#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).


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.
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.
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 test 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. Ex-plore 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)**


Pu, Ch. (200). Rethinking literacy instruction to non-LEP/ESL-labeled language minority students. Literacy Teaching and Learning, 15(1 and 2), 137-155.


Books

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books


Articles


References