

Oral Language and Listening Skill Development in Early Childhood

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"I teach 10 children in a Pre-K class. They're all very different, but I notice major differences in their language. Some seem to pay attention when I give directions or read to them, while others don't seem like they're listening. When I ask questions, a few respond, while others look confused and don't respond at all. Some are talking clearly while others are hard to understand—even the other children don't understand a few. Some children confuse words and mix sounds in words, saying things like 'cyclemotor' instead of 'motorcycle' or 'pasghetti' for 'spaghetti,' while others aren't talking at all. How do I support all my students in developing language?"

If you are reading this chapter, you either have the opportunity to impact a child's life or are interested in learning more about how to do so as an effective teacher, specifically through building oral language. While there is a great deal of knowledge and skill you must possess as an effective teacher, your abilities to enhance a child's oral language development will contribute significantly to children's acquisition of literacy skills and future academic success. What you learn in this chapter will connect to other content in this book and will help solidify the connections among language, vocabulary, and literacy. You will learn to contribute positively to a child's oral language development through the process of providing children opportunities to talk, building upon children's verbal expressions by using language facilitation strategies, and creating an environment that invites children to continue practicing and developing their oral language skills.

Objectives: After studying this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

1. Define and describe oral language and its components.
2. Articulate the importance of oral language for a young child's development of emergent and early literacy.
3. Identify examples of different types of vocabulary that comprise a young child's repertoire of oral language skills.
4. Name three basic strategies to prompt language or "invite children to talk."
5. Demonstrate the ability to respond to children's responses using research-based language facilitation strategies and rich language models.
6. Implement environmental arrangement strategies to encourage language use.
7. Create a physical environment that reflects your knowledge and abilities to promote oral language.

(continued)

Objectives (continued)

8. Incorporate oral language building into read-alouds using research-based practices.
9. Delineate at least five ideas for elevating the level of attention to oral language beyond what you may already do.
10. Integrate the features of effective instruction into oral language-building activities.
11. Differentiate your teaching and scaffolding to match the range of oral language abilities among your class of young children.

WHAT IS ORAL LANGUAGE?

Oral language is what is used to express ourselves verbally and is the ability to understand language produced by others. It is comprised of the words and how these are combined in phrases and sentences while one is communicating verbally. Oral language is dependent on vocabulary as well as other language components. If you consider that vocabulary is both expressive and receptive and is required in written and oral form for speaking, listening, writing, and reading, then it is easy to see the connections between vocabulary and oral language. Oral language relies on expressive use and receptive understanding of words in oral form for speaking and listening. While oral language does not directly involve reading and writing of the printed form, it contributes to the development of language for reading and writing. If a child knows the meaning of a word in oral form, he or she will understand it in print. For example, a young child learns to use the word "dog" for labeling a dog, first a specific dog and then all dogs. The concept of a dog for which the young child has learned the label is developed enough so that when the child encounters the printed word "dog," he or she is able to link the oral word and the concept of a dog to the written form and, thus, comprehends written language through this linkage.

To understand oral language, it is important to know a bit about all the components of language—of any language. Every language is defined by five components: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. The general forms of language, oral or written, can be described using these five components. Each will be defined and specific examples as they relate to oral language will be provided.

Phonology

Phonology relates to the sounds of a language and the rules that govern how they are combined to form words. Because the focus of this chapter is on oral language specifically, it is important to note that a language cannot be presented in an oral form if phonology is absent. In other words, language requires sounds in order to communicate orally. Phonology has a strong connection to the development of phonological and phonemic awareness skills. Phonological and phonemic awareness are considered essential for early reading success (see Chapter 4). Children need to have the awareness of the sounds of our language and the ability to discriminate and isolate the sounds so they can connect them to print for reading, spelling, and writing. There are about 44 different sounds in our language and only 26 letters to represent all these sounds in various combinations. For example, the sound for /f/ can be represented by these letters or combinations: *f* as in *fan*, *ph* as in *phone* or *graph*, *gh* as in *cough*, *ff* as in *stiff*, *lf* as in *half*. In addition, it is important to know that word meanings can change just by changing one sound (e.g., *receipt* and *receive* have different sounds at the end of the word and have different meanings, while *mop* and *map* have different middle sounds to differentiate between the two word meanings).

Morphology

Morphology relates to the meanings of individual word parts and how they are combined to create words. Words and word parts are morphemes, or units of meaning. There are two

different types of morphemes—free morphemes or bound. Free morphemes are units that have meaning independent of other units (in other words—a stand-alone word). The words *happy*, *dog*, *run*, and *home* are all examples of free morphemes. Bound morphemes are units of meaning that are attached to free morphemes and therefore change the meaning and usage of words. The words *unhappy*, *dogs*, *running*, and *homeless* all contain both free and bound morphemes and thus have different meanings than the original free morphemes. The most common way to understand bound morphemes is to understand affixes (prefixes and suffixes). Morphology influences the areas of phonics, word study, and, of course, vocabulary.

Semantics

Semantics is knowledge of word meanings for specific words in various contexts and how to select appropriate words to communicate. Understanding that words have multiple meanings and that the meaning changes based on the context, position of the word in a phrase or sentence, or the form is all part of the language component of semantics. Semantics knowledge helps us relate words to each other and categorize and choose the appropriate word to fit the situation (e.g., *happy* vs. *ecstatic*, *pouting* vs. *bawling*, *dog* vs. *Golden Retriever puppy*).

Syntax

Syntax relates to the rules that govern word order and how words are combined in phrases and sentences. Another word for syntax is grammar. This component of language influences comprehension of both oral and written language. As young children develop oral language, they learn how words are combined. They often understand words they hear before they can integrate grammatical structures or rules into their spoken language. It is important to know that children learn much about language from listening to it so that we understand how valuable adult language models can be for impacting children's development of syntax. Some more sophisticated forms of syntax, such as complex clauses or embedded phrases, may require frequent modeling and scaffolding for children to comprehend.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics relates to the use of language and the knowledge of the functions of various forms of language—knowing when to use a word or expression for a particular purpose. Young children develop the functions of requesting, protesting, and seeking clarification very early, and they learn how speaking to their teacher and speaking to a sibling may vary.

WHY IS ORAL LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

Oral language plays a key role in children's development of literacy, but it also impacts other domains such as cognition and social-emotional areas. This brief section will focus on the specific contribution of oral language to written language and comprehension. Oral language develops before written language. However, oral language development and written language development contribute reciprocally to each other and impact the ability to read and write. This reciprocal interaction continues throughout life. In other words, the more knowledge and use of oral language one acquires, the more language one is able to access for writing and reading comprehension. Conversely, the more one reads and engages in writing activities, the more one will be able to understand words in the context of oral language for both listening comprehension and speaking.

The following statements highlight important concepts of oral and written language and their connection to understanding, speaking, reading, and writing:

- Receptive understanding of oral language contributes to listening comprehension.
- Expressive use of oral language contributes to the ability to speak.

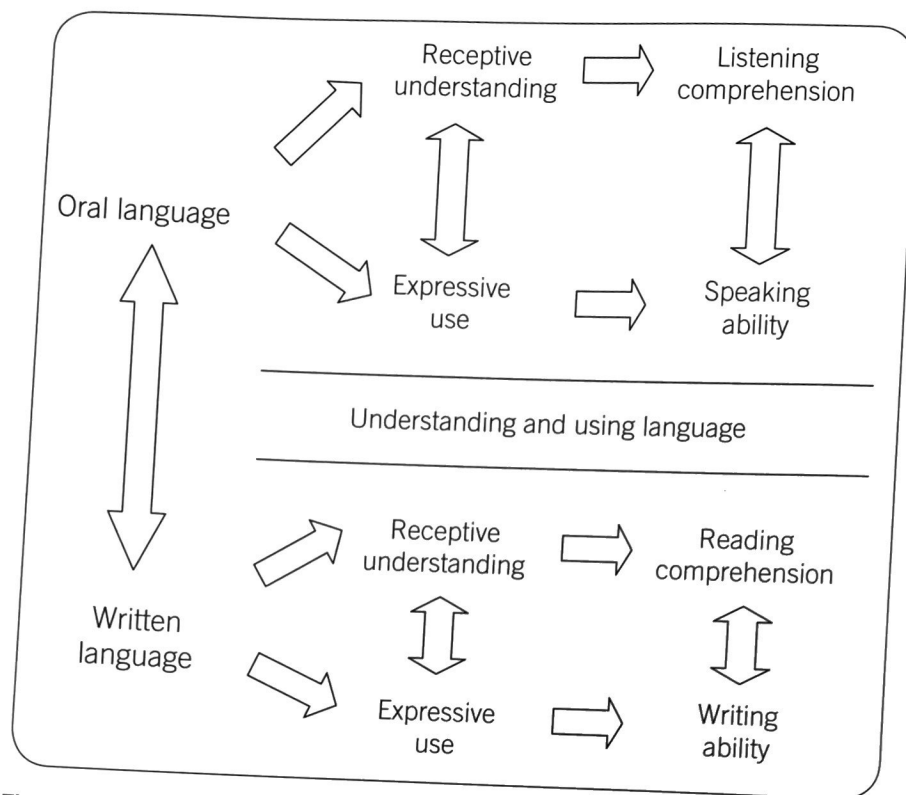


Figure 3.1. The connections between oral and written language.

- Receptive understanding of written language contributes to reading comprehension.
- Expressive use of written language contributes to the ability to write.

Figure 3.1 illustrates the important connections between oral and written language and the contributions to language comprehension and use.

ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD YEARS

Oral language begins to develop in infancy. Young children are introduced to oral language the moment they begin to hear people talking to them. Babies begin to develop their own oral language when they vocalize and babble, making word approximations. Babies eventually begin to develop a single-word vocabulary toward the end of their first year of life. Generally, as soon as a young child has about 50 single words in his or her vocabulary, he or she begins to combine words to form multiword phrases. These phrases grow in length and complexity rapidly, and by the time a child is 3 years old, he or she can truly be considered a conversational partner. Throughout the early childhood period of development, oral language continues to grow rapidly as children encounter new vocabulary, concepts, experiences, and opportunities to use complex language for a variety of purposes. This period of rapid growth represents our golden opportunity to impact a child's oral language abilities in important ways.

A young child's vocabulary consists of nouns, action words, and position words at first (dog, cat, mommy, car, go, eat, up, down, etc.). When children begin to combine words, the early two-word combinations reflect some relationship between the words such as object/action (e.g., car go), person or agent/action (e.g., mommy eat), or object/object (e.g., dog car). The adult who is building oral language (parents and teachers) interprets the child's meanings based on the context and "fills in the blanks" to provide language models (e.g., Yes, the dog is in the car). Once children begin to combine more words, their vocabulary increases to

support the development of syntax to be able to use complex language, such as expressing cause and effect, asking questions, embedding clauses to provide more description, or expressing a negative statement (e.g., I can't eat that anymore).¹ Adult language models play a key role in building children's sophisticated language. Thus, your role as a teacher is critical.

RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES TO PROMOTE ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In this section, you will learn about two research-based practices that are effective for promoting oral language development in young children: Language facilitation strategies and interactive reading using dialogic reading strategies. These two broad sets of practices are related to each other in that dialogic reading is dependent upon the ability to use language facilitation strategies to elaborate children's language. However, language facilitation strategies should be integrated throughout a child's day in the context of many activities and routines—basically, anytime that language is involved.

LANGUAGE FACILITATION STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Language facilitation refers to the ways that children are encouraged and invited to use oral language. Language facilitation strategies are specific actions taken to support young children's language development and use of oral language. The following vignette contains language interaction between a pre-K teacher and her young students during center time. Notice that Ms. Takeisha prompted the children to talk and then she responded to them by modeling language and vocabulary that elaborated the children's language. By using specific strategies, it is ensured that children are exposed to rich language models so that they eventually embed them into their oral language.

Vignette: Conversation between Ms. Takeisha and Her Students During Center Play

Ms. Takeisha used several strategies during her interaction with the children (see Box 3.1). Each one and its purpose will be identified. The important point to remember about Ms. Takeisha's interaction is that she was deliberate about her word choices and language use so that she could model and prompt while enjoying the time to play with her children. This interaction illustrates how easy it is to teach during play for the purpose of building oral language.

It is important to use language facilitation strategies for several reasons. Research conducted during the past 40 years has shown that children's language improves when the adults and teachers in a child's life encourage children to talk and respond in a way that provides children more opportunities to hear and use words that add to their current language.²⁻⁵ Improving children's language improves their listening comprehension and, thus, their ability to learn to read and succeed in school.

These key terms are necessary to understand so you may use language facilitation strategies effectively to teach and assess children's oral language development.

Prompt: A verbal action that the adult uses to invite children to respond verbally. A prompt can be considered as an "invitation to talk." There are three main types of verbal prompts: questions, completion prompts, and comments. For example, Ms. Takeisha prompted with a comment and a question in line 2 of the vignette.

Utterance: The amount of language a child produces in one breath or statement. The length of an utterance can range from one word to several words or even a couple of phrases or sentences if they are produced in one connected utterance. The number of words (and morphemes) in children's utterances are counted to monitor their language development.

BOX 3.1. CONVERSATION BETWEEN MS. TAKEISHA AND HER STUDENTS

1. Ms. Takeisha, the lead pre-K teacher, was playing with a small group of children in the cooking show center. Dominique and Cassandra, two 4-year-olds, were pretending to mix some ingredients in a bowl. Here is part of the conversation that occurred during this play scene.
2. **Ms. T:** Oh, I can see that you're creating something that's going to be delicious! Tell me the ingredients. What did you put in your bowl?
3. **D:** Well, first we put-ed in five spoons of that white powder and we mixed in this.
4. **Ms. T:** You are quite the chefs! This looks so scrumptious that I want to write down the recipe. Then I'll have directions for making it myself. Do you mind?
5. **C:** That's okay.
6. **Ms. T:** Okay. First, you put in five spoonfuls of flour. That's this powdery white ingredient that many chefs, or cooks, use for baking.
7. **C:** Don't forget that we used some of that shaker stuff and eggs and chocolate cookies and . . .
8. **Ms. T:** Then you added a stick of butter. Next you added salt from the shaker, two or three shakes?
9. **C:** I think five shakes!
10. **Ms. T:** It will be a salty treat! You also blended in some eggs and crumbled chocolate cookies—yum! This will be a salty AND sweet treat. I can't wait to sample your creation.
11. **D:** It will be ready soon.
12. **Ms. T:** Terrific! Now I have the ingredients, but tell me the next steps?
13. **D:** Well, you just mix it and then put it in the stove.
14. **Ms. T:** Will I place it on the stove to cook or in the oven to bake?
15. **C:** In the oven 'cause it is like a cake. You have to keep it in there for a long time.
16. **Ms. T:** I guess we should set the timer so it won't overcook.
17. **D:** We need to put it in a pot.
18. **Ms. T:** That's an important step—we need to pour the batter in a cake pan and then place it in the oven to bake. I think we'll be able to smell the flavors as they bake and that will make our mouths water and want to devour it—eat it quickly.
19. **C:** It's good!
20. **Ms. T:** Oh, it's going to be more than good! It will be scrumptious. That means really, super yummy to eat. Let me hear you say "scrumptious."
21. **C and D:** Scrumptious!
22. **Ms. T:** Now, while it's baking, tell our friends that you baked a scrumptious treat to share!
23. **C and D:** We made a scrumptious treat!
24. **Ms. T:** You made a scrumptious treat to share with everyone!

For example, in line 11, D's utterance length was five words (It will be ready soon). As you recall, morphemes are the smallest unit of meaning, and words contain either free or bound morphemes. Free morphemes are words that stand alone and have meaning without being combined with other morphemes (e.g., cat, walk, in, happy). Bound morphemes, also units of meaning, are combined with free morphemes to change meaning. For example, "plural s" is added to indicate more than one (e.g., cat). The past tense marker, -ed, is also a bound morpheme (e.g., walked). Words that contain a free and bound morpheme count as two or more morphemes (e.g., walked, cats, happiness). In line 3, D used the word "mixed," which is two morphemes, and his use of this word indicates correct usage. In the same line, he also added -ed to the word "put" to indicate past tense. Because he combined the bound morpheme (-ed) incorrectly with a free morpheme (put), this is incorrect usage. These early combinations are important for understanding children's language development and for providing opportunities for us to model correct forms.

In addition to counting the numbers of words, we also notice the types of words and how children combine them to convey their thoughts. For example, in line 15, C's utterance includes a connecting word (because) to show a comparison. She also demonstrates appropriate use of several examples of position words or prepositions.

Elaboration: An adult's verbal response to a child that builds upon what the child said by increasing the number of words *and* inserting vocabulary to build a child's oral vocabulary knowledge. For example, Ms. Takeisha elaborated D's utterance in line 6 by increasing the number of words and using different vocabulary words to provide a rich language model.

Dialogic reading, as you will learn in the next section, incorporates the strategy of elaboration as a form of expansion for building and scaffolding children's language and vocabulary development.

Expansion: An adult's verbal response to a child that builds upon what the child said by increasing the number of words. The goal of using expansions is to increase the amount of language a child is using or "expanding" their utterances. For example, Ms. Takeisha expanded the last statement by adding a few more words, "to share with everyone" (line 24). The complete statement is not only an expansion, but it offers another opportunity for the children to hear the word "scrumptious" used again. Dialogic reading incorporates expansion as a purposeful strategy for building and scaffolding children's language and vocabulary development.

Model: The use of a model is a purposeful way for adults to provide an example of a word, phrase, or sentence with the expectation that the children will attempt to imitate it. Models are extremely important for much of what is done with young children and are a powerful way that children acquire and develop language. For very young children, the model may be single words or two-word phrases and may include a prompt, such as "Say 'milk'" or "Say 'more please.'" The prompt that follows a model should be explicit so children know that they're expected to repeat the model. Lines 20 and 21 illustrate the powerful use of models. Ms. Takeisha first modeled a new vocabulary word and embedded the meaning in her statement. She followed this with a prompt for the children to say the word, "scrumptious." This step is particularly important when modeling words that children are not accustomed to saying or words that may be difficult to say because they have several syllables or chunks or different combinations of letter sounds. In dialogic reading, the adult provides models frequently when responding to children's responses and conversing about the book.

Narrative: A narrative is basically a retelling or describing of an activity that children are doing. The adult narrates what a child is doing with a specific purpose—to model the words that help a child acquire the language to talk about what he or she is doing, hearing, or seeing. Many of the other language facilitation strategies are embedded within a narrative, especially modeling vocabulary. Lines 6, 8, and 10 all contain examples of narratives. Narratives are important for scaffolding children's abilities to participate in the storytelling as part of dialogic

reading. Sometimes, these can be considered as “think alouds” when narrating what is being done to provide children with the language models. “Think alouds” allow us to talk without expecting a response.

Here are a couple more examples to illustrate a few of these strategies:

Child (points to flowers): Flowers are pretty.

Teacher (following child's lead: Yes, those flowers are colorful and gorgeous. Elaboration and extension, instead of “Yes, the flowers *are* pretty” [repetition and slight extension]).

Child (chooses the bakery center for play): I want to cook something.

Teacher (again, following child's lead after arranging an inviting center): Great! Let's create something delicious together. Do you have a special recipe in this cookbook to guide us [elaboration, embedded vocabulary with support]? Tell me how we will make it [open-ended prompt, instead of “I want to cook with you.”].

The teacher continues to converse, narrate, and model vocabulary and syntax during play and also uses opportunities for the child to say key vocabulary words using mands, or prompts, and models (to emphasize the important connection between phonology and semantics). For example, the teacher might prompt by saying, “These chocolate-flavored biscuits you created are scrumptious! Scrumptious is another word for delicious. Say ‘scrumptious.’” (model). The teacher might scaffold by allowing the young child to first say the word in two parts by syllable and then model putting it together. Later, the teacher might prompt by saying, “This cake is not only delicious, it's _____” (mand or prompt), waiting for the child to insert the new vocabulary word.

Language Facilitation Practice

Read the following examples of prompts and children's responses followed by the adult's responses (Table 3.1). Using what you just learned about language facilitation, determine if the adult response is strong or weak for building children's oral language. For any responses you identified as weak, create an improved oral language-building response. Try to identify the specific language facilitation strategy used for the strong examples and the ones you embedded into the improved responses.

Now, for those adult responses that you determined to be weak, put your new knowledge to work! In Table 3.2, write an improved adult response that would qualify as a strong language model and would likely have a positive impact on a child's oral language development. Try to identify the type of language facilitation strategies you incorporated in the improved response.

Table 3.1. Language facilitation practice

Prompt	Child	Teacher	+ or - ?
Who do you think they're going to find at the zoo?	Animals	That's right—animals!	
What do you think he's going to do?	Fly home.	He might fly away to return home to his family.	
Why is she laughing?	It's funny.	Oh, she's laughing because she thinks he's amusing.	
They didn't know what happened, so they _____.	Called someone.	They called for help because they didn't know what happened to the injured dog.	
I wonder when he might be able to go back to school.	When he's better.	That's right, when he's better.	
How can he reach it?	Jumping up.	Yes, he can jump or leap or stretch. He might be able to use a ladder if there's someone to assist him.	

Table 3.2. Language facilitation improvements

Previous adult response	Improved adult response	Type(s) of language facilitation strategies applied
Example: While reading aloud, a teacher pauses, and asks, "What is he doing?" (The illustration depicts a boy walking down the street). One of the children responds, "He's walking." The teacher responds, "Yes, he's walking."	<i>"Do you think he's walking or strutting?" (The teacher demonstrates the action 'strutting.') When the children respond, "Strutting," the teacher then says, "Yes, he's strutting confidently. Strutting is a better word for what he's doing because he looks like he's proud and confident."</i>	Model (within a scaffold): The teacher provided an alternative word choice along with a demonstration so that children could hear and understand the meaning of a different word to describe the boy's action. Expansion: The teacher expanded the children's response by adding more words in the context of a sentence. Elaboration: The teacher provides support for the meaning of the word '<i>strutting</i>' based on the story and illustration.
Another Example (from Table 3.1): In response to the child's response, "<i>animals</i>," the adult said, "<i>That's right—Animals!</i>" (This is considered a weak response because it represents a mere repetition of what the child said and does not provide an elaborated language model).	<i>"Yes, they'll find a variety of, or different, animals and they might even see the zookeeper who tends, or takes care of, the animals."</i>	Expansion: The adult added more words to expand the child's response to include more words in the context of a compound sentence. Elaboration: The adult inserted the word "variety" to indicate that they'll find different animals. The word "tends" was also inserted and paired with the meaning.

Interactive and Dialogic Reading

Reading to young children presents multiple opportunities to build language. Books provide language that is decontextualized, or does not rely on the immediate or present context to understand meaning.⁶ Understanding decontextualized language contributes to listening comprehension because young children begin to understand language that is beyond the "here and now." Preschoolers experience a rapid period of growth in their ability to interpret meaning of decontextualized language, and shared reading experiences contribute greatly to this development. Books provide background knowledge and context that support children's ability to use and comprehend decontextualized language through use of word meanings (semantics) and grammatical structures (syntax) that may be beyond a child's current repertoire or understanding and, thus, help build these areas. While there are many ways to enjoy reading to young children, the intentional use of scientifically validated interactive and dialogic reading approaches significantly impact the development of oral language.

Interactive reading is a general approach that focuses on engaging children in book reading through commenting and asking questions.

Dialogic reading is a specific type of interactive reading that relies on a systematic and explicit set of strategies. There are two acronyms associated with dialogic reading, and both of these help teachers plan for using dialogic reading purposefully to build children's oral language. The acronym PEER (Prompt, Evaluate, Expand, Repeat) is used to create a conversation with children and to help them take an active role in storytelling. The acronym, PEER, serves as a reminder for teachers to use the strategies and prompts systematically. These also require specific action on the teacher's part. **P** represents *prompt*, and the acronym CROWD relates to the types of prompts (described later). The teacher prompts children to engage them in dialogic reading. **E** serves as a reminder for the teacher to *evaluate* the child's response and then immediately *expand* (also **E**) the child's response to provide a more elaborate model. This is what is most beneficial for using dialogic reading for oral language development. Teachers are expected to evaluate the child's response in order to acknowledge the child's response and language use, but also to scaffold, or support, higher-level language development. The final letter of the PEER acronym is **R** for *repeat*, and this action serves as a reminder for the teacher

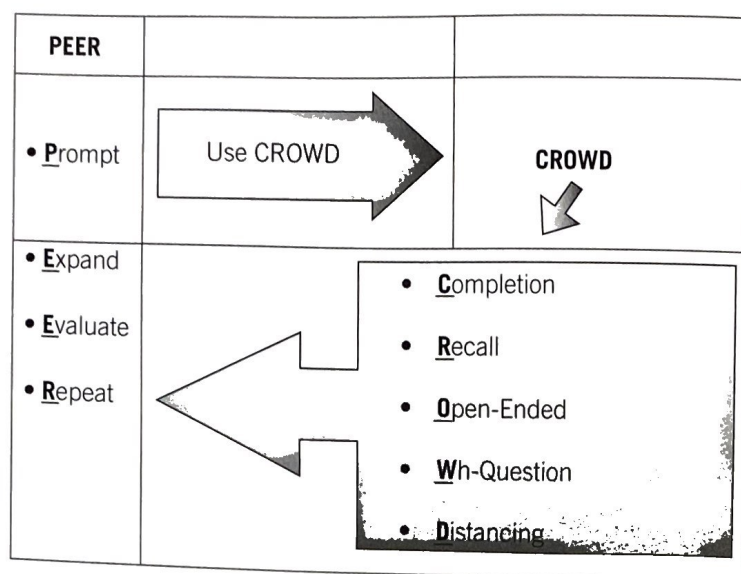


Figure 3.2. Dialogic reading strategies.

to encourage the child to repeat the expanded or elaborated response. This important step provides the child with additional opportunity to practice the new language model (an important feature of effective instruction). Dialogic reading is conversational, intentional, and effective for assessing and building oral language and vocabulary in young children.⁷

With dialogic reading, there are five specific prompts, which are typically posed in the form of a question. The prompts have a specific purpose—to prompt children to respond. Whereas a comment is an implicit “invitation to talk,” question prompts, however, are explicit in that the adult who poses them waits for and provides scaffolds so that children respond. Figure 3.2 illustrates the connection between the PEER and CROWD strategies, illustrating the specific prompts, which are defined with examples.

Dialogic Reading Prompts (CROWD).⁸⁻¹⁰

- *C* stands for *completion prompts*. The reader (teacher) makes a statement and purposefully pauses (similar to a time-delay prompt) so that the children can provide the missing word or words. For example, “Mary had a little ____.” The children provide the missing word. The completion prompt serves as a scaffold to support understanding and recall, but also provides an easy way for children to participate using language. The reader may challenge the children by using completion prompts that match their particular needs.
- *R* stands for *recall questions*. The reader plans questions to pose at appropriate points in the book reading that encourage children to recall details or sequential events. For example, “What three materials did the three little pigs use to build their houses?” “What were some things that worried Wemberly?” The reader may pose these questions during and after the book is read.
- *O* stands for *open-ended questions*. The reader prepares questions that elicit more than a one-word response and may also elicit more than one correct answer. The reader poses these questions to provide the children more opportunity to respond using multiword responses. For example, “Why do you think Chrysanthemum didn’t like her name?” “How did Petunia feel when she first arrived on the farm?” “How did Duck and Goose figure out that the soccer ball was not an egg?”
- *W* stands for *Wh- questions*. The reader asks a variety of Wh- questions and puts more emphasis on those that may be challenging for children to answer (giving more opportunities for children to practice responding and for the reader to provide more scaffolding). For very young children, Wh- questions are more basic than for older children with higher-level language skills. The teacher encourages labeling of objects, actions, and concepts to

build basic vocabulary and children's abilities to use these basic words while talking about the book. It is generally recommended that the teacher address at least one vocabulary word that may be unknown to most children. For example, "What do you think *drowsy* means?" "Why did the author use the word *extraordinary*?"

- *D* stands for *distancing questions*. The reader prepares questions that prompt children to make connections with the book. The connections may be related to the children's personal experiences or earlier knowledge. For example, "Tell me about a time when you felt worried like Wemberly." This is an open-ended prompt also and is preferred over asking, "Did you ever feel worried like Wemberly?" because children would likely respond with one word—yes or no—and require additional prompting to expand. Another example is, "Tell us about a place you've visited where you might have seen other animals like this."

While ongoing opportunities to use and understand language contribute to children's developing listening comprehension, dialogic reading specifically targets both oral language and listening comprehension through the use of specific prompts.

Vocabulary Support Strategies during Read-Alouds

While reading to young children and focusing on both oral language and vocabulary development, there are many opportunities to provide explicit support for children to understand and learn new vocabulary. Research-based practices include the use of "child friendly" or "student friendly" definitions or explanations.¹¹ Sentence stems (see Table 3.3) are helpful for creating simple explanations of words that provide meaning. They also provide an additional model of the word used in the context of a sentence (sometimes in a different form or tense). These strategies are useful for embedding vocabulary support before, during, and after reading aloud to young children. This type of practice benefits semantic and syntactic development. Table 3.3 illustrates examples of using sentence stems to create explanations of words that young children can understand.

Table 3.3. Sentence stems for vocabulary support

Key word for strategy	Sentence stem	Example
Something	If something is ____, it is ____.	If something is gigantic, it is really big, like a giant.
Someone	If someone is ____, he or she is ____.	If someone is exhausted, he or she is tired.
Describe	____ is a word that can be used to describe ____.	Delighted is a word to describe a happy or pleased feeling.
Type (or kind)	____ is a type of ____ that ____.	A vest is a type of sweater or shirt that doesn't have sleeves.
Another word for	____ is another word for ____.	Vehicle is another word for car or automobile.
These are additional ways to embed vocabulary support while reading and after reading.		
Sentence stem	Example word in text	Example of meaning
That means ____.	Irritable	That means crabby.
That's the same as ____.	Flock (of sheep)	That's the same as a group of sheep.
It's kind of like ____.	Drowsy	It's kind of like sleepy.
It's something that ____.	Ladle	It's something that is used to scoop or serve soup or stew.
When someone is (<u>selected word</u>), they are ____.	Elated	When someone is elated, they are really happy and excited about something.
That word tells about or describes something that is ____.	Scrumptious	That word describes something that is really yummy or delicious.
If you are (<u>selected word</u>), you are ____.	Approaching	If you are approaching someone, you are going toward them or getting near them.

Table 3.4. Synonym substitutions

Text from book

"I think it's a beautiful name," commented Daisy.

He tried to lift the enormous watermelon.

The gallant young sailor turned the boat around and headed home.

She felt fortunate that day.

Text with paired synonym

"I think it's a beautiful name," commented/said Daisy.

He tried to lift the enormous/huge watermelon.

The gallant/brave young sailor turned the boat around and headed home.

She felt fortunate/lucky that day.

Another key strategy for providing vocabulary support and building oral language is called synonym substitution. While reading aloud using synonym substitution, you embed synonyms children are likely to understand and pair these with the new vocabulary word in a way that children can hear a slight pause or change in intonation. Table 3.4 illustrates some examples.

Practice Activity

Select a book that you would consider reading to your group of young children. Be sure to select one that provides opportunities to build language and vocabulary as you are reading. Preview the book to identify opportunities to embed dialogic reading prompts using Figure 3.3, CROWD Strategy Planning Template. Create the prompts and write them on sticky notes to place in the book in preparation for reading. Then, look for opportunities to provide vocabulary support using any of the previously mentioned strategies. Use Figure 3.4, Embedded Vocabulary Support for Building Oral Language, to write the words you would teach, the child-friendly explanations you will provide using the sentence stems, and/or the synonyms

Title: <i>A Girl and Her Gator</i>	Illustrator: <i>Tom Murphy</i>
Author: <i>Sean Bryan</i>	

C – Completion questions (e.g., *Lily's purse is _____ and she brings it _____.*)

A girl named Claire had a gator on _____.

R – Recall questions (e.g., *What happened when Jose went back to school? What was missing from Corduroy's overalls? How did Stephanie wear her hair?*)

What were some of the things that the Gator was trying to convince Claire she could do with a "gator up there?"

O – Open-ended questions (e.g., *Why was Alexander having a bad day? How did the cat get his whiskers? What do you think his friends thought when they heard he moved?*)

Why was Claire worried about having a gator on top of her hair?

W – Wh-questions (Creating and asking a "What" question referring to word meaning or vocabulary is a good choice to ensure that you are embedding specific vocabulary instruction; e.g., *What do you think shy means? What does it mean to be embarrassed? What are braids?*)

What do you think "gossip and stare" means?

D – Distancing question (e.g., *Tell me about a time when you felt lost or lost something. How did you feel when your friend moved away? Do you have something that is very special to you like Owen's blanket?*)

Tell your friend next to you about something that was embarrassing to you but turned out to be okay in the end. How was this like Claire's feelings?

Figure 3.3. Example of a completed CROWD Strategy Planning Template for *A Girl and Her Gator*.¹²

Book title: _____ Author: _____ Illustrator: _____

Word	Child-friendly explanation (Refer to the sentence stems)	Synonyms for substitution	Before, during, after?

Figure 3.4. Embedded vocabulary support for building oral language.

you will provide using synonym substitution, and determine when you will emphasize these words—before, during, or after you read the book or a combination.

Create at least three prompts or questions for each category that you can use to prompt and build upon children’s language during a read aloud. Include the page number that corresponds to the appropriate opportunity to use each prompt. Use these to prompt dialogue and interaction and then evaluate, expand, and repeat while reading.

C—Completion questions (e.g., Lily’s purse is _____ and she brings it _____.)

R—Recall questions (e.g., What happened when Jose went back to school? What was missing from Corduroy’s overalls? How did Stephanie wear her hair?)

O—Open-ended questions (e.g., Why was Alexander having a bad day? How did the cat get his whiskers? What do you think his friends thought when they heard he moved?)

W—Wh- questions (Creating and asking a “What” question referring to word meaning or vocabulary is a good choice to ensure that you are embedding specific vocabulary instruction; e.g., What do you think shy means? What does it mean to be embarrassed? What are braids?)

D—Distancing question (e.g., Tell me about a time when you felt lost or lost something. How did you feel when your friend moved away? Do you have something that is very special to you like Owen’s blanket?)

ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT FOR BUILDING ORAL LANGUAGE

There are many ways that you can engineer your classroom environment to support oral language development. Arranging theme-based centers is a way to build vocabulary and

concepts around a specific topic. Not only does this build language, but it also helps build background knowledge. Building background knowledge for children will contribute to the development of listening and reading comprehension. Planning purposefully to bring more language opportunities into your classroom will benefit your children now and in the future. Each opportunity they have to learn words, relate them to concepts and experiences, and use them as part of their oral language means that they will be able to comprehend those words and concepts when they encounter them in print. When you provide rich language at the oral level when children are young, they will likely develop a rich vocabulary—a key ingredient for reading comprehension.

If you plan carefully to create a language-rich classroom, you will be successful. In other words, it will not just happen without your thoughtful actions! Paying attention to the physical arrangement in your classroom, materials you select, environmental prompts you create, and the words you choose to talk about the experiences you provide, are valuable and necessary for having a language-rich classroom.

The physical arrangement should include space for large group activities, such as read-alouds and circle time. Small group areas should be well-defined and include furniture appropriate to the activity or routine. For example, if you provide opportunities for children to work on puzzles together, a tabletop surface with children sitting next to each other is more conducive to interaction and collaborative efforts than floor space. Areas that accommodate dramatic play of all types should be large enough so that children have space and access to materials that relate to the center. For example, a grocery store requires shelves with labels and a check-out area and walls to display ads and pictures that encourage verbal interaction. Each area in the classroom can display pictures, photos, or items that prompt oral language. As teachers, it is important for you to provide interesting topics, cues, and models for children to practice their language.

The decisions you make for the selection of materials is similar to that of the physical arrangement. The key is to extend what children already know or have experienced so that they acquire the language to build upon their background knowledge. If you think beyond what children might have experienced and include talk that expands upon their experiences, you are providing opportunities to build oral language and add a whole new vocabulary to their repertoires.

A simple tool for you to use as an environmental prompt or cue to assist in modeling efforts is "The Teacher's Word Wall" (Table 3.5). This word wall serves as a reminder for you to use sophisticated language or expressions in place of common, routine comments produced in the child's environment or your classroom. The table provides examples of alternate ways to say common expressions, like "great job" or "thank you." Because some of these alternatives may not be part of your typical vocabulary when conversing with young children, you and others talking to young children can easily glance at the word wall and select an option to insert into a comment or dialogue. Over time, as the common expressions are replaced

Table 3.5. Example of a teacher word wall (reminders to use sophisticated language in place of common expressions)

Great job!	Thank you	I'm happy	Please . . .
Awesome!	I really appreciate what you did.	I am so delighted!	I would appreciate it if you . . .
Fabulous!	We are grateful.	I am elated!	Will you charm us with your great listening?
Kudos to you!	I admire your kindness.	We are so pleased.	I would relish your willingness to participate.
Stupendous!	I treasure your cooperation.	I am tickled pink!	Por favor (Spanish for "please")
Impressive!	Muchas gracias! (Spanish for "many thanks" or "thank you")	I am impressed with your effort.	S'il vous plait (French for "please")

with more sophisticated options in a fluent manner, the children will hear them used multiple times and eventually will weave them into their own speaking vocabulary. The idea is to replace the expressions often to continue building on children's vocabulary.

An extension of the "Teacher's Word Wall" includes vocabulary, anchors for conversation or conversation starters, prompts (questions and comments), and actions that relate to a specific theme (Table 3.6). The example in Table 3.6 relates to a flower shop-themed center. Again, these cues serve as reminders for you and other adults to embed the language into the context of interacting with children during center play or other classroom routines.

Table 3.6. Example of a theme-based teacher's word wall

Center theme: The flower shop			
Vocabulary	Conversation starters	Prompts (questions or comments)	Actions to model and narrate
embellish convenient arrange bouquet	The location of your shop is so convenient—it's so close to everything.	How would you like me to embellish or decorate this vase of flowers?	I'm selecting several different colored flowers to arrange a colorful bouquet.
schedule a delivery bouquet single exquisite bud vase	I'd like to schedule a delivery for a bouquet of flowers. Can you send it soon?	That is one beautiful bouquet you've arranged for someone special!	This single rose looks exquisite in this bud vase, don't you think?
decorate clip stems stay fresh wither examples creations	May I look at examples of your creations in your catalogs?	I wonder how I can use this ribbon to decorate this basket. I might try to weave it through the openings.	I always clip the ends of the stems so the flowers will stay fresh longer. This way, they'll last for days and won't wither quickly.
houseplants include dish garden nice touch celebrations attractive combination	I think the combination of flowers and houseplants is attractive—I like how they look together.	Which houseplants would you like to select to include in this dish garden?	I'm adding flowers as a nice touch to this dish garden that usually has only houseplants. A celebration is not complete if it does not include flowers somewhere!
message include greeting card variety purchase	Oh, I didn't know that you also included a variety of greeting cards to purchase in your shop! There are so many to buy!	What message will you include on your greeting card?	I'm trying to find the perfect words to include in my special message.
fortunate locate blooming floral arrangement	How fortunate for me to locate your shop! I am lucky that I don't have to walk far.	Who's the fortunate, or lucky one, to receive this floral arrangement?	I'm fortunate to have all these flowers blooming in my garden behind the shop. It makes it very easy to create all of these floral arrangements like this one.

THE FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND ORAL LANGUAGE

Table 3.7 illustrates some examples of how each of the features of effective instruction can be addressed through efforts to build oral language and listening skill development in young children. Try to apply what you know to think of others that may not be represented in this table.

Refer to Table 3.8, and review the examples of how oral language, vocabulary, and other language-related skills are embedded throughout the course of a typical day and are embedded into routines. As a teacher, you will want to identify activities or opportunities to address each of the major areas of emergent literacy that are integrated throughout the day. Planning for a minimum of three opportunities for each area will ensure sufficient attention and will likely result in more language skills practiced than planned. This planning will illustrate how you attend to an important feature of effective instruction providing multiple opportunities for students to respond and practice.

Differentiation

Differentiating instruction for students at any age will become a commonplace occurrence in your classroom. While it is common, it is not easy! You may have interacted with enough children at this point to know that all children are different and have varying needs at multiple time points. The opening of this chapter illustrated a teacher's concern about the vast language differences between children within a small group. These differences require knowledge and practice to be able to meet children's needs and support their development appropriately.

Your ability to differentiate successfully depends on your ability to assess your children and identify their needs. When you are able to do this, you can adjust what you do within an activity to meet varying needs. When you are considering developing language skills in the context of talking with children during center activities or read-alouds, it becomes a simple matter of adjusting your language to match children's needs. The tricky part is knowing what they need! Understanding language needs means that you must know where children are in their language development *and* what comes next. Your role as a teacher is to provide support for what comes next so that children are working toward developing more advanced language.

Here are a couple of examples of how you can differentiate easily in the context of conversation during center play. Let us consider that you have one child who is still developing his single-word vocabulary and has about 50 words in his lexicon (oral vocabulary repertoire). Another child is beginning to embed descriptive words to tell about experiences and feelings. Most of the children speak in phrases or short sentences, but there is one child who is quite verbose—she can talk in complete sentences, take conversational turns in excess of four turns, and she has a pretty sophisticated vocabulary for a 4-year-old, using words like *actually*, *enormous*, *exhausted*, and *finally*. What a wonderful opportunity *and* responsibility to differentiate by varying your language and models to match the next steps for these children. For the child who uses primarily single words, your models and prompts would target his or her ability to combine words. Your models would emphasize words that he or she uses in appropriate combinations (e.g., *You have a red car.*; *Do you want more crackers?*; *What would you like to do, ride bikes or play ball?*). For most of the children, you would extend and elaborate using descriptive words, linking words or conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *but*, *because*, *then*, etc.) and modeling sophisticated vocabulary for everyone, especially your most verbal child. Use alternatives like, *What do you prefer to do right now?* or *If we all choose to play ball together then we'll have to remain inside because it looks like the weather's about to change!*

In addition to the children that were described in the previous example, you may also have a child who is learning English as a second language. He or she may be similar to the child with a single-word vocabulary or one who is beginning to use more descriptive words, but how you differentiate may vary. A child who is learning English as a second language

Table 3.7. Features of effective instruction and oral language

	Explicit instruction with modeling	Systematic instruction with scaffolding	Frequent opportunities for practice	Immediate corrective feedback	Ongoing progress monitoring
Phonology (Providing practice for children to say and use three-syllable words.	Tell children that you are going to say a word slowly and in parts because it's hard to say.	Provide part of the word when children have difficulty saying multisyllable words.	Prompt children to use new words many times throughout the day.	Provide the model and prompt child to say it again.	Identify specific sounds or multi-syllable words to monitor.
Morphology		Provide sentence stems that allow children to create different word forms to fit the context. For example, "If you're not happy, you might be ____."	After talking about words we use to talk about things that already happened, provide story starters that prompt children to embed past tense and use the -ed marker.		Listen to spontaneous language during free play and note new combinations of word parts. Children may begin to create their own words.
Semantics				When children use a descriptive word, use it as an opportunity to model a different word or synonym.	
Syntax		Provide a prompt that creates a forced opportunity for a child to combine the right word forms. <i>The dog barks, and yelps, and ____ (cries—child usually uses first-person verb for third-person noun).</i>		Provide the correct model using slight elaboration and have the child repeat it with you the next time.	
Pragmatics	This is an example of when we might use this word when we greet someone ...			Provide a simple rationale for using certain words when expressing feelings.	
Language facilitation				Expand and elaborate children's language using correct forms.	Identify specific language goals and create data sheet to document progress (see the example of the progress monitoring data sheet in this chapter).
Read aloud with dialogic reading	I'm going to use these three words to help me retell the story in order—first, next, finally.		Use higher-level questions throughout the read-aloud to provide many opportunities to process and respond.	Let's see if we can find the words the author used to tell us about that. If we're answering a "Who" question, we'll answer with a person or a character.	

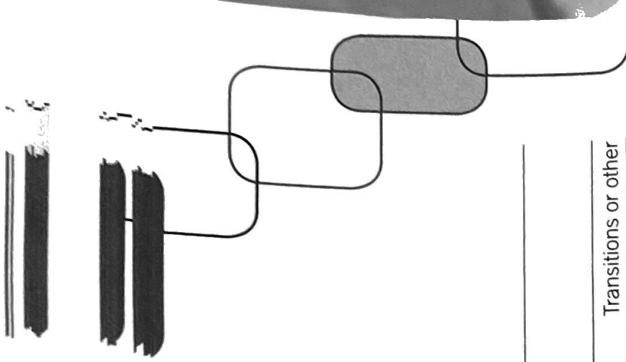


Table 3.8. Planning matrix for embedding vocabulary and other emergent literacy skills throughout the day

Theme: <u>Bugs and Creepy Crawlers</u>									
This week: <u>invisible, mystery, camouflage, Previous words: amazed, delighted, magnify</u>									
Vocabulary Words to Model or Prompt:									
	Arrival	Circle	Centers	Free play	Outside play	Snack/meal time	Story time	Dismissal	Transitions or other
Oral language (vocabulary and listening comprehension)	Use previous vocabulary words to greet children	Read <i>Dot & Jabber and the Big Bug Mystery</i>	Use magnifying glass to find hidden objects (invisible)	Model elaborated language as children play	Look for bugs that might be examples of camouflage	Provide topics and opportunities for children to converse	Retell using pictures and props		"I am delighted that you had fun."
Phonological awareness	Call children's names by syllables	Sing "bug-theme" fingerplays (e.g., "Baby Bumble Bee")	Find objects that begin with same sound as "bug"		Play "I Spy" by segmenting words		Read "bug poems"	Call children's names by deleting last sound or syllable	"You moved so quietly, I thought you were invisible."
Concepts of print	Have children "sign in"	Names visible, song titles	Centers labeled many ways	Label toys and play areas	Look for print and signs	Menu/sign showing food items	Focus on parts of book.	Put name badges away	
Alphabetic principle	Children place name on word wall	Show letters that start names	Some letter stencils available for tracing			Talk about foods, show shopping list	ID letters on each page		
Opportunities to model vocabulary (from read-alouds)	"I'm delighted to see everyone today."	"Is someone absent or invisible?"	"I'll be amazed when I see you clean up."	"It's a mystery! The balls have disappeared."	"You're wearing green so are you in camouflage?"	"If you can see your raisins, they're not invisible."	Focus on selected words.	"I can't wait to see how you'll amaze me tomorrow."	"Your voices seem magnified—ouch my ears hurt."

may require additional support from illustrations, objects, or demonstrations in order to understand concepts or new vocabulary. What is most critical, however, is that you provide many opportunities for children learning other languages to actually say the words and practice the oral language you are modeling. While this is important for all young children developing oral language, it is even more important for English language learners.

Differentiating during read-alouds is easy to achieve through the use of various prompts and questions followed by the elaborated responses you provide.

Assessment

As a teacher, you will have the responsibility of assessing your young children in several areas, including oral language. In addition, as a teacher, you will also have the opportunity to engage in self-reflective practice. First, we will discuss ways that you can assess children's oral language skills. Next, you will be introduced to a tool that you will use for self-evaluation of your skill for reading aloud to young children and incorporating strategies that will lead to enhanced oral language development.

Progress Monitoring of Children's Oral Language

When you introduce new concepts or words into a child's vocabulary, the easiest way to assess progress is to listen for the child's spontaneous use of new language and then document it in the form of notes or checklists that you created to match the aspect of language you have targeted. You might also ask specific questions that would likely solicit specific words or complex sentences. For example, if you have taught and modeled words presented in the flower shop center, you might listen as children play in the center and document episodes when children use the words. You might also consider asking specific questions that invite children to use new words. For example, "What do you recommend for me to send to a friend for her birthday?" If children are having difficulty recalling words such as *bouquet* or *floral arrangement*, you could provide them as models embedded in a question such as, "Do you suggest a floral arrangement or a bouquet or a dish garden?" A child would have to select one and say it, and you could follow up by having them show you the difference.

Another way to monitor children's progress is during read-alouds. Figure 3.5 can be used to identify specific goals for specific children and to provide opportunities for children to respond to the prompts that you generated for use during a read-aloud. You may consider asking all children to respond to a few prompts and pose specific prompts to children who need additional practice or varying levels of support, modeling, or increased challenge.

When planning a read-aloud, think about specific children in your class who need help on targeted oral language skills. In the chart below, write the child's name and specific skills you want to focus on during the read-aloud. Then, make a checkmark in the box for which CROWD prompts you will use during the read-aloud to address those skills.

Next, during the read-aloud, when you ask the child the question, put a + or a - next to the checkmark depending on whether the child successfully completed the prompt or not. After the read-aloud, add appropriate comments and next steps to continue the assessment and progress monitoring. This information can also be documented on sticky notes placed in the back of the book you are reading and later transferred to this chart. Please note that it may not be necessary or feasible to progress monitor all students during a read-aloud, but this is a way to plan for differentiated lessons to meet individual children's needs *and* to monitor their progress to see if what you are doing is working.

Self-Reflection Activity

Earlier in this chapter as part of a practice activity, you selected a book to read aloud to a group of young children. You also planned to read it using dialogic reading strategies and created

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Classroom: _____

Teacher Name: _____

Date	Child	Specific Skills to Work On	CROWD Prompts to Use					Comments/Next Steps
			C	R	O	W	D	
2/3	Nina	- Understanding sequencing in a story - Being able to make predictions		☒ +		☐ -		Needs more help in making predictions, continue to ask "what do you think will happen next" type of questions
	Julian	- Responding with more than two or three word utterances - Recalling details		☐ -	☐ -			Provide additional modeling and scaffolds for three-word phrases; use

Figure 3.5. Progress monitoring tool for use during read-alouds.

- prompts to embed during the reading. In addition, you planned to embed vocabulary support. Now, it is time to actually read the book to a group of young children and record yourself so that you can engage in self-reflection. If recording is not an option, you may want to pair with a classmate so that you can observe each other and provide feedback using the tools available.
- You can use the *Read Aloud Tool for Evaluation (RATE)*¹³ to improve your skill with reading to young children by learning all the components of a valuable read-aloud and maximizing its potential for enhancing oral language and listening skill development for young children. The RATE is divided into five components of a read-aloud:
1. **Book selection:** This component addresses the quality of the book selection for meeting the objectives associated with dialogic reading, oral language development, and other specific goals within emergent literacy.
 2. **Book introduction:** The quality of the introduction relates to *how* the book is introduced and goes beyond the identification of the title, author, and illustrator. Rating this component allows you to strengthen this area if needed so that you identify an objective or indicate a specific purpose related to why you chose the book to read. This also helps children focus on the purpose while listening and participating in the read-aloud.
 3. **The read-aloud:** This component represents a significant part of the entire read-aloud and includes your attention to features such as eye contact and use of voice, management of the flow, posing appropriate questions, responding to children, facilitating interaction, and embedding vocabulary support
 4. **Specific dialogic reading strategies:** This portion of the RATE allows you to reflect and evaluate your skill in using the dialogic reading strategies systematically and purposefully.
 5. **Book closure:** The way that a teacher closes the book and supports children's understanding and ability to connect the book to other knowledge or concepts is what contributes to a high-quality book closure. During the closure, the teacher engages children in conversation

about the book using guiding questions that relate specifically to the intended purpose of selecting the book as well as important oral language skills.

For each component, a rating of 1 (low score) to 5 (high score) is assigned, and the individual component ratings are summed for a total score out of a maximum of 25. Anchor descriptions are provided for a rating of 1 (Needs much attention), 3 (Needs some attention), and 5 (Best). While the overall score allows for a general idea of the quality of a read-aloud and progress monitoring of your read-aloud skill, the individual component ratings allow you to identify areas of strength and those in need of additional attention.

For self-reflection, read the *Read Aloud Coding Guidelines* provided and familiarize yourself with the RATE. Once you feel prepared to conduct your read-aloud by planning appropriately, make arrangements to do the read-aloud and record yourself. After you have recorded, use the RATE to evaluate your read-aloud and identify particular strengths and areas in need of further practice. Remember to evaluate yourself with an informed, knowledgeable lens based on the information you have learned in this chapter.

When you have finished evaluating yourself, develop a plan for strengthening the areas you feel needed more attention. Then, plan for the next read-aloud and focus on improving all parts, particularly the ones you identified for yourself. Providing yourself with multiple opportunities to practice is another illustration of the features of effective instruction. Multiple practice opportunities help you improve while also building children's oral language.

CONCLUSION

There exists a strong research base that has validated some simple, effective strategies to build oral language in young children.

These translate to simple actions:

- Talk to children, converse.
- Plan for the opportunity for children to use their language.
- Use read-alouds systematically.
- Follow children's leads. (You can build upon their interests and experiences, but you must create an environment that will prompt more language and curiosity.)
- Model, model, model!
- Prompt (comments and questions).
- Use rich vocabulary.
- Build background knowledge.
- Continuously make connections among words, concepts, and topics.

If you do all of this purposefully and consistently, you will set your young students on a path toward success in learning to read.

ENDNOTES

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