

ORAL LANGUAGE SUPPORTING EARLY LITERACY **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS**

In considering what aspects of oral language competence should be targeted to enhance early literacy acquisition, we can be guided by the findings from the OLSEL Research Project undertaken in 2009-2010.

The following **four elements** of oral language ability have been identified as explaining significant variance in students' early reading acquisition:

- Phonemic and Phonological awareness;
- Vocabulary development;
- Story Grammar; and
- Understanding and using longer and more complex sentences.

It should be noted that whilst these 4 elements can be considered areas of priority, they sit firmly within a broader and deeper framework i.e. the ICPALER framework, and therefore should be considered as integral elements of the whole process of learning.

The 4 elements are further expanded below, encompassing suggestions for both assessment and classroom implementation. Additional information on each of the four elements can be located at: <http://www.olsel.catholic.edu.au/literacy-resources/index.cfm?loadref=74>

1. Phonemic & Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness has been highlighted in recent years as an important area of knowledge used by students to facilitate both their reading and spelling. You may hear the terms phonemic awareness and phonological awareness used interchangeably but these are actually different abilities. Phonemic awareness refers to the children's awareness of individual sounds while phonological awareness refers to sounds in words and larger sound units.

Some aspects of phonemic and phonological awareness that can be targeted, while reading, are:

- identifying words that rhyme (e.g. who can think of a word that rhymes with "cat"? / which of these words does not rhyme with the others .. cat / sun / hat?).
- breaking or segmenting longer words into their syllables (e.g. child says "rainbow" while clapping the syllables)
- segmenting words into onsets (i.e. initial sound) and rime units (e.g. cat ... c / at);
- blending individual sounds into words and segmenting words into individual sounds. Initially, target three sound words (e.g. cat / home) then four sound words (e.g. stop / treat) and then five sound words (e.g. print / stand).

Select words (8-10) from a text you are about to read with the children or from a text a child may be reading individually. Practice the phonological/phonemic awareness task using these selected words for five to ten minutes before you read the text together. Doing this allows children to have some experience with the words before they read and thus facilitate their ability to apply their phonemic and phonological awareness knowledge to the reading process.

A phonemic and phonological awareness program developed by CEOM (based on the work of Dr John Munro), is the Phonological Early Reading Intervention (PERI). **PERI** provides teachers with the phonological foundations necessary for pre-literate and early literacy development. The areas covered through PERI are:

- Manipulating sound patterns in words
- Segmenting words into smaller parts,
- Sound blending,
- Manipulating sounds into new words, and
- Phonemic recoding.

All content for PERI has been taken from, "Assessing and Teaching Phonological Knowledge," by JK Munro, 1998, available online through ACER. <http://shop.acer.edu.au/acer-shop/group/ATP/2>

Suggested assessment tool/s:

- SPAT-R (Sutherland Phonological Awareness Test-Revised) – Dr R Neilsen (2005)

2. Vocabulary Development

A person's vocabulary is the set of words they understand. Each word has a meaning and a sound pattern (how it is said). For the words we can read, there is also a linked letter pattern.

The focus in this section is on equipping teachers with the tools necessary to examine how their students use words. Words are the building blocks of our oral language knowledge. The more words children know about a topic, the more effectively they can learn more about it and can comprehend descriptions of it. As well, they can get greater enjoyment and satisfaction using the ideas. They can be guided to see how *'nice'* doesn't communicate as rich a picture as *'enjoyable'*, *'stimulating'* or *'satisfying'*.

In our teaching and more generally in our interactions it is important that we encourage our students to explore word meanings and patterns in meanings and to take risks with how they use them. They need to learn the power of words and also how they can work out the meanings of unfamiliar words. As well, they need to be encouraged to think innovatively about words and bound morphemes. The new words a child creates today may be part of our regular vocabulary in ten years' time.

Having identified the words that may be 'new' to the students, implement directed teaching activities to ensure students gain this vocabulary knowledge. Apply the following sequence based on Munro (2005):

- Say the new word accurately and ask the students to say the word;
- Describe or act out the actions that characterize the word;
- Suggest how the new word is like words the students already know;
- Encourage students to suggest synonyms and antonyms for the word;
- Identify contexts in which the word is and isn't appropriate;
- Define the meaning of the word;
- Explore the meaning/s of new word (using your Meaning Making Motor);
- Link the words with related words in networks; and
- See how new words 'came from' words they already know.

Suggested assessment tool/s:

- Synonym Test – Dr John Munro (2005)
 - Prep – Year 1/2 (Individual administration required)
 - Year 2/3 – year 6 (Group administration)

3. Story Grammar / Oral Narrative Schema

Assisting students to acquire an awareness of how a story (oral narrative) is sequenced will assist them to better comprehend texts they are reading. It will assist them to be able to predict what might happen next and also evaluate the quality of the story. In addition, working on this area will also assist them to provide larger amounts of information in a cohesive manner when formulating their own stories.

A feature of stories is that generally all of them conform to this story grammar sequence. Longer stories are comprised of the setting and the formal ending along with a series of “episodes” with each episode containing the steps from the initiating event to the direct consequence. Simple stories such as the one listed next have a single episode structure.

Jane was at school and went out to sit on the seats and eat her lunch. As she opened her lunch box, it fell over and her lunch went on the ground. Jane wondered what she was going to do. Her sandwiches now had dirt all over them. She decided to ask someone for help so she told her friend, Susan. Susan took one of the sandwiches from her lunch-box and shared it with Jane. After lunch, Jane and Susan went into the playground and had a good time playing chasey.

Setting:	<i>Jane was at school and went out to sit on the seats and eat her lunch</i>
Initiating Event:	<i>As she opened her lunch box, it fell over and her lunch went on the ground</i>
Internal Response:	<i>Jane wondered what she was going to do.</i>
Attempt:	<i>She told her friend, Susan</i>
Direct Consequence:	<i>Susan took one of the sandwiches from her lunch-box and shared it with Jane</i>
Formal Ending:	<i>After lunch, Jane and Susan went into the playground and had a good time playing chasey.</i>

Working in a group, use the Story Grammar questions (below) to formulate a story about a stimulus picture or a sequence of pictures.

Setting	Who is in the story? (the characters) Where are they? When is the story happening? (time/place)
Initiating Event	What happened to the characters? What occurred in our story?
Internal Response	How did this make the characters feel? What did they think about what happened?
Internal Plan	What did the characters decide to do? What did they need to do?
Attempt	What did the characters actually do?
Direct Consequence	What happened because of what the characters’ did?
Ending	How will our story end? What do you think the characters will do next time?

Suggested assessment tool/s:

- Assessing story grammar through oral retell – Dr John Munro (2005)
- Assessing story grammar through spontaneous and cued retelling – Dr John Munro (2002)

4. Understanding and Using Longer and More Complex Sentences

By encouraging students to add **adjectives** and **adverbs** to sentences, that they are saying and writing, students are able to increase the grammatical complexity of sentences comprehended and used.

Consider the following sentences and analyse how they are different.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The man drove the car• The old man drove his new car carefully	The second sentence is longer and more complex by adding adjectives and adverbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The girl read the book from the library• The young red-headed girl read the picture book from the school library	The second sentence is longer and more complex by adding adjectives and adverbs

The other group of words that allows students to formulate longer and more complex sentences is **conjunctions**. **Conjunctions** allow us to join sentences and often add to the meaning implicit in the sentence ideas (e.g. “because” links cause and effect; “if” marks a conditional concept). In addition, conjunctions improve the cohesion of longer and more complex sentences and texts.

Consider the following sentences and analyse how they are different.

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The boy got home from school .The boy played football with his friends.• The boy played with his friends after he got home from school	The second sentence is longer and more complex by adding a conjunction to join the sentences.
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Another group of words that add to the cohesion between and across sentences is **pronouns**. In the example above, we have joined two sentences with the conjunction “after” and used the pronoun “he” rather than repeat the redundant subject (i.e. “the boy”).

Essentially, we can facilitate the length and complexity of the sentences comprehended and used by students by enhancing and expanding their use of **adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions** and **pronouns**.

- Select sentences from books you are reading with the class. Encourage students to brainstorm adjectives for characters, events and locations and adverbs for actions. Provide opportunity for students to change adjectives and adverbs used in the text with other ones they have thought of. Encourage students to add adjectives and adverbs to sentences.
- Read the text with the children. Encourage students to identify words that join sentences (i.e. conjunctions). Select two short sentences from the text and encourage the students to think of a conjunction to join the two short sentences into one long sentence.
- Discuss the sentences the students write. Take the opportunity to encourage them to add adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and pronouns to their first draft sentences.

A second way of helping students to increase the grammatical complexity of sentences comprehended and used is to use the program Colourful Semantics. Colourful Semantics is a resource used by CEOM Speech Pathologists.

Colourful Semantics is a teaching strategy (developed by Alison Bryan Speech-Language Therapist, UK) that:

- uses colour-coded cue cards to ‘show’ the key meaning elements and structure of a sentence; each card represents a word or part of a sentence.
- supports students learning through the use of oral, visual and hands-on materials.
- provides a method of teaching children how to:
 - understand,
 - construct, and
 - think about sentence meanings and structures.
- can support the development and extension of vocabulary.
- does not focus on grammatical rules such as: determiners (eg. the), plurals (eg. houses, mice), tense (eg. –ed, ing, will), or possessives (eg. her bike, the boy’s kite) etc.; however these can still be modeled and recast whilst working on *Colourful Semantics*.
- helps students develop in their ability to use longer, more detailed sentences and increasingly complex sentence structures. As such it can be used with a range of ages.
- has been developed with an oral language focus, although it has potential for use in written language tasks.

Colourful Semantics involves the use of colour cue cards, vocabulary development and specific practice of a range of sentence structures to facilitate this.

More information on Colourful Semantics can be found at:

http://www.olsel.catholic.edu.au/_uploads/_ckpg/files/What%20is%20Colourful%20Semantics_SpechPath%20Presentation.pdf

Suggested assessment tool/s:

- Record of Oral Language

Self Talk / Self Learning

While developing and strengthening students' oral language competence is important, it is insufficient on its own to facilitate ongoing learning. We can go a long way to assisting students to better regulate their learning by encourage them to reflect on their language and explicitly use their language to assist them to undertake tasks. It is therefore important that we initially scaffold learning for students through provision of prompts, but we also need to encourage the use of metacognition (self-talk) so that students develop 'self-learning strategies'. These will be related to all aspects of learning including the strategies outlined above for the 4 elements.

Ways this can be reinforced in the classroom are as follows:

- Encourage student to explicitly discuss what they know about a topic before you introduce it and ask them to explain why doing this will help them;
- Encourage students to explain how they will complete a task
- Before students start a writing piece, ask students to think about who will read it (i.e. take on the perspective or the person who will review the work)
- Encourage students to reflect on and explain what they have learned in a session or after a work unit. Again, ask them to explain how they might use this knowledge on other tasks.
- Use levels of questioning to depth students' reflections on what they have learned (e.g. Blank's Questioning levels / Wallach's Questioning Rubric). Attempt to at least achieve a 50-50 balance with the frequency of questions at the complex end equalling the frequency of questions at the literal end.
- Reflect on the three elements of the Collin's Model that are the learners' responsibility: Articulation, Reflection & Exploration. Have I allowed some time for each of these.