Implementing the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan: A Guide for Educators

Children's **Literacy** Initiative

Session Goals & Outcomes

- Identify and apply evidence-based literacy Instruction strategies
- Understand the role of high-quality instruction in promoting equity
- Integrate culturally responsive practices into literacy instruction
- Promote community and shared responsibility for equity in literacy
- Promote community and shared responsibility for equity in literacy

Link to Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan

- Please use this link to access the Illinois Comprehensive Literacy Plan. We will refer to part of this plan throughout our discussion today.

Guiding Values for Literacy

EVERY LEARNER...

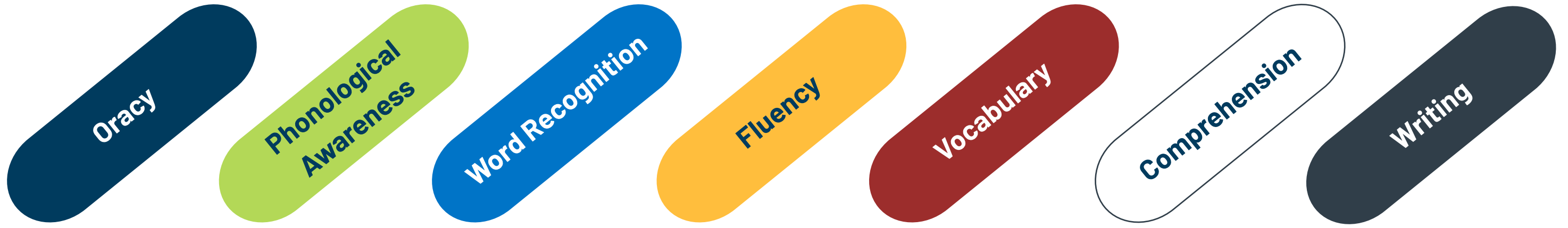| is capable and has the right to equitable access to high-quality, inclusive, differentiated, and evidence-based literacy instruction	deserves schools that nurture their unique assets and interests, honoring their complexity within the context of their communities	has the right to develop literacy in two or more languages to prepare for success in our global world.	has the right to be empowered through agency to self-advocate within supportive learning environments.	has the right to reliable and valid assessments that accurately measure their literacy skills
• Empowers students for meaning-making, fostering personal and collective agency for lifelong learning • Prioritizes explicit, systematic, and structured instruction of foundational reading skills • Utilizes high-quality, evidence-based literacy practices • Utilizes reliable data to enhance teaching	• Recognizes and utilizes the language and culture of families and communities • Promotes collaboration among educators, families, students, and communities • Applies Universal Design for Learning principles • Offers consistent opportunities for students to demonstrate literacy skills from an early stage • Acknowledges and incorporates the linguistic capabilities of individual students	• Utilizes students' language usage and methods of demonstrating their knowledge • Embeds literacy and language learning in clear, genuine, and significant contexts • Adjusts to the sociocultural backgrounds and language requirements of students • Provides culturally and linguistically responsive scaffolds that aid in early identification measures	• Fosters the joy of reading, encourages student choice, and cultivates independent reading habits • Optimizes the relationship between receptive and expressive modes of communication • Develops critical literacy skills to mastery, enabling all learners to thoroughly examine, analyze, and evaluate texts for power, equity, and social justice • Recognizes every student's linguistic knowledge • Engages multiple modalities for students to demonstrate knowledge	• Provides educators with resources, professional development, and student-centered support systems for evidence-based literacy practices • Recognizes and responds to changing learning requirements • Offers continual evidence-based assistance for students encountering literacy difficulties • Utilizes versatile, comprehensive support across learning domains and levels, integrating diverse educational strategies and tools

The Seven Components of Literacy

Oracy · **Phonological Awareness** · **Word Recognition** · **Fluency** · **Vocabulary** · **Comprehension** · **Writing**

Birth ·· **College & Career Ready**

ORACY	Begin developing basic oral communication through sounds and responses.	Engage in conversation; express feelings and join class discussions.	Speak clearly, follow directions, and engage in storytelling and role-playing.	Practice structured talk, active listening, and presenting.	Work on complex speech, articulation, and nonverbal cues.	Enhance oracy for academia, real-world, debates, and presenting.
CONCEPTS OF PRINT	Children explore board books with pictures and simple words, learning that words and pictures convey meaning from parents and caregivers.	Children grasp book handling, page-turning, and the concept of print conveying meaning, while also beginning to recognize letters.	Learners begin to recognize letters and understand left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading direction.	Students continue to develop print awareness, letter recognition, and the use of text features, such as the table of contents.	Students enhance their proficiency in utilizing various text features for clarity and comprehension. These may include titles, headings, maps, sidebars, bulleted lists, photos, captions, subtitles, page numbers, illustrations, charts, graphs, diagrams, important quotes, keys, sources, special print, glossaries, timelines, or word usage indexes.	
PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS	Explore language sounds through rhymes, songs, and wordplay.	Engage in rhyming, clapping syllables, and identifying beginning sounds.	Develop understanding of phonemes; learn to blend and segment sounds in words.	Apply phonemic awareness by segmenting, isolating, and substituting sounds.	Master complex phonemic tasks, including reading multisyllabic words and phoneme manipulation.	Seek tailored instruction in phonological awareness as needed, informed by assessment.
WORD RECOGNITION	Establish phonological and phonemic awareness as foundations for phonics and letter-sound relationships.	Initiate phonics with basic letter-sound relationships, encoding, and decoding.	Expand phonics instruction to more complex letter-sound correspondences.	Advance in phonics, focusing on spelling patterns and word decoding.	Continue to reinforce phonics skills through advanced vocabulary and complex texts, including morpheme study and intricate word analysis in English and World Language courses.	
FLUENCY	Develop oral language through repeated exposure in infancy and preschool.	Cultivate early fluency skills, like sound/letter fluency, and enhance it by reading aloud with expression and pacing.	Practice reading fluently with expression and accuracy.	Enhance reading fluency, focusing on more complex texts.	Extend reading fluency to a wide range of academic and literary texts.	
VOCABULARY	Acquire vocabulary through exposure to spoken language, texts read aloud, and conversations with caregivers in early childhood.	Build oral and written vocabulary through explicit instruction, exposure to varied texts, and engaging in discussions.	Expand vocabulary by reading challenging texts, studying academic vocabulary, and using context clues for word meanings.	Develop sophisticated vocabulary knowledge by exploring word origins, prefixes, and suffixes.		
COMPREHENSION	Engage with texts by listening and interacting with oral and written language through read-alouds.	Deepen understanding and interaction with texts, focusing on comprehension.	Develop critical reading skills, analyzing texts in-depth.	Perform critical analysis of literature and various texts, enhancing interpretative abilities.		
WRITING	Explore emergent writing through scribbling, drawing, and gradually using letters, invented spelling, and basic grammar.	Integrate reading and writing skills, enhancing both simultaneously.	Develop basic writing skills, focusing on sentence and paragraph structure, and connecting them with reading skills.	Progress to more advanced writing, including argumentative and research writing.	Master advanced writing skills for essays, research papers, and college applications.	

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Phonological awareness is the ability to recognize and work with sounds in spoken language. It includes being able to hear distinct words, syllables, and sounds as well as being able to segment, blend, and manipulate those sounds. Phonological awareness is a foundational skill for learning how to read and write.

Children develop phonological awareness in any language they are learning and speaking, which includes the language of instruction in school—typically white mainstream English—and other languages at home and in their communities. The phonological awareness skills addressed in this overview are skills associated with white mainstream English, the language of school instruction. Keep in mind, there are other ways of speaking and other phonological progressions that are equally valid.

Children come to our classrooms with a variety of language backgrounds, identities, and cultures. This overview takes a culturally relevant-sustaining approach to the teaching of phonological awareness. Our teaching of phonological awareness is relevant and sustaining to the cultures, identities, and interests of children when we are:

- teaching skills within texts that represent and align to who they are
- affirming and utilizing their home language practices and encouraging flexible and fluid movement between and among their languages
- articulating the significance of learning phonological awareness skills to learning to read, i.e., understanding that these skills are a means to becoming the readers and writers they are capable of
- teaching skills alongside of knowledge development, criticality, and other areas of literacy development

What is Phonological Awareness?

Phonological Awareness includes the initial recognition of sounds in larger, more concrete linguistic structure like words, syllables, and onset/rimes. Evidence that children are developing an awareness of these structures includes:

- Recognition of individual words in a sentence (How many words are in this sentence?)
- Recognition and identification of rhyming words (What words rhymed on these pages? Do these two words rhyme?)
- Recognition of the parts of a word—or syllables—by counting them, taking them apart, and putting them together (How many syllables in oct/o/pus? Say them one at a time)
- The ability to manipulate onset and rime—producing rhymes ("What rhymes with *fox*?") requires the understanding that rhyming words have the same rime (the onset in *fox* is "f" and the rime is "–ox")

Phonological awareness also includes the recognition of smaller, more abstract sounds in words—the individual sounds in words known as *phonemes*. This is called phonemic awareness, which is a subset of phonological awareness. It is the ability to isolate, blend, and segment the smallest units of individual sound, phonemes. It is now recognized that children can begin learning to hear and say phonemes without first practicing syllables in words. Therefore, it is important to begin with and stay focused on developing phonemic awareness more than other aspects of phonological awareness (ILA PA Position Statement, 2020).

Phonemic awareness includes the ability to:

- Identify and produce phonemes; for example, identify the last sound in the word *goat* as /t/.
- Blend phonemes—like putting together the individual sounds /b/ /a/ /t/ into the word *bat.*
- Segment phonemes, which is taking apart the sounds in the word, so *dip* becomes /d/ /i/ /p/.
- Isolate phonemes, which means hearing and naming one specific sound anywhere in the word. For example, identify the sound /i/ when asked, "What's the middle sound in the word 'fish'?"
- Manipulate phonemes or change things up—like making the /c/ in *cot* become the /h/ sound to make *hot*.

Why is Phonological Awareness Important?

When phonological awareness knowledge is in place, children have a solid grasp on how to break up words into parts, like syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes, and then blend those parts together. When they learn to match these processes with written language, they can decode and encode, which means they can break apart written words into sounds and patterns. This sets them on the path to becoming independent word learners. Once children begin to read words, they get lots of information about what they are reading. This means that phonological awareness is crucial for fluency and comprehension. Moreover, evidence has led many researchers to believe that the acquisition of phonological awareness is also associated with vocabulary development.

How Do We Teach Phonological Awareness?

» **Use diverse texts in read alouds and shared reading experiences**

Using texts that help children see, celebrate, and discuss their identities, cultures, experiences, and interests—and then teaching phonological awareness skills within those texts—will have a high impact on Black and Latinx children's ability to learn a skill in joyful and meaningful ways. During the reading aloud or shared reading of these texts, children can listen for rhyming words while you read aloud and then generate a list of more words that rhyme with the words in the text. As they practice rhyme, repetition, and word play, they'll see the letter associated with the sounds they are making as well as expand their vocabulary and print knowledge.

» **Affirm and utilize children's home languages**

We honor and utilize children's linguistic repertoires when we encourage linguistic dexterity, moving flexibly and fluidly between and among their languages. Remember, phonological awareness skills aren't specific to a certain language. If children can hear the sounds within words in their home language, they can hear those sounds within English words. Not all sounds are the same from language to language, but, the skill of hearing those that are is the basis for reading everywhere. Highlighting the role of sounds in words in child's home language by singing, rhyming, and playing with language in a child's home language both affirms children;s language background, while supporting the natural transfer between phonological awareness and syntactic information between two languages.

» **Connect phonemic awareness to phonics and vocabulary**

The most effective kinds of activities for fostering phonemic awareness involve deconstructing and reconstructing the sounds in words, taking the sounds in words apart and putting them back together again. Combining phoneme-level instruction in sounds with grapheme-level instruction in letters—i.e., teaching phonemic awareness and phonics simultaneously—has also been shown to be both effective and efficient, as it helps childs better understand the relation between letters and sounds. This may look like deconstructing and reconstructing sounds with magnet letters/board, tiles, or sound boxes, and then modeling for children how to write the words they are making. It is also critical to connect this instruction to vocabulary—if we are highlighting parts of words, or making words in our instruction—children, particularly those learning English, must understand what those words mean in order for the instruction to be relevant to them. This could be aided by visuals, gestures, and explaining of word meaning.

» **Play-based, joyful activities**

The teaching of phonological awareness outside of texts should be play-based, short, and joyful. During transition times when children are arriving to school or getting ready for lunch they can line up by listening to the beginning sound of their name. During centers and small group instruction, sort picture cards by the sound they hear in the beginning of the words.

» **Small Group Reading allows for differentiation**

In addition to whole class time, teaching phonological awareness during small group reading time helps to ensure that you are differentiating your instruction for a variety of learners. A phonological assessment should help to drive instructional plans for children of different reading levels. For example, readers in the early reading stage will not need as much attention to phonological awareness as those in the emergent reading stage. Additionally, children learning English may require additional instruction on English phonemes that do not exist in a child's home language. Teachers must acquire knowledge of these phonemes and then explicitly demonstrate the production of the sound, focusing on how you move your mouth to do so. Helping Latinx and MLL children to identify sounds in short words with picture sorts can also support the learning of unfamiliar phonemes (Robertson, retrieved 2021).

Remember to consider phonological awareness instruction in relation to your overall curriculum and instruction, and to the children in your classrooms. The International Literacy Association's most recent position statement on phonological awareness emphasizes that while phonological awareness instruction is important for many children's reading development, over-emphasis can come at the cost of other crucial areas of the curriculum, with minimal benefits. Therefore, phonological awareness instruction should be "purposeful, highly efficient, and focused primarily on skills that support literacy development" (ILA PA Position Statement, 2020). Knowledge and intellect, the development of criticality, and the amplification of joy are just as critical for reading development as the learning of phonological awareness skills—which are simply a means to becoming the readers and writers our children are capable of. A child's literacy abilities and development, therefore, are defined not just by a narrow set of skills like the number of sounds they know, but by the assets, mindsets, and dispositions they bring to the journey of becoming literate.

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Phonics is defined as the relationship between the sounds of oral language and the letters or spellings that represent those sounds when written. Children use phonics skills when they apply their knowledge of sounds and spelling patterns to their reading and writing of words. This overview of the *what*, *how*, and *why* of phonics instruction:

- Values phonics as a foundational skill for learning to read that must be taught systematically and explicitly

- Takes a culturally relevant-sustaining approach to the teaching of phonics, which considers how the languages, cultures, identities, and interests of children are relevant to and integrated into our teaching of phonics

- Recognizes that the teaching of phonics skills is one aspect of literacy that must be taught alongside of other areas such as comprehension, vocabulary, knowledge development, and criticality

What is Phonics?

Foundational Skills that Underlie Phonics

- **Phonemic awareness:** the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate individual sounds—called *phonemes*—in spoken words

- **Print concepts**: the understanding that what we say can be represented in print. And that in print, letters make up words and words make up phrases and sentences that collectively represent meaning

- **Alphabetic knowledge:** the ability to identify each specific letter, know the difference between them, and begin to write them

If we consider our English language to have three layers, **phonics represents a firm understanding of the first two layers** and it significantly influences the third:

1. The **alphabetic layer**, in which basic letter-sound correspondences are learned

2. The **pattern layer,** where children examine consonant-vowel patterns

3. The **meaning and morphological layer**, where children learn new vocabulary and make generalizations about the meaning structures of affixes, prefixes, and suffixes on words

How Do We Teach Phonics?

» **Explicitly and Systematically**

Explicit and systematic instruction, as defined by the ILA, is critical to teaching phonics effectively:

*"**Explicit** means that the initial introduction of a letter–sound relationship, or phonics skill, is directly stated to students. For example, we tell students that the /s/ sound is represented by the letter* s*. This is more effective than the discovery method because it does not rely on prerequisite skills that some students might not have. Being explicit, however, does not mean that students cannot play with letters and sounds during the instructional cycle. In fact, word awareness activities like word building and word sorts allow students to become flexible in their knowledge of sound-spellings and solidifies that learning.*

*"Being **systematic** means that we follow a continuum from easy to more complex skills, slowly introducing each new skill. Systematic instruction includes a review and repetition cycle to achieve mastery and goes from the known to the new in a way that makes the new learning more obvious and easier for students to grasp. For example, after students learn to read simple short-vowel CVC words like* run*,* cat*, and* hop*, they are often introduced to the skill final-e as in the words* hate *and* hope*."*

While a teacher's knowledge of how phonics typically develops will help them to fill gaps in children's development, we need to recognize that all children develop differently and will need different intensities of phonics instruction. Instruction should start with an assessment to determine what skills children need, and how often they need them.

» **In Service of Reading and Writing**

Phonics should be taught **in service of** reading and writing, not in place of other instruction needed to learn, read, and write well. The goal of phonics instruction is to decode and encode words to read, write, and spell (as opposed to the goal being to learn a set of skills in isolation. Knowing what "r-controlled vowel" means, for example, is only useful as it helps you to decode and encode). Spelling and writing are critical components of phonics instruction. Learning to decode and encode are connected, simultaneous processes that require the same set of skills (phonics knowledge: the knowledge of letters and sounds and how words work).

» **With Multiple Approaches**

Traditionally, there have been **two basic approaches for teaching phonics**:

- **Analytic instruction,** where we compare words to identify patterns or examine similarities in word families, like the *–at* word family, and then apply this knowledge to new words.

- **Synthetic phonics**, which focuses on individual sounds and teaches children to blend individual letter sounds together to form words (e.g., *c-a-t/cat*).

Both approaches to phonics, analytic and synthetic, should be used when teaching phonics, and can be done explicitly and systematically. A contemporary, holistic approach to phonics instruction that takes both approaches into account is "word study." Word study is an instructional methodology to teach the alphabetic and pattern layers of the writing system.

» **By Utilizing a Child's Home Language**

A child who is already decoding in their home language can capitalize on that strength by understanding the similarities and differences inherent in decoding in their home language and English (Genesee, 2012). An educators' awareness of the sound spellings in English that do and do not occur in a child's home language (for example, sounds like d, p, t are the same in English and Spanish) will help them devote more instructional time to the sound spellings that are not as likely to transfer between the child's home language and English (such as short vowels or the sound of j). Instruction of these sounds to English learners is best aided by visual clues and by clear demonstrations of the articulation of sounds.

Because children learning English may develop an understanding of the alphabet and letter-sound correspondence in English before fully developing phonemic awareness in English, educators can regard phonics as a pathway to phonemic awareness, and be willing to work on phonemic awareness as they work on phonics (Barone and Xu, 2008), as opposed to waiting to teach phonics until phonological awareness is mastered.

When assessing English learners on their knowledge of sounds in English (school English is white mainstream English, which is the language of instruction), educators must keep in mind that children with different home languages may be aware of sound-symbol connections and are just pronouncing them differently. It is particularly important to be aware of these aspects of pronunciation when assessing letter sounds, so that the assessment provides accurate depiction of what children know (Barone and Xu, 2008).

In addition to utilizing knowledge of a child's home language in the instruction and assessment of school English, multilanguage learners also benefit from the integration of vocabulary and phonics instruction. A first grade emergent English learner working to decode the short vowel patterns in *bag*, *rag, wag, nag, tag,* and *sag,* must also understand the meaning of these words.

» **With a Gradual Release Approach**

An approach to teaching phonics that includes a brief whole class mini-lesson that names the concept or skill of focus is important. Instruction within balanced literacy practices will then help show children HOW to use the skills in reading and writing. Pointing out how we use skills and using clear, consistent language related to what skills are and how to use them—through modeling, guiding, and independent practice—will help children to transfer skills.

It is especially critical that in the early years (K/1) we are modeling, getting children to watch us read and write, while explicitly naming behaviors we are using to read and write. This begins with modeling concepts of print. Adding in word study to small group reading instruction is particularly beneficial because instruction can be differentiated for the small group and practiced in the context of instructional level text, providing the appropriate amount of challenge.

» **Across a Range of Texts**

Children should have access to a diverse set of texts in which to practice phonics skills. Practice in decodable texts early on can be useful, but not sufficient. In other words, these texts should not be the only type of text they have access to. Quality texts (that are not considered "decodable") will give children a chance to apply their knowledge of phonics skills to decode words while also comprehending; decodable texts often lack story line and depth.

We know what does work, and **research tells us *what does not work***:

- Phonics worksheets
- Spelling lists to memorize
- Teaching only phonics "rules"
- "Drill and kill" type teaching of phonics through only flash cards and memorization
- Inappropriate alphabet key words
- Focus on phonics above all other areas of reading development
- Focus on the teaching of reading skills, including phonics

Why Phonics is Critical to Reading Development

- **Phonics underlies children's ability to read and spell words.** When children understand that oral language is written as print and how the spelling of words is related to speech sounds, they can decode (break apart and blend) words to read, and they can encode (segment) words to spell. A lack of phonics skills in the early years can lead to children relying primarily on other, less reliable strategies like meaning to figure out words. It can also lead to an inability to decode/chunk longer multisyllabic words that children encounter later on in reading.

- **Phonics is connected to the other areas of literacy instruction.** Phonemic awareness is the process by which readers start understanding how sounds make up words, and phonics is the understanding of how letters and sounds are connected. Early literacy skills like these lead directly into the process of decoding. The more skilled a reader is with decoding, the more fluent they become. The impact of phonics learning is far-reaching. As phonics increases, so too does the reader's ability to comprehend what they are reading. And, once children can spell words, they can write with more fluency and meaning. The big idea is that phonics instruction, the knowledge of letter-sound patterns applied to reading and writing, is a means to becoming a reader and writer. It is only one part of the journey. Becoming the readers and writers our children are capable of becoming requires not just acquiring the skills, but participating in instruction that is meaningful to them, and aligned to their identities, languages, cultures, and interests.

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Fluency is defined as the ability to read words accurately, smoothly, and with expression. It is a bridge between word recognition and comprehension; fluency allows readers to make meaning from a text "on the run." By listening to a child's oral reading fluency, we can learn information that immediately informs our instruction. This overview of the *what*, *why,* and *how* of fluency instruction:

- Values fluency as a foundational skill for learning to read
- Takes a culturally relevant-sustaining approach to the teaching of fluency, which considers how the home language, cultures, identities, and interests of children are relevant to and integrated into our teaching of fluency
- Recognizes that the fluency instruction is one aspect of literacy that must be taught alongside of—and connected to— other areas of literacy learning

What Are the Elements of Reading Fluency?

- **Accuracy** is the ability to read the words in the text as they are written. The goal of accurate reading is automatic and effortless word recognition—no decoding, no word solving, just reading.
- **Rate** is the speed at which a person reads text. The goal is for the reader to have the ability to read the text at the appropriate speed, and to determine what is appropriate based on the nature of the text.
- **Phrasing** is the ability to group words together as in normal speech, pausing appropriately between phrases, clauses, and sentences. Phrasing requires readers to read texts in meaningful chunks, paying attention to prepositions and punctuation.
- **Expression** is the ability to read words in text with the appropriate stress and intonation. It's often called "reading with feeling." Prosody, the defining feature of expressive reading, requires proficiency in all the variables that speakers use to help convey aspects of meaning and to make their speech lively: timing, phrasing, emphasis, and intonation.

While these four elements traditionally encompass what "fluent" reading looks like, we must be cautious in defining a child only in terms of these four elements. For example, people of color have historically developed "fluency" in "reading" social contexts and environments—temperaments and moods of people. This way of "reading" is a skill that needs to be counted as a demonstration of reading (Muhammad, 2020). It is dangerous to define any child's reading ability by a limited number of skills.

Speaking of what's "counted" in terms of measures of fluency, we must recognize how the text children are being asked to read affects their oral reading fluency, and therefore their performance on an assessment. Because fluency is so intricately connected to word recognition skills, oral reading expression (prosody), and text comprehension, fluency can be very context-specific. That is to say, a child may be more fluent in one text over another. For this reason, when a child appears to read "disfluently," particularly children developing English language proficiency, all the components of the reading process need to be explored and understood to get at the root of why a child may not be fluent with a particular text (Montero and Kuhn, 2016). This exploration must include whether or not they are being given texts to read are of interest to them and are reflective of their identities.

Why is Fluency Critical to Reading Development?

Fluency is intricately connected to other areas of literacy learning. Phonological awareness is the process by which readers start understanding how sounds make up words and phonics is the understanding of how letters and sounds are connected. Early literacy skills like these lead directly into the process of decoding. The more skilled a reader is with decoding, the more fluent they become. As fluency increases, so does the reader's ability to comprehend what they are reading. When readers no longer have to think about every sound and letter and can, instead, read with automaticity, their brains can attend to meaning. Fluency, supported by phonemic awareness and phonics, is vital to reading comprehension.

Conversely, a lack of fluent reading behaviors, referred to as disfluency, can affect a reader's motivation and comprehension. When a child's reading slows down periodically, it is difficult for them to make meaning from the text because so much of their mental energy is devoted to deciphering words. Reading can become a labored, tedious task that is almost completely devoid of meaning, satisfaction, and enjoyment. If reading consistently takes so much work, children will understandably not persist through text, and not be motivated to read in the first place.

How Can We Support the Development of Fluency?

» **Read to children**

Reading aloud allows children to hear what fluent reading sounds like. While reading to children, we model and explicitly teach what it takes to read accurately, at an appropriate rate, and with good phrasing and expression. The books we are reading aloud to children must be representative of their home languages, cultures, and communities. Consider having children make and read their own bilingual books based on their own experiences—this can be especially supportive of fluency as children are often able to expressively read words and sentences they wrote themselves and have meaning to them.

» **Provide supported practice**

This experience lets children feel what it's like to apply fluency skills. Having children read repetitive lines in text together or share a rhyming poem helps them get a feel for rhythm and patterns. Other supportive practices for developing fluency include reading while listening, where children listen repeatedly to a recording of text while reading along, until they are able to read the material on their own with fluency. Visual supports in the texts will further support English learners in using this strategy, which simultaneously exposes children to oral and written language in an engaging and interesting manner.

» **Incorporate activities for performing reading**

When children are able to perform reading through readers theater or other performance styles, they have an opportunity to demonstrate expression in different ways. Oral story-telling, for example, which may not include reading from a script, is another form of literacy that can be particularly joyful and evident of a child's ability to fluently express ideas and storylines. A broader view of literacy encompasses the multiple ways literacy can look in context, and honors the community wisdom and cultural traditions of the diverse group of children in our classroom. Performance reading of all kinds is often a joyful experience for children—particularly when the performance celebrates a part of who they are. Joy in instruction is critical to engagement and motivation, which is fundamental to reading development.

» **Give children time to read**

Children should read often. When they read and reread texts, they gain fluency and are able to read smoothly with each repeated reading. This reading time also enhances motivation. By extending independent reading time to encompass these various ways of reading—alone and in collaboration, with a new text or a beloved familiar text, silently and out loud—we send the message that there are many enjoyable ways to read, and that how we become fluent readers in our second language or our first language can be approached in a variety of ways (Montero and Kuhn, 2016).

» **Articulate the significance of fluent reading**

Fluency, one foundational reading skill, is a means to becoming the readers children are capable of becoming. Children must understand that these skills are relevant and useful in their lives so that they can express themselves, gain knowledge, analyze texts and the world around them, and make a difference in the lives of others. In other words—connecting the dots between fluency and reading, reading and writing, and literacy and opportunity is crucial for children. Connected to this is the idea that the learning of foundational skills must be balanced with time spent on other areas of literacy learning like comprehension, building knowledge and intellect, and criticality.

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A child's literacy development depends upon the depth and breadth of their vocabulary knowledge. Words, written and spoken, are the tools children use to interact with and make sense of their internal and external worlds. This overview of the *why, what*, and *how* of vocabulary instruction:

- Takes the position that words matter. They are powerful. Written and spoken, they are the tools children use to interact with and make sense of their internal and external worlds

- Takes a culturally relevant-sustaining approach to the teaching of vocabulary, which considers how the languages, cultures, identities, and interests of children are connected to and integrated into our teaching of vocabulary

- Recognizes that the teaching of vocabulary is most impactful when paired with the teaching of other areas of literacy development such as foundational skills, comprehension, knowledge development, and criticality

Why is Building Vocabulary Important?

Words help to shape a child's identity and experiences, and they are the mechanism with which they express themselves. Children bring a rich repertoire of words with them as they enter our classrooms, words that come from their families, experiences, cultures, communities, and languages. By affirming the words children already know and utilizing this bank of words in the classroom, we honor the words that have already shaped who they are. This helps us understand vocabulary learning as additive. We are adding onto children's banks of words when we are exposing them to, and teaching, words that may be less commonly used in speaking and more prevalent in texts. The overall difference in the number of words in a children's vocabulary is one key factor in the equation of academic success. The more words they know, the better they can express themselves and realize their full capabilities as readers and writers.

What is Vocabulary?

While there is no dispute over what constitutes a word, there is some differing opinion on what words we should be focusing on during school time instruction. Beck and McKeown have coined the "3 Tier" system in their book *Bringing Words to Life.* A word's frequency of use, complexity, and meaning determines which tier it will fall into. While Beck and McKeown classified words with native English speakers in mind, Dr. Margarita Calderón utilized the concept of language tiers to align the needs of English Language Learners in her article, "Effective Instruction for English Learners."

» Tier 1

For native English speakers, **Tier 1** words are "everyday" words—words that typically appear in oral conversations such that children are exposed to them at high frequencies from a very early age. These everyday words don't usually require direct instruction. Children pick them up because they are used in casual conversation and can also be heard frequently in simple books.

Tier 1 words include **basic nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions such as** *bed, go, eat, brother, blue,* and *sad.*

For English Language Learners, these are words that they typically know the *concept* of in their primary language but may not know the label or word in English. **Our vocabulary instruction must explicitly teach the differences between school English and children's home languages.** Charity-Hudley, co-author of *Understanding English Language Variations in U.S. Schools,* explains,

"School English, both written and spoken, tends to use vocabulary items that are more literary than colloquial, such as entrance rather than door... beginning rather than start. Indeed, from elementary school spelling tests to vocabulary questions on standardized tests... cultural indicators suggest that to be educated in our society is to have a big vocabulary. Yet students may not have been taught explicitly about contrasts in vocabulary words... It is therefore important to instruct students wherever possible as to differences between academic terms and colloquial terms for the same concepts." (p. 26)

Other Tier 1 words are simple cognates. **Cognates are words in two languages that share a similar meaning, spelling, and pronunciation** (like *family/familia*). These words may not require instruction to learn their meaning because children may know the word meanings in their primary language.

» Tier 2

Tier 2 are the words that are **important to teach explicitly and in context**. For native English speakers these are words that:

- Are characteristic of written text and are found less frequently in daily conversations
- Are found across a variety of domains and different types of literature
- And are important for reading comprehension and descriptive writing

Tier 2 words include **descriptive nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions such as** *rush, devour, forlorn,* **and** *considerably*.

For English Language Learners Tier 2 words can also include:
- High-frequency words in the children's readers or listening comprehension texts
- Words frequently found in decodable books, such as *huge* or *saw,* that are not easily decodable
- Words with multiple meanings, such as *push*, *cold*, or *ring*
- Words typically used in oral or written instructions such as *describe*, *clarify*, *identify,* or *label*

» Tier 3

For all of our children, **Tier 3 words are low frequency, context-specific vocabulary**. These are words that are found in specific domains such as academic subjects like history, science, or math. Some examples include *isthmus, divisor, photosynthesis,* and *acrylic.*

Words associated with **hobbies, sports, and occupations** can also be Tier 3 words. Some examples include *skein, bogey,* and *chiropractor*. They are important to teach as part of the content or subject area you are studying.

Finally, in addition to the three tiers of vocabulary, we need to teach phrases that may be new to children or use different meanings of known words. These phrases are often figurative language, like the idiom "it's raining cats and dogs" or "catch a break."

With these tiers of words in mind, you can begin to determine which words should be at the center of your instruction.

How Do We Teach Vocabulary?

Let's look for a moment at the ways vocabulary has historically been taught. The standard approach is to introduce a list of words to children on Monday. Children study definitions of the words, craft sentences using the words, and then on Friday take the vocabulary test. Most often children learn to spell the words as well as learning their meanings.

In addition to this type of instruction, most teachers look for opportunities throughout their day to pay some additional attention to vocabulary. Perhaps by introducing some new words in reading lessons, or adding the technical vocabulary in science or social studies lessons to a word wall.

With this approach to vocabulary instruction we can, at best, teach between 300 and 800 words. This is not enough. Vocabulary instruction that relies on expanding children's vocabularies one word at a time will not help us reach our goals in growing and expanding a child's repertoire of words. Instead let's consider vocabulary instruction that takes some of the indirect and direct methods of the past, connects them to children's identities and to quality literature, and focuses on children really *knowing* words. Because when we really know a word, it is a part of both our receptive and expressive language. We appreciate it, use it in oral communication, chose it for our writing, and make sense of it in our reading.

The question of how to include vocabulary in our instruction begins by making a potential shift in our thinking. **We want to understand how we can teach vocabulary so that children can become better readers, writers, and thinkers**… NOT how we can teach children to memorize the definitions of certain words. Again, the ultimate goal of vocabulary instruction is to help children to really *know* words. We know that strategies like taking vocabulary tests or looking up words in a dictionary and writing them in sentences don't result in real word learning. Instead, **we need to consider what we can do to foster authentic word learning in children.**

Michael Graves, author of *The Vocabulary Book*, provides us with a four-ply plan that includes both implicit, or *indirect* vocabulary learning, and explicit, or *direct* vocabulary learning.

Direct vocabulary learning refers to children learning vocabulary through:
1. Teaching individual words
2. Teaching word learning strategies
3. Fostering word consciousness

We have added a fourth idea to the direct teaching of vocabulary:
4. Utilizing home language

Let's explore each of these in more detail and understand their implications for us.

Teaching Individual Words

In teaching individual words, we have two decisions to make: what words we will teach, and when we will teach them.

To decide what words we will teach, the 3-Tier system we learned about earlier will be most helpful. When we read aloud to children, we want to highlight a couple Tier 2 or 3 words, depending on the text. In a fiction text, you are more likely to encounter Tier 2 words like *persistent*. In a non-fiction text about plant life, for example, you are more likely to encounter a Tier 3 word like *photosynthesis*.

To decide when will we teach these words, we need to think about the opportunities we have throughout the school day. Remember, we know that teaching words out of context, or for no purpose, is not beneficial to children.

The three best opportunities we have to teach individual words are:

1. **Before and during our read alouds**
   This is when we want to both point out and define some of the sophisticated language that authors use. When we provide definitions for children, we want them to be what we refer to as "child friendly." For example, when we define the word *persistent* during a read aloud we might say "persistent means to keep trying and never give up."

   We want to take opportunities to highlight words and their definitions in the read alouds we do across the curriculum—in science, social studies, and math as well. Some additional strategies for teaching individual words to English Language Learners include (Silverman, 2016):

   - Say the word to children and have them say it back
   - Show a printed version of the word, and have children notice the letters and sounds in the word
   - Offer a child-friendly, highly comprehensible definition of the word
   - Use actions, gestures, and/or pictures to explain the meaning of the word
   - Give children examples of the word in different contexts

2. **Before and during small group instruction**
   We may select words to focus on that are challenging for readers, and should also choose words that contribute to the overall meaning of the text.

3. **In a conversation with children in which we are presenting a "word of the day" or week**
   Highlighting a word that is connected to weekly themes and learning helps children add new words to their schema. We'll touch on this more when we talk about fostering word consciousness.

   One important caution when we teach individual words is to be mindful of how we use and introduce dictionaries, which should be presented to children as a useful tool, not as the sole or even the primary means of developing a stronger vocabulary; simply having children look up words in the dictionary will not expand their vocabulary substantially, but it may help them figure out the meaning of particular words when they read complex text.

Word Learning Strategies

The second component of direct vocabulary learning is **teaching word learning strategies**, like how to infer word meaning from context clues, or use word parts to figure out the meanings of words.

We know that lots of words can be figured out by inferring their meaning from context. This strategy is often referred to as "using context clues." Also, the meanings of 60% of the new words children encounter can be inferred by analyzing word parts or morphemes. Like the example: (-tele (far) confer (talk) teleconference).

Children who have an awareness of the meanings of word parts like prefixes, suffixes, and roots can make links between the pronunciation, spelling, and meaning of many challenging words.

Fostering Word Consciousness

The third component of direct vocabulary learning is fostering word consciousness. Word consciousness is our awareness of the role and the power of words. Word-conscious children enjoy words and are zealous about learning them.

Word consciousness can be built by including more vocabulary in the print environment with word walls, word banks, and a posted word of the day—drawn from words related to a unit, topic, or group of texts the class is learning about. Word consciousness can also be fostered by teachers who express their own excitement and curiosity about new words and encourage children to ponder and play with the new words they learn. Teachers should take opportunities to demonstrate excitement and curiosity for words that are part of a certain

language, variation of English, or are significant to a culture or community. Attention to these words helps to highlight the diverse cultures and identities in the classroom and in the world, while enriching and sustaining the experiences of children.

Educators need to send the message to children that discovering words and learning new words is interesting, powerful, and fun. When we teach children to be conscious of the role and power of words, they begin to take ownership over discovering, learning, and using new words on their own.

Utilize Home Languages

Because no language is more prestigious than another, the culture and instruction of classrooms must convey that all languages are valuable and contribute to learning and growth in our classrooms. One way to do this is to use translanguaging in the context of read alouds or shared writing, where a text might be read or composed in more than one language, and where children have the opportunity to use both vocabulary from their home language and academic English vocabulary from school to discuss or write about a topic (Hesson et al., 2014; Garcia et al., 2020). Another is to teach children how to recognize cognates, words in different languages that have the same origin (*familia/family*). With cognates, children can use what they know about a word in one language to figure out its meaning in another language. Spanish and English have many cognates (Montelongo and Hernandez, 2013).

Indirect vocabulary learning opportunities occur through wide reading and oral language.

Children's vocabulary learning is magnified when we combine indirect and direct vocabulary learning. When we read aloud to children and show them how we notice words, try to define them in our own words, display them, and purposefully intend to use that word in our speaking and writing—we are supporting them to do the same thing when they encounter words on their own. We want them, while reading independently, to notice new and interesting words, write them in a word bank, and play with those words by comparing them to other words or categorizing them. Doing these things will help them to really know the word.

When it comes to reading to children, reading with children, and having children read independently, **the texts we share with them and give them access to matter**. Children's motivation for reading increases when they can see representations of their identities and cultures in books—when they see their languages and words used and celebrated by authors.

Finally, **oral language** is critical to vocabulary instruction. Considering ways in which children can engage with printed, posted text and read it with rhythm and expression will enhance their understanding and appreciation of words. Also, giving them opportunities to share oral stories from their cultures and communities will give them a chance to use and celebrate their words, while growing their classmates' word knowledge.

The big idea is that indirect and direct vocabulary learning not only happens side by side, but that the indirect learning opportunities—those rich and varied learning experiences—are very much enhanced by the direct vocabulary instruction we do throughout the day. Children's learning of words increases exponentially when we recognize and value the words they bring to our classrooms, help bring new words to life for children, demonstrate amazement of the power and beauty of words, and provide opportunities for children to interact with words in a variety of ways.

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Children's **Literacy** Initiative

This overview of comprehension explains *what* comprehension is, *how* to teach it with a culturally relevant-sustaining approach, and *why* it is critical for learning to read. The cultures, identities, and interests of children are central to their development of comprehension skills, and therefore central to the planning of comprehension instruction. This overview details the essential threads that underlie and contribute to comprehension growth and development—in other words, what elements should be at the forefront of all comprehension instruction, and the scaffolds that can support children's comprehension- i.e., the methods we use within our lessons to support children to make meaning from text.

What is Comprehension?

Reading comprehension has been defined as "the act of constructing meaning with oral and written text" (Duke and Carlisle, 2011). Because reading comprehension is such an important aspect of literacy, we need, as teachers, to understand what it is and how it develops. Comprehension does not reside in a text, but in the reader's interaction with the text. As a reader reads, they create a mental representation of the meaning of the text (Kintsch, 1998; McNamara, Miller, and Bransford, 2016).

One basic model of reading comprehension views it as an interaction between three elements:
1. **the reader** who is doing the reading,
2. **the text** that is being comprehended, and
3. the activity or **the purpose** for reading

(RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). Each of these three elements interacts to influence comprehension in a particular social context. We can support children's comprehension by taking into consideration all three elements of the comprehension "triangle":
- what the reader brings to the text (their identities, knowledge, histories, vocabulary, skills, strategies, etc.),
- the text itself (its language, syntax, content, structure, etc.),
- and the activity or purpose for reading (the context in which the reading is occurring).

How Do We Teach Reading Comprehension?

The Essential Threads of Reading Comprehension

A child's capacity to comprehend any given text depends on many variables, including their identity, oral language, foundational reading skills, vocabulary, background knowledge, and their engagement with the task of reading—all of which can also be impacted by a child's motivation, the complexity of the text being read, and the child's familiarity with the topic and genre of the text. To better understand the "tapestry" of reading comprehension, let's consider some of the "essential threads" which contribute to its growth and development in children.

» **Oral Language**
It has been said that "reading floats on a sea of talk" (Britton, 1970; Mills, 2009). Research has tied oral language skills to learning how to comprehend, and classroom discussions, in a variety of forms, to the deepening of children's understanding of texts (Hadley et al, 2020; Mills, 2009; Duke, 2011). The development of oral language proficiency has been shown to be especially crucial to the development of MLL/ELL's comprehension. It is the cornerstone from which all these other foundational skills grow (August and Shanahan, 2007; Helman et al., 2012). **Student-centered dialogues and daily conversation** give MLLs accesses to *comprehensible input*, opportunities to listen to speech they understand), as well as *venues for output*, opportunities to participate in talk (Cummins, 1994).

» **Criticality**
Recognizing that comprehension is an active and often collaborative process of making meaning, effective teachers of reading comprehension foster classroom discussions that affirm children's funds of knowledge and encourage criticality: they honor the wisdom and knowledge children bring with them from their homes and communities, and they encourage children to recognize as well as challenge representations of power, race, and gender in texts and the larger world (Moll et al.,1992; Souto-Manning et al., 2018; Muhammad, 2020).

» **Foundational Reading Skills**
The foundational reading skills of decoding and fluency are directly linked to comprehension (National Early Literacy Panel, 2009; National Reading Panel, 2000). Without these skills and fluency children have to use all of their attention just to blend together letter sounds, leaving them with very little attention or cognitive energy to devote to thinking about the meaning of what they are reading.

» Vocabulary
The connection between vocabulary and comprehension has been well established by research. As the reading researcher Elfrieda Hiebert has pointed out, "The words our students know make a big difference in how well they comprehend text. Words represent knowledge, and knowledge about a text's topic strongly predicts comprehension of a text" (Verhoeven, van Leeuwe, & Vermeer, 2011; Hiebert, 2020). Therefore, in addition to the wide range of useful words children are learning *from* texts and class discussions, there is a wide range of useful words children bring with them from their homes and communities to the comprehension of texts and classroom discussions, including the words they know in their own language or dialect. Children's "own" words, just as much as academic vocabulary, are important to the processes of making meaning from texts. (Varelas and Pappas, 2006).

» Knowledge
Background knowledge and general knowledge are both linked to reading comprehension. Two of the most prominent models of comprehension, the construction-integration model and the schema-theory model, view comprehension as the source of knowledge, and knowledge as the source of comprehension: "We bring knowledge to the comprehension process, and that knowledge shapes our comprehension. When we comprehend, we gain new information that changes our knowledge, which is then available for later comprehension" (Duke et al., 2011). It is apparent from these models and later research that when we help children build disciplinary and world knowledge, as well as background knowledge, we support their ongoing comprehension growth in a number of ways (Duke et al., 2011; Cervetti and Hiebert, 2015).

Knowledge includes what an individual or group **already knows and brings to comprehension**, not just content-specific knowledge (Hattan and Lupo, 2020; Moll et al., 1992). For this reason we need to examine whose knowledge matters at school, and whose knowledge is undervalued, an inquiry which can lead to more conscious attempts to connect the cultural, personal, and language knowledge children bring with them from their homes and communities to our comprehension instruction (Hattan and Lupo, 2020; Moll et al.,1992). Practices such as translanguaging, where children are able to move back and forth between more than one language, and family storytelling, where children tell and write stories from their own lives, send the message that our classrooms are places where comprehension is a responsive, generative practice that builds on—rather than diminishes—what children already know and are able to do.

» Reading Engagement and Motivation
Rudine Sims Bishops long ago pointed out—and numerous researchers and educators have since confirmed—that children's reading motivation and comprehension depends on opportunities to work with texts that both **reflect and extend** their knowledge and identities, texts that are "mirrors," "windows," and "sliding glass doors" (Bishop, 1990; Milner IV, 2020). Children's motivation to read will be dependent upon whether they can **see themselves** in school texts, when the texts used in their classroom are "mirrors" into their lives and experiences (Milner IV, 2020).

To foster greater motivation and engagement, teachers and coaches can begin implementing more collaborative discussions about culturally relevant and "interesting and edgy texts," discussions that build comprehension, as well as cultural literacy and critical literacy skills. Through such robust discussions, children can then learn how to *use* what they comprehend to do something, such as "tell a story, explain a situation, argue with an author or a classmate, maybe even plan to change the world" (P. David Pearson, et al. 2020).

Reading engagement and motivation has been highly correlated with comprehension (Guthrie et al., 2006; Duke et al., 2011). When children are engaged with reading and motivated to read, they show greater stamina, persistence, and willingness to figure out what they may not initially comprehend in a text. Providing motivating texts and contexts for reading is an important component of any attempt to build children's comprehension (Duke et al., 2011).

» Integration of Reading and Writing
Like talk and oral language, writing is intrinsic to the development of reading comprehension. Reading and writing mutually reinforce one another and have been shown to draw on some of the same cognitive processes (Shanahan, 2006). Through writing and talk, children are often able to build richer mental representations of the text they read than they might be able to through reading alone. It appears that revisiting and re-representing ideas in many modes helps us better understand those ideas, and that giving children chances to think through content from reading in writing and talk allows them to further build up their comprehension of what they have read (Duke et al., 2011).

» Volume and Range of Reading

Because the volume of experiences children have with reading texts in and out of the classroom has been shown to correlate with their general reading success, it is generally assumed that exposure to a volume and range of text, particularly in a motivating situation, builds comprehension, as many studies of voluntary summer reading programs have demonstrated (Taylor et al., 2000; Allington et al., 2010; Duke et al., 2011).

» Integrated Instructional Practices

Instructional practices that support the overall development of reading comprehension need to integrate the essential threads described above. It is this integration—the way that high-quality instructional practices draw on more than one essential thread—that makes for strong comprehension instruction. The instructional practices that allow children to think through the same topic or a theme in different modes (reading, writing, and oral language) with a range of the essential threads are the ones that will foster the rich and nuanced understanding that is the ultimate goal of reading comprehension.

Comprehension Scaffolds

Comprehension scaffolds are the specific tools we use in individual lessons to scaffold and support children's understanding of complex texts. In other words, comprehension scaffolds are something we use selectively when necessary to help readers understand complex texts in specific lessons. Our goal in using scaffolds is always to foster children's agency while providing the scaffolding they need to be successful, gradually releasing the support as it's no longer needed. This is especially true for MLLs, who benefit from scaffolds but may require different scaffolds at different times as they become progressively more proficient in English. The practice of scaffolding must also value what children already know, prior to giving support. For example, a teacher might ask a multilingual learner what words or phrases in the text the child already understands, before showing them to how use those words and phrases to support their understanding of the more confusing parts of the text.

Common Comprehension Scaffolds	
What	**Why**
Comprehension Strategies: • Setting purposes for reading • Previewing and predicting • Activating prior knowledge • Monitoring, clarifying, and fixing • Visualizing and creating visual representations • Self-questioning and thinking aloud • Summarizing and retelling *From Duke et al., 2011*	Research has shown that comprehension strategies can support children's comprehension of text in various content domains (Duke, 2011). However, **over-emphasis on comprehension strategies** can inhibit rather than promote comprehension, if children come to think the point of learning the strategies is to learn the strategies, not to understand the text itself. When teaching comprehension strategies, it is therefore important to not over-teach them and to keep the text and its meaning—not the processes of enacting the strategies—at the center of instruction. Some researchers have also suggested that "rigid, highly routinized strategy instruction may not be as effective as conventional discussions focused on knowledge acquisition" (McKeown et al., 2009; Wilkinson & Son, 2011; Duke et al., 2011).

Text Structures
• **Elements of Structure in Narrative Text**
  - Character
  - Setting
  - Goal
  - Problem
  - Plot or action
  - Resolution
  - Theme
• **Elements of Structure in Informational Text**
  - Description
  - Sequence
  - Problem and solution
  - Cause and effect
  - Compare and contrast
From Duke et al., 2011
	Research has established that knowledge of text structures supports comprehension (Duke, 2011). The goal of text structure instruction is to help children understand how particular genres and types of text are structured, so that they know what to expect and think about when reading those texts. For example, an introduction to narrative text structures might include orientation to one or all of the following aspects of narrative text structure: character, setting, goal, problem, plot or action, resolution, and theme. And an introduction to different kinds of informational text structure might include orientation to any of the following methods of organizing informational text: description, sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect, compare and contrast.

Common Comprehension Scaffolds

What	Why
Rereading • Understanding the gist or big idea • Understanding complex vocabulary • Understanding complex syntax and/or grammar • Repairing comprehension "break downs" and "solving" confusion	Rereading is often used as a method to help children figure out sections of text they do not understand, and can be a useful strategy for adjusting one's comprehension of a text when it "breaks down." Therefore, children working with complex text, particularly informational text, can be encouraged to reread sections where they became confused and see if slowing down, rethinking, annotating, and checking vocabulary in that section of the text as they reread helps them to better understand the section.
Annotation • Slowing down to deepen understanding • Noticing and noting new learning, new vocabulary, questions, and literary elements • Leaving "thinking tracks"	Annotation can be used to deepen comprehension and get children to actively think about a text as they read it. Annotating can take many forms, including underlining or marking particular aspects of the text, or jotting notes in the margins. Annotating for specific aspects of texts named in the standards is currently common practice ("underline the main idea"), but this is by no means the only or even the most compelling way annotation can be used. It can, in other forms, be a fun and useful tool to get even the youngest readers reading more actively, as they star passages where they learned something new or put question marks next to passages they do not understand, and may return to reread.
Reading Guides Common tasks for reading guides: • Answering questions • Completing charts • Constructing diagrams • Drawing pictures • Writing responses From Stahl, 2020	Reading guides are guides containing questions to be answered and other tasks to be filled in as children read. With subheadings to help children keep their place while they read, reading guides are meant to encourage children to slow down and think more deeply about crucial sections of the text which are necessary for understanding the whole text. They are not intended to be quizzes and worksheets, test prep, or graded exercises. Rather, they should be "guides on the side" for thinking along with the text (Stahl, 2020). Each reading guide is unique, as it contains just the elements necessary for helping children think through a particular text.

Why is Reading Comprehension Important?

Comprehension is the ultimate goal of all reading and therefore the ultimate goal of all reading instruction. Comprehension is the reason we teach the foundational skills like phonics and fluency. At the most immediate level, it allows a child to grow as a reader and a thinker because the child is understanding what he or she is learning from reading texts. On a more far-reaching level, strong reading comprehension is one of the primary skills that allows children, and later young adults, to thrive in school, college, and eventually the professional world. Without good reading comprehension we would not know how to processes, evaluate, and use all the written information around us, on which our lives as citizens and individuals depend.

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Read Aloud & Shared Text

1 = Emerging	2 = Developing	3 = Implementing	4 = Sustaining

Standard/Learning Goal or Focus:		Curriculum/Text:	
What we want to be true based on research and best practices…	Rubric		Notes

Books and Materials

Books and materials are central to the read aloud. The books must be thought-provoking and useful for starting and sustaining discussions and should send affirming messages, heighten joy, and serve as windows and mirrors.

A.1 Critical Literacy Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, and a good candidate for critical literacy instruction. Text contains content, themes, or main ideas that are significant, thought-provoking, and that support analysis.	1 — Text is not complex or grade-level appropriate. 2 — Text is complex but not grade-level appropriate or a good candidate for critical literacy. 3 — Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, and a good candidate for critical literacy. 4 — Text is complex, grade-level appropriate, a good candidate for critical literacy, and considers the identities of the children in the class.	
A.2 Diversity and Inclusion Text contributes to the inclusion of diverse voices and ideas in the curriculum.	1 — Text presents only a narrow perspective (singular story). 2 — Text does not contribute to the inclusion of diverse voices and ideas. 3 — Text adds to the diversity of ideas, perspectives, and authors. 4 — Text adds to the diversity of ideas, perspectives, authors, and contributes to children's understanding of themselves, others, and our world.	
A.3 Social Justice and Equity Text authentically and accurately reflects the identities (racial, cultural, linguistic), topics, histories, interests, experiences, and motivations of people within it.	1 — Text contains racial, cultural, or linguistic stereotypes or inaccurate information on a topic. 2 — Text paints an incomplete or unauthentic picture of the topics or identities. 3 — Text authentically and accurately represents the topics and/or the identities of the people within it. 4 — Text authentically and accurately reflects the topics and the identities of people within it and is either culturally relevant to the children in the classroom or provides them with a window to learn about others.	
A.4 Lesson Alignment Strong alignment exists between the text and standards.	1 — Text does not align with the standard(s) of the lesson. 2 — Text somewhat aligns with the standard(s) of the lesson. 3 — Text strongly aligns with the standard(s) of the lesson. 4 — Text strongly aligns with learning goals of the lesson and allows for connection with other classroom texts, goals, units, experiences, etc.	

Child Actions

Child actions are the expression of the experience children are having during the read aloud. The experience of joy is a result of stimulating intellectual engagement.

B.1 Language Practices

Children use a variety of language practices and play as they make meaning of the text and develop a love of reading and language

1 — Children have little to no opportunities to use all of their language practices.
2 — Children's language practices are accepted and encouraged at some times and in some spaces and not others.
3 — Children engage in language play and exploration using all their language practices.
4 — Children engage in language play and exploration using all their language practices and are excited to explore their own and others' language practices.

B.2 Collaboration

Children grow and share ideas by collaborating with peers through discussion, questioning, debate, writing, etc.

1 — Children have no opportunities to share ideas.
2 — Children share answers to low-level or closed questions.
3 — Children grow ideas by asking questions, talking to each other, debating, and writing.
4 — Children's understanding of the text changes and grows as a result of their ongoing collaboration with peers.

B.3 Anchoring Learning in the Text

Children cite evidence from the text to support their understanding of the deepest meaning of the text, attending to vocabulary, syntax, language choice, illustrations, author's craft, and other text structures and features.

1 — Children do not cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text.
2 — Children inconsistently cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text.
3 — Children consistently cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text.
4 — Children additionally cite evidence from the text that moves the discussion towards the deepest meaning of the text and to support, clarify, and challenge each other's ideas and viewpoints.

B.4 Social Justice and Equity

Children identify and discuss the cultural, linguistic, racial, and social justice ideas/themes within the text.

1 — Children do not identify or discuss issues of social justice and/or equity within the text.
2 — Children identify issues of social justice and/or equity within the text.
3 — Children identify AND discuss issues of social justice and/or equity within the text.
4 — Children independently make connections to external social justice and equity issues (real life, other texts, etc.) using ideas within and beyond the text.

B.5 Connecting Learning

Children synthesize and apply key learnings from text across other texts, learning experiences, and life experiences.

1 — Children do not make connections to the text or key learnings.
2 — Children connect to the text in basic or superficial ways.
3 — Children use their connections to the text to develop key learnings, original ideas, and conclusions about the text.
4 — Children use their connections to the text to develop key learnings, original ideas, and conclusions about the text and apply their key learnings from the text to other texts, learning experiences, and life experiences.

Teacher Actions

Teacher actions are intentional and aligned to the experience children should have. The teacher must genuinely value everyone's presence and recognize that everyone contributes to learning.

C.1 Intellectual Prep & Language Practices

Teacher facilitates discussions among children that support them in arriving at the deepest meaning of the text by asking questions that are grounded in the text; children's contributions and responses in all language practices are honored.

1 — Teacher does most of the talking with little to no facilitation of discussion among children.
2 — Teacher facilitates some peer discussion that may or may not arrive at the deepest meaning of the text.
3 — Teacher facilitates discussions grounded in the text and supports them in arriving at the deepest meaning of the text.
4 — Teacher facilitates discussions among children that honor diversity of thought; children use their language practices freely as they gain a deeper understanding of the text.

C.2 Instructional Routines & Pacing

Teacher uses instructional routines that support children's understanding of the deepest meaning of the text by including appropriate think time, talk time, wait time, and feedback.

1 — Teacher includes instructional routines and feedback primarily focused on classroom management.
2 — Teacher includes too many or too few opportunities for think time, talk time, wait time, and/or feedback that focuses on right or wrong responses.
3 — Teacher includes instructional routines that consider the differences among children by pacing the lesson to provide think time, talk time, wait time, and feedback that is direct and non-judgmental.
4 — Teacher includes instructional routines that consider the differences among children and provide opportunities for children to utilize feedback to reflect, apply, and contribute to their learning and the learning of others.

C.3 Anchoring Learning in the Text

Teacher scaffolds children's understanding of the deepest meaning of the text by drawing their attention to specific phrases, words, illustrations, and language practices that are significant to understanding.

1 — Teacher provides little to no scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text.
2 — Teacher provides some scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text.
3 — Teacher consistently provides scaffolding for children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text.
4 — Teacher flexibly uses scaffolds that meet the diverse needs of children to enable all children to use textual evidence to grow their understanding towards the deepest meaning of the text.

C.4 Social Justice and Equity

Teacher dedicates time and attention to criticality so that children read, write, think, and speak in ways to understand power and equity.

1 — Teacher does not notice or dedicate time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children.
2 — Teacher points out but does not discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children.
3 — Teacher notices and dedicates time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in the text with children.
4 — Teacher notices and dedicates time to discuss social justice themes, bias, stereotypes, and inequities in text with children and prompts and supports children to take action.

C.5 Connecting Learning

Teacher creates opportunities for children to synthesize, connect, and apply their learning; teacher stamps key learnings throughout the lesson.

1 — Teacher does not create opportunities for children to make connections, synthesize, and apply their learning.
2 — Teacher creates opportunities for their own connections or low-level child connections (e.g., "thumbs up if…").
3 — Teacher creates opportunities for children's meaningful connections.
4 — Teacher creates opportunities for children to apply their connections and stamps key learnings.

Classroom Ecology

Classroom ecology is the interdependence of the people and the space. The classroom ecology is inclusive, respectful, and affirming. It promotes a positive self-identity so that children feel comfortable sharing their whole selves: their cultures, languages, gifts, talents, oral traditions, etc. It offers access, choice, voice, and the materials and tools necessary for children to thrive.

D.1 Extend Learning

Spaces, time, and materials are designed to extend and support children's learning (e.g., learning centers, library, writing tools, and anchor charts).

1 — There are no or limited spaces and materials to support and extend children's learning.
2 — There are learning centers and spaces but no time or opportunity to extend or apply learning.
3 — The classroom has materials, time, and spaces where children independently extend their learning from the read aloud.
4 — Spaces or materials offer a variety of choices for children to apply, explore, and extend their learning.

D.2 Seating Arrangements Build Ideas

Seating arrangements promote conversation and sharing of ideas amongst children.

1 — Seating is arranged to facilitate discussion between teacher and children only.
2 — Seating arrangements promote limited conversations (e.g., only turn and talk).
3 — Seating arrangements support whole group and partner discussions.
4 — Seating arrangement configurations are used flexibly to promote conversation and idea sharing.

D.3 Access to Text

Children have access to read aloud text through visual and/or auditory means.

1 — Not all children have access to the text.
2 — Children have access to the text (visual, auditory, tactile) but it is unstructured, inconsistent, not developmentally appropriate, or highly managed by the teacher.
3 — Children have full access to the text (visual, auditory, tactile) to allow them to build comprehension, cite evidence, and learn about the forms and functions of print.
4 — Children have full access and autonomy over the text at any time to cite evidence, review text, and confirm their thinking.

D.4 Culture, Identity, and Language

Artifacts and children's work represent their language practices, interests, cultures, and identities.

1 — There are few or no artifacts or children's work in the classroom.
2 — There are artifacts and children's work in the classroom, but they do not reflect all children's cultures, identities, and languages.
3 — The artifacts and children's work in the classroom represent their language practices, interests, cultures, and identities.
4 — Children access and use the artifacts in the classroom to learn about the classroom, themselves, each other, and the world; artifacts are an extension of their learning.

Notes

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