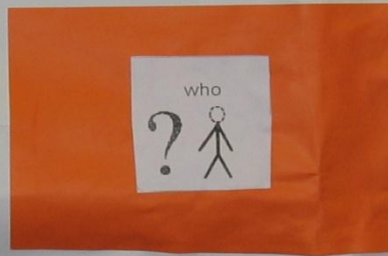
wrestlers



bull



pig



who  
?  
stick figure



friends



Chelsea



girl



man



cat



fairy



fairy princess



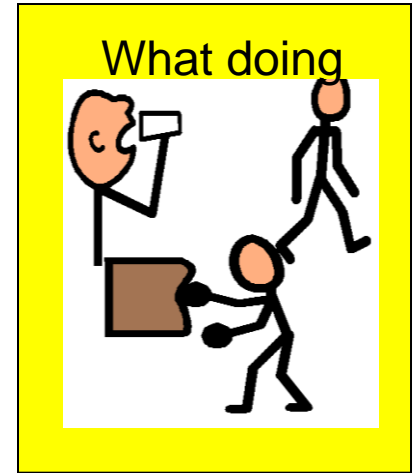
fairies



Tim



**'WHAT DOING' = yellow = verbs**



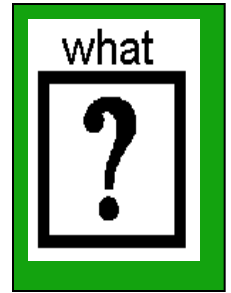
**Can include:**

- **'stand alone' verbs** e.g. run, sit
- **verbs associated with an object** e.g. wash (car), brush (hair)
- **different tenses** (past, present, future)
- **'is'** (copula)



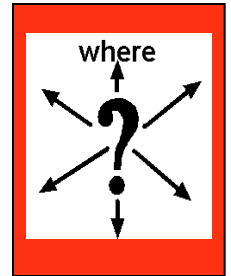
**‘WHAT’ = green = objects/nouns**

- e.g. brush dog, wash car



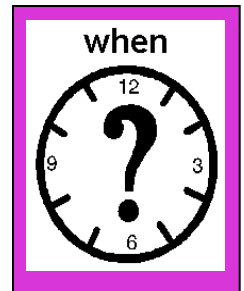
**‘WHERE’ = red**

- e.g. on the car, in the cupboard,  
outside, at the park



**‘WHEN’ = purple**

- e.g. yesterday, last week,  
on the weekend, tomorrow



# what doing - what



The boy is sleeping.

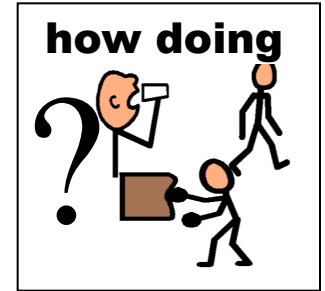


The boy is playing (golf).



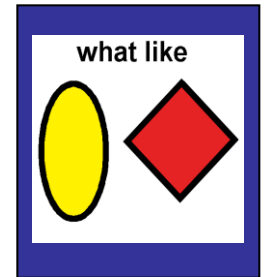
# ‘HOW DOING’ = white = adverbs

- e.g. quickly, gently, like a monkey, in a silly way, well



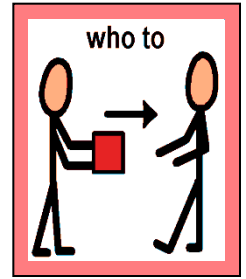
# ‘WHAT LIKE’ = blue = adjectives

- Can include:
  - Feelings e.g. angry, scared, hungry
  - Physical attributes e.g. old, tall, pretty



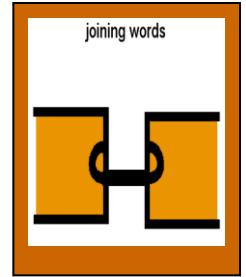
## 'WHO TO' = pink = indirect objects

- e.g. The girl gave flowers *to her mother*.



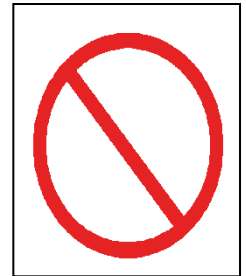
## Joining words = brown = conjunctions

- e.g. and, because, after, although



## 'Not' = red circle cut out

- e.g. not verb, not adjective  
(N.B. 'never' = 'how doing' (adverb);  
'does/did' etc. = auxiliary verbs



e.g. 'Boy did **not** run')





# who + what doing

*The girl is crying.*

*She is bleeding.*



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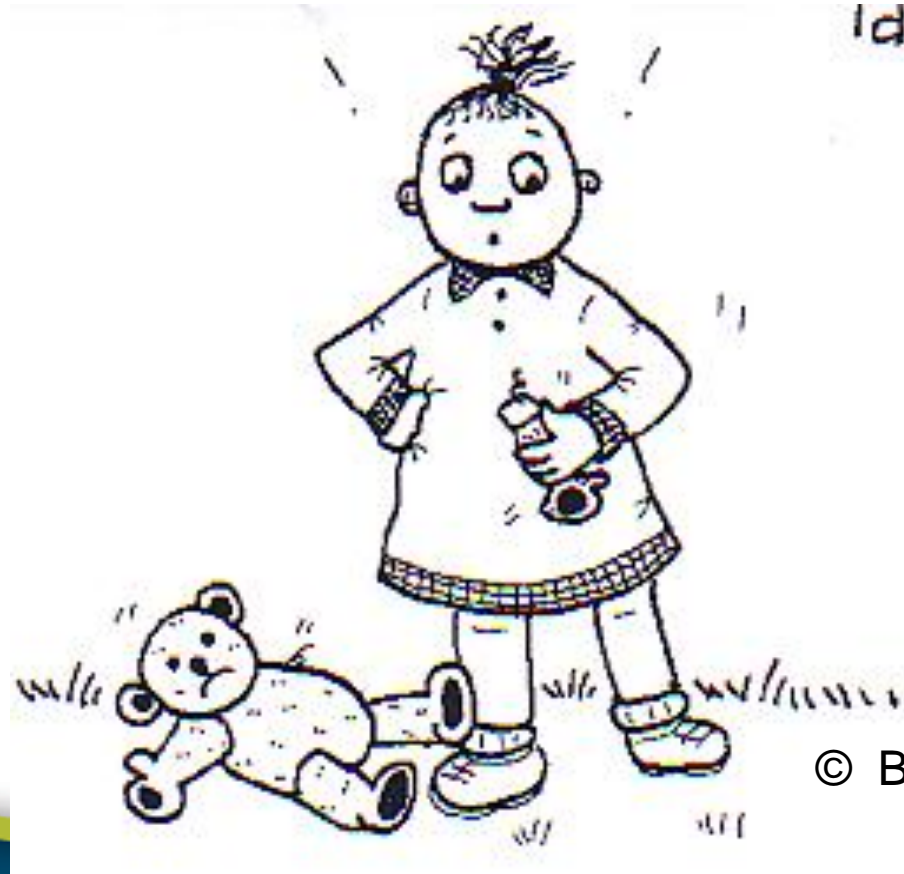


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who + what doing + what + where

*The girl dropped her teddy on the ground.*

*She broke her teddy in the backyard.*



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who + what doing + what + joining  
word + what like

*Jack wore his gloves because it was cold.  
The boy is making a snowman and it's fun.*



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# CS Strategies Teachers have used in the classroom

- large copies of cue cards are stuck on blackboard or wall, ready to use.
- Placed posters or butchers' paper containing brainstormed words/pictures for each cue.
- Used colour cards as cues during 'Show and Tell' and 'Big Book' introductions



- Added appropriate labels to the cue cards e.g. 'who' = noun/subject; 'what doing' = verb; 'what' = noun/object
  - Students then use the colour cards to refer to if unsure about a label e.g. adverb, adjective
- Used colour cards as cues during narrative, essay, report, debate, sentence formulation etc.



- Gestured to cue cards as a story is read and/or discussed.
- Students have found the key words in a sentence, text or picture → then underlined them in colour etc.
- For those students with difficulty grasping an animal/object as the 'Who', pictures have been added e.g. a house etc. next to the stick figure person on the cue card.



- Write a sentence on the board and have students match up the words with the cue cards. Encourage the students to make the sentence 'more colourful' by adding a word or sentence part.



OLSEL Project Schools have reported a measurable growth in the **Literacy skills** of low, average and above average students who have been exposed to the **Colourful Semantics** Strategy.





# A Case Study

Student X is a 6.9 year old boy who had an oral language assessment in October 2009, with results revealing that he has moderate-severe receptive and expressive delays.

The Renfrew Action Picture Test (RAPT) was administered in November 2009 and re-administered in June 2010.



# What is the girl doing?

Hug teddy

(October 2009)

Hugging a teddy

(June 2010)



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# What is the mother going to do?

Put boot on girl  
(October 2009)

Mum is putting  
some boots on  
the girl's leg.

(June 2010)



© Renfrew Action Picture Test



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# Tell me all about what the man is doing.

He jump the horse.

(October 2009)

The man is jumping over the gate with the horse.

(June 2010)



© Renfrew Action Picture Test



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# What has happened to the girl?

She fell stairs.

(October 2009)

The girl fell down  
the stairs and  
she broke her  
glasses.

(June 2010)



© Renfrew Action Picture Test

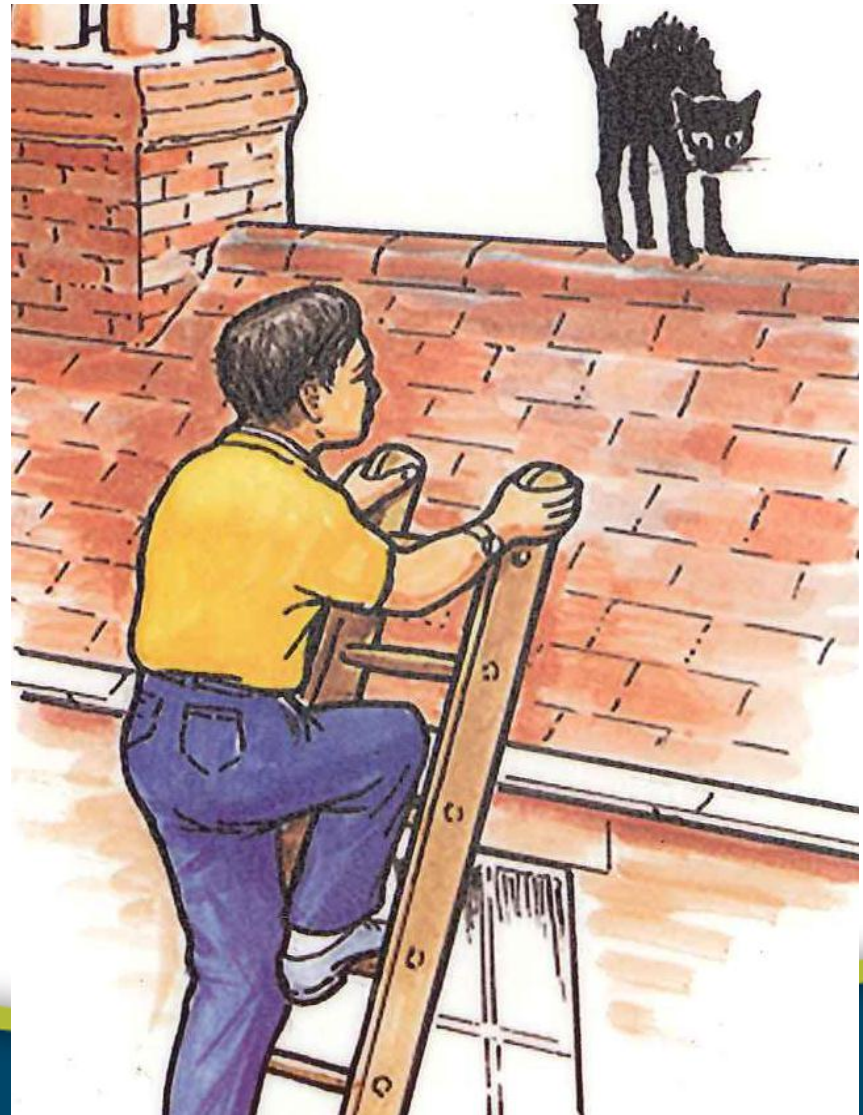


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# Tell me what the man is doing?

Cat on the  
roof. (October 2009)

The man is on the  
ladder and he's  
trying to get the cat.  
(June 2010)



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# Questions



# Colourful Semantics

- Colourful Semantics was developed in the UK by Speech and Language Therapist Alison Bryan
- It was brought to Victoria by Speech Pathologist Andrea Hewett (Bairnsdale)
- Presentation adapted from that developed by Marcella Van Mourik (CEO SP)
- Some of the pictures used in this presentation are from Black Sheep Press:  
[www.blacksheep-epress.com](http://www.blacksheep-epress.com) (Slides 25, 26 & 27)

