Delve below the tip of the iceberg:
Expanding ways of thinking, talking and learning

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Overview

1. **What do we know?** (Evidence from research)

2. **What can we do?** (Translating to practice)

3. **How can we do it?** (Using evidence-based strategies)

What we know (and research confirms):

1. Critical importance of oral language to long term literacy development and future life success – a rich vocabulary facilitates early reading and writing

2. Achievement gaps, especially in vocabulary are well established before children start school; if they enter school behind, they rarely catch up

3. The linguistic environment influences oral language development; high quality conversations are the key mechanism for expanding oral language

4. The **quality** of talk and the **amount of time** adults spend talking directly with children is related to academic achievement.

All aspects of literacy are closely intertwined – optimal environments support all relevant abilities rather than focusing on a single skill area e.g. teaching letter names in isolation does not result in accelerated reading acquisition (Adams, 1990).

High correlation between children's language development and teacher's oral language proficiency, specifically vocabulary – vocabulary highly sensitive to adult input!

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge and language use can enhance or limit learning opportunities – your role is critical in developing children's vocabulary and listening comprehension.

A closer look at the iceberg
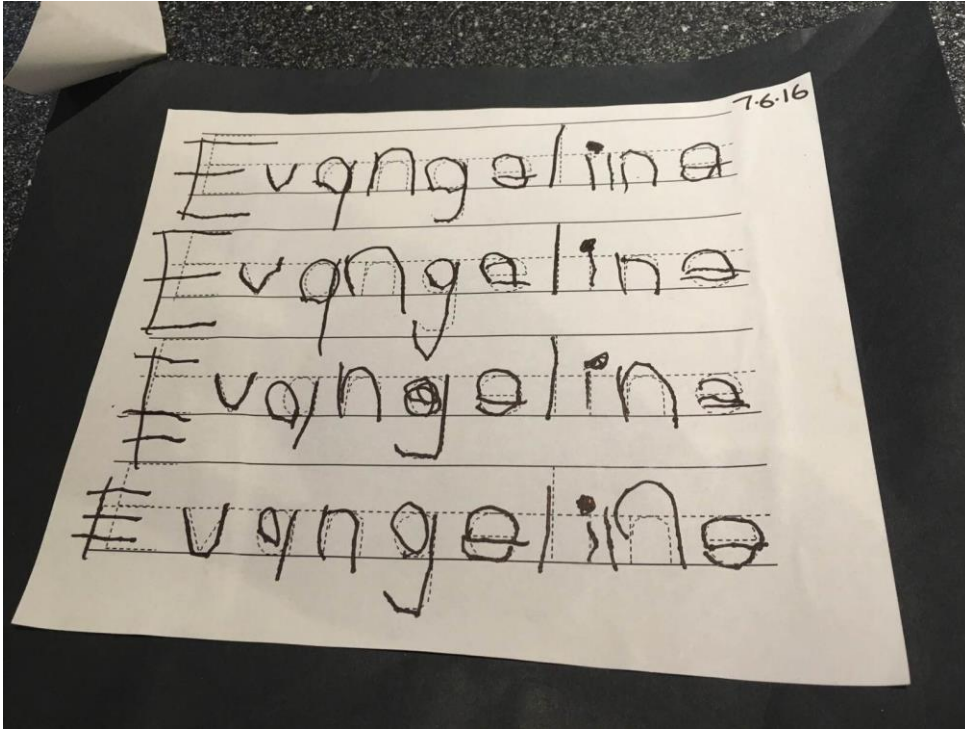
Increasing pressure can result in narrow focus on easily quantifiable "constrained" skills – essential but not sufficient for enduring literacy success.

Early literacy success

Adults who model positive dispositions for literacy and show:
- it's enjoyable/fun;
- it's useful;
- they value active children's participation.

Helping children learn about, and use language and literacy for many different, authentic, and meaningful purposes.

Sounds
& letters

Listening Comprehension – identifying story elements: setting, characters, plot, theme; summarising narrative & information texts; making inferences

Vocabulary – exposure to varied and precise vocabulary; noticing and using interesting words and more complex syntax than is used in everyday talk.

Oral language: Time for talk **–** extended conversations and talk beyond the "here & now", about past and future events; talk that encourages questioning and speculation.

Translating research – to 'grow' vocabulary

- Interactive read-alouds (narrative & information) – a rich source of diverse vocabulary – **breadth and depth** is essential.

- It's challenging to attend to new words in a stream of speech. Greater gains when **implicit and intentional explicit instruction is combined** to help them actively process and review words.

- Being intentional & explicit requires **planning beforehand** – (e.g. select some target words; generate possible questions on a 'post-it' to enable discussion and review of words)

- Repeated readings over a few days enhances receptive and expressive vocabulary.

Strategies for intentional, explicit vocabulary instruction

(see Weitzman & Greenberg, 2010).

Providing rich explanations for selected "target" words make a difference:

- **Show the meaning** – e.g. point to illustration; show a picture or a prop to clarify meaning; use facial expression or gesture; or change the way you say the word.

- **Tell** – a child-friendly definition that you could insert while you are reading supports building of a mental representation of the word.

- **Relate – make connections to children's experience and knowledge** – help to go beyond the "here & now".

- Provide **multiple opportunities for children to use the words** outside the context of the book.

Which words will I choose?

- **Level 1** – familiar words that children learn and use in everyday life (e.g. *chair, run, laugh*).

- **Level 2** – words occur in a wide range of oral and written texts and are more sophisticated than those used in everyday conversations. They offer a more precise use of language, or are words that introduce new concepts and build world knowledge (e.g. *tremble, vanish, camouflage*).

- **Level 3** – words that are used less frequently (e.g. technical language).

When you read aloud, children hear interesting words embedded in a meaningful context. If you insert some brief explicit instruction, you help them to focus and begin to actively process words.

Show:

"Pig was a Pug, and I'm sorry to say, he was greedy and selfish in most every way"

**Show** – by pointing to the illustration of Pug, salivating over his bowl of food.

"*That word on his bowl says 'MINE' – I think he's going to eat that food all by himself – someone who's selfish doesn't like to share!*"

You are also modelling how text and pictures work together, and how the illustration gives clues about Pig's character too.

Tell – provide child-friendly definitions

Although the context of the book provides implicit information about meaning of words, and you change your voice and facial expression, children make greater gains when you draw attention to novel or unfamiliar words – combining **implicit** as well as **intentional explicit** teaching.

But Pig would just grumble, 'They're mine! GO AWAY!' *When you grumble, you speak in an unhappy way, a bit like when you grizzle to your mum to tell her you don't want to go to bed yet.*

But Pig would just grumble,
'They're mine! GO AWAY!'
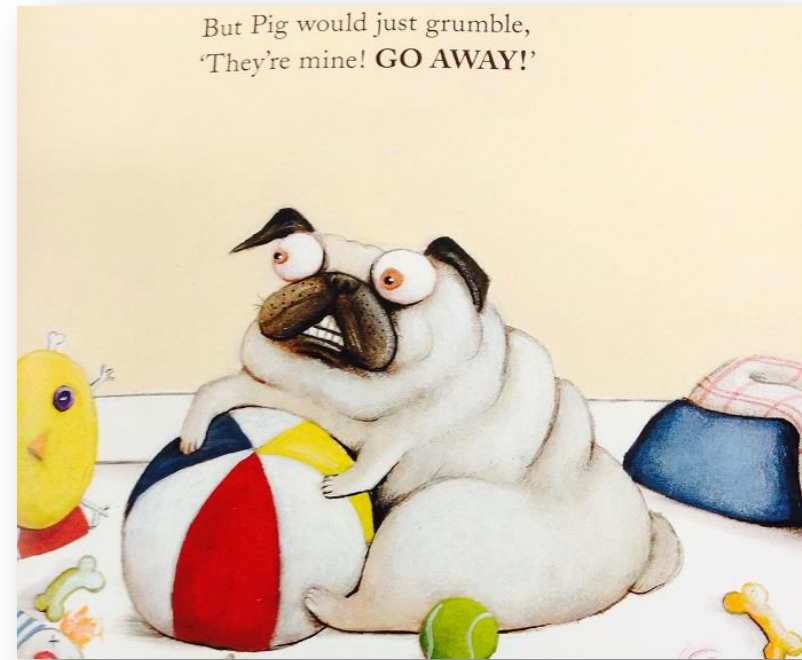
Relate & review

Questions that promote active engagement with target words build depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge.
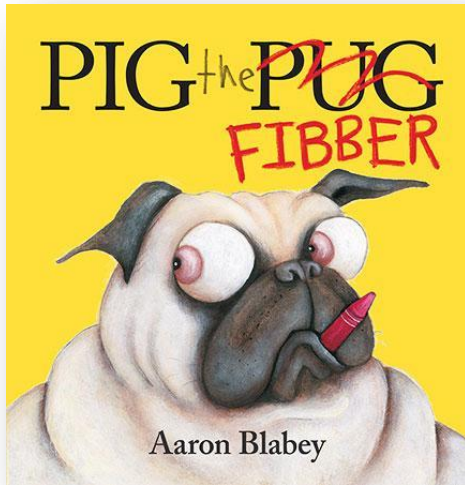
Text-to self: *Think of a time when you felt you wanted to **grumble** about something.*

Text-to-text: *Remember one of our other favourite stories about Pig – **Pig the fibber**? Pig was selfish when he made a sneaky plan to trick Trevor. Why was he selfish?*

Think about ways of increasing exposure to target words

Sometimes play a game after reading and discussion – for example:

"In the story, Pig was very selfish – I'm going to say some sentences with our special word – *selfish***.** You have to listen to see if you think the sentence sounds right and makes sense. Put your thumbs up if you think it's right, or thumbs down if it's not – but don't say anything." (Ask a child to explain his/her response).

- I'm selfish if I hide the Lego wheels so I can use them all.

- Tia's selfish because she shared her lolly bag.

Think about ways to use words in other contexts as well as:
- Studying the concepts that underlie words (e.g. dog – pug, daschund; …)
- Expanding words within a category (e.g. synonyms/antonyms for *selfish, greedy, grumble*)

Teaching **clue words** helps children to "take stock" and integrate ideas

You can teach simple clue words (or linking words and phrases) to enhance both receptive and expressive language.
- to recall story structure and sequence ideas (e.g. first, before, next, after, then, last)
- to compare and contrast (e.g. the same, like, different)
- to reason/give consequences (e.g. because, so)

I think Pug is different from (same as) Hairy Maclary, because ….

PIG *the* PUG

Aaron Blabey
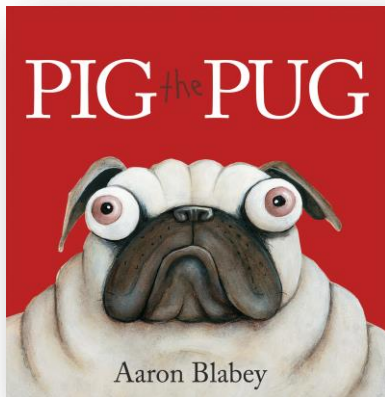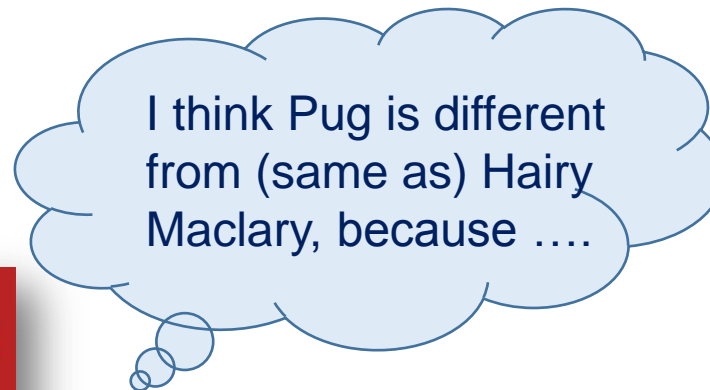
This also helps writing later on:
"If you can't say it, you can't write it!"

Create a culture of conversation

Children construct their understanding through social interaction.

Open-ended questions or statements allow children to:
- use the language they hear and respond;
- give voice to their ideas;
- receive feedback on what they've shared.

What's important?
- Time to think and respond;
- Follow their lead and keep the conversation going;
- Reflect and probe (*Tell me more …; Why do you think…?; What can we do….? This reminds me of ….*);
- Model how to ask "thick" questions.

Questioning strategies that will elicit and extend talk

Many preschoolers can do more than label and describe – with support, they can use language for thinking and problem solving. Adjust the level of challenge and include questions or comments that encourage them to:

1. **Predict** – *What do you think might happen to ….*
2. **Explain** or clarify – *Why do you think……*
3. **Link to own experiences** –*Think of a time when you ….*
4. **Visualise –** *What would you see (or hear, or feel) if you could have a close-up view of ……?*
5. **Connect with emotions –** *How do you think ….. felt when…?*
6. **Project** (to understand others' perspectives) **–** *I wonder what ….. is thinking now?*

7.Problem-solve – *How could we find the answers to our some of our questions? e.g. How do dogs learn if they don't go to school?*

Children with limited language may need more structured questions or prompts to support elaboration. How might you do that?

Use the "gradual release of responsibility" continuum.

For example: **See-think-wonder** – a strategy that encourages analytic talk and opens possibilities for further investigation. You model the process first, then joint construction, gradually children take control, e.g. *Leo the littlest seahorse*

I can see an enormous fish

I think he might be hunting for his dinner – he's a predator.

After reading:
I wonder if seahorses have any other enemies, predators?

Sharing, reflecting & acting

With a partner:

1. Share the good ideas you already use, as well as new strategies you have encountered

   and

2. Consider how you might best incorporate one or two changes in your particular context to enhance teaching practice, as well as learning opportunities for young children.