

#5 Oral Language



Guiding Principle

It is powerful to harness the established power of children's oral language to literacy learning from the beginning, so that new literacy knowledge and new oral language powers are linked and patterned from the start. Children with the least preparation for literacy learning need such an integrated approach if they are to catch up to their classmates (Clay, 2001, p. 95).

So my discussion proceeds on these assumptions: that literacy learning includes reading and writing, that the aim is to have children reading a variety of texts using a range of flexible strategies (including but not restricted to attacking unknown words phoneme by phoneme), and composing simple messages in writing. As children work towards this end goal, oral language is both a resource and a beneficiary. (Clay, 2001, p. 95)

A Little Background

The importance of oral language is well documented in research and through controlled observations with children.

Children's "oral language competence forms the basis for their future growth in literacy that they approach with the same inventive skills they have used in learning to talk... It is the school's obligation to extend the opportunities for children to use language for an ever increasing range of purposes – especially to use it to learn" (King, 1985, p. 37).

Because of the interrelationship among reading, writing, and oral language, you will want to revisit *Promising Literacy for Every Child: Reading Recovery and a Comprehensive Literacy System*, Second Edition (RRCNA, 2014), referred through-out this document as the Guide. This Oral Language Toolkit relates to Guide Component 2 (Effective Classroom Instruction, pages 31–35), Guide Component 3 (Literacy Assessment, pages 36–39), and Guide Component 4 (Effective Interventions pages 40–44).

Review “An Introduction to RRCNA Professional Learning Toolkits”

Please refer to the brief introduction to all toolkits on the RRCNA website for background information and ways to use the resources in each toolkit.

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit provides a wide range of resources available through RRCNA. The leader(s) of your professional learning community will want to choose resources that meet the needs of teachers and children in your context. You will, of course, want to include other resources available to you to enrich the experience.

Professional Learning Toolkits

are an extension of *Promising Literacy for Every Child: Reading Recovery and a Comprehensive Literacy System*, Second Edition (RRCNA, 2022), referred throughout this document as the Guide. Be sure to read “An Introduction to RRCNA Professional Learning Toolkits” prior to using this specific toolkit.

Intended Participants

This toolkit is appropriate for classroom teachers, coaches, interventionists, EB teachers, literacy specialists, and administrators.

► Initial Sessions

Session One: Self-Assessment of Learning Community

1. Read and Discuss. Prior to the first session, give participants access to Marie Clay's 2004 article, "Talking, Reading, and Writing" in *The Journal of Reading Recovery*. This article should stimulate conversations about the importance of oral language and ways to include oral language opportunities in daily interactions with children.
2. Self-Assessment. After discussing Clay's article, evaluate current oral language teaching and learning practices in the school or grade level. Set some goals for your learning related to this toolkit.

Sessions Two and Three: Assessment of Students

1. Student Assessment. Use the RRCNA Professional Learning Module "Assessing Oral Language with the Record of Oral Language." This will take 2 sessions with opportunities to practice the administration with students between sessions. The module shows a way to observe a child's control of the structures of the English language and to monitor change over time. Teachers will have a way to assess the oral language behaviors of individual children when needed. This module can be purchased from RRCNA. Participants will also need the book *Record of Oral Language* (2007, 2015), by Marie Clay et al., available from Heinemann.
2. Participants may choose a 'focus' child with low scores to follow throughout this study of oral language. Read and discuss chapter 2 in the *Record of Oral Language* to explore guidelines for teacher actions following the administration and scoring of the assessment task. Chapter 3 offers information about speakers of other dialects or other languages.

► Subsequent Sessions

1. You may want to view the RRCNA webcast "Oral Language Development: Theory Into Practice" as a group. This webcast is available through RRCNA for members only and provides an overview to stimulate conversations and future planning for learning.
2. Preview the list of RRCNA resources and decide which ones will be useful for your learning community.
3. You may wish to use a jigsaw arrangement for resources you select. Instead of a session planned for the whole group, individuals or small groups may work together on selected activities with various resources and then bring information back to share with the larger group. For example, some participants may want to target resources that address language needs of English language learners and share with the group. Or individuals or small groups could divide journal articles to read and share with the group.

► Application of Learning

A crucial aspect of community learning is for participants to apply what they learn in their own settings and to share with others in the professional learning community. Think about ways to measure changes in your learning as well as changes in student learning. For example, if participants use the Record of Oral Language module, they will want to share their experiences and their findings after assessing some children.

► Final Session(s)

Participants should take time to evaluate their progress based on the goals set in Session One. Set goals for future learning and applications.

RRCNA RESOURCES FOR USE IN PLANNING SESSIONS

Interactive Leader-Directed Professional Development Module (20% discount for RRCNA members)

Assessing Oral Language with the Record of Oral Language DVD — 2 sessions with practice between \$140

This module focuses on a technique for observing a child's control of the structures of the English language and for monitoring changes in control over time. The module includes video examples of concepts described in the *Record of Oral Language* book by Marie Clay and colleagues. Videos show the full administration of the Record of Oral Language with two students and additional examples for deeper learning. (Participants will need the book *Record of Oral Language* (2007) by Marie Clay et al., available from Heinemann.)

On-Demand Webcasts (\$45 for members; \$75 for non-members)

Most webcasts are sessions from past National Reading Recovery and Early Literacy Conferences sponsored by RRCNA.

Oral Language Development: Theory Into Practice

Adria Klein and others

Explore best practices for oral language development in the classroom that promotes equity and access to instruction for all students, including English learners. Examine open website from the New Teacher Center including videos of classroom practice, participation structures that support oral language, and new language readers.

Structure is an Important Source of Information

Sue Duncan

Although this webcast focuses on Reading Recovery children, it is helpful in demonstrating the importance of structure or syntax as a source of information as readers read texts. It assists children to solve words in reading and it gives them a feed-forward and feedback mechanism as they read. The webcast explores ways of supporting the learning of a child who finds structure difficult.

Understanding Text Complexity

Janet Bufalino

Designed for Reading Recovery teachers as well as classroom teachers, this webcast focuses on how teachers can analyze the complexities of meaning, structure, and visual information in a text to help choose the 'right book' for one student or a group of students.

English Language Learners: The Importance of Language to True Literacy

Kathy Escamilla, Jill Kerper Mora, and Susan O'Leary

The target audience includes K-3 classroom teachers, Reading Recovery teachers, and other professionals. Explore effective ways to promote literacy learning with English language learners by examining positive research/evaluation outcomes.

Free Webcast

Closing the Achievement Gap for English Language Learners

Yvonne and David Freeman

The presenters first describe three types of English learners and then explain four research-based keys that lead to academic success for limited formal schooling and long-term English learners. For each key, they share strategies, culturally relevant materials, and teacher stories.

Journal Articles (click titles to open/download)

- Ashdown, J., & Simic, O. (2000). *Is early literacy intervention effective for English language learners: Evidence from Reading Recovery*. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 5(1), 27-42.
- Cazden, C. B. (2005). *The value of conversations for language development and reading comprehension*. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 1-6.
- Clay, M. M. (Spring 2004). *Talking, reading, and writing*. *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 3(2), 1-15.
- Compton-Lilly, C. (2005). *Nuances of error: Considerations relevant to African American Vernacular English and Learning to Read*. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 10(1), 43-58.

- Dixon, M. (2014). **Put your ear a little closer: Tuning in to a child's language to aid literacy acquisition.** *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 13(2), 16-24.
- Jones, N. K. (2011). **Language choices: Responding to language diversity and deviation.** *The Journal of Reading Recovery* 10 (2), 7-25.
- Kim, Y. (2010). **Scaffolding through questions in upper elementary ELL learning.** *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 15(1&2), 109-137.
- McVee, M., and Pearson, P. D. (2003). **Talking the talk: A close examination of teacher-student discourse around written artifacts.** *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 8(1), 47-71.
- Morrow, L. M. (2005). **Language and literacy in preschools: Current issues and concerns.** *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 9-19.
- Pu, Ch. (200). **Rethinking literacy instruction to non-LEP/ESL-labeled language minority students.** *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 15(1 and 2), 137-155.
- Rabin, B. (2014). **TALK to think, learn, and teach.** *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 13(2), 5-15.
- Rodriguez, C., & Torres-Elias, A. (2009). **Refining the craft of teaching English language learners.** *The Journal of Reading Recovery*, 9 (1), 53-61.

Books

- Rodriguez, C. (2009). *Achieving literacy success with English language learners: Insights, assessment, instruction.* Worthington, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books

- Clay, M. M. (1998; 2014). *By different paths to common outcomes: Literacy learning and teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann. (see chapters on language)
- Clay, M. M. (2007; 2015). *Biks and gutches: Learning to inflect English*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2007; 2015). *Record of Oral Language: Observing changes in the acquisition of language structures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2001). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Dorn, L. J., & Saffos, C. (2005). *Teaching for deep comprehension: A reading workshop approach*. York, ME: Stenhouse. (See Chapter 5, "Understanding language for comprehending texts" on pages 51-64.)
- Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children's learning*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.
- Johnston, P. H. (2012). *Opening minds: Using language to change lives*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.
- McGee, L. M., & Richgels, D. J. (2014). *Designing early literacy programs, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Guilford Press. (See Chapter 2, "Accelerating children's language and literacy learning in exemplary prevention classrooms" on pages 14-37.)

Articles

- Giroir, S., Grimaldo, L. R., Vaughn, S., & Roberts, G. (2015). Interactive read-alouds for English learners in the elementary grades. *The Reading Teacher*, 68 (8), 639-648.
- Lysaker, J., & Hopper, E. (2015). A kindergartner's emergent strategy use during wordless picture book reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 68 (8). 649-657.
- Snell, E. K., Hindman, A. H., & Wasik, B. A. (2015). How can book reading close the word gap? Five key practices from research. *The Reading Teacher*, 68 (7), 560-571.
- Wasik, B. A., & Iannone-Campbell, C. (2012-2013). Developing vocabulary through purposeful, strategic conversations. *The Reading Teacher*, 66 (4), 321-332.

References

- King, M. L. (1985). Language and language learning for child watchers. In A. Jaggar & T. Smith-Burke (Eds.), *Observing the language learner* (pp. 19-38). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.



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