

## DOMAIN I.

## LANGUAGE ARTS, PART I: ORAL LANGUAGE, EARLY LITERACY DEVELOPMENT, WORD IDENTIFICATION, AND READING FLUENCY

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### COMPETENCY 1.0 ORAL LANGUAGE

**Skill 1.1** Knows basic linguistic concepts and developmental stages in acquiring oral language, including stages in phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics, and recognizes that individual variations occur

See Skill 2.1 for information on phonological and phonemic awareness.

See Skill 3.2 for information on syntax, semantics, morphology and pragmatics.

#### *Theories of Language Acquisition*

##### **Learning Approach**

Early theories of language development were formulated from learning theory research. The assumption was that language development evolved from learning the rules of language structures and applying them through imitation and reinforcement. This approach also assumed that language, cognitive, and social developments were independent of each other. Thus, children were expected to learn language from patterning after adults who spoke and wrote Standard English. No allowance was made for communication through child jargon, idiomatic expressions, or grammatical and mechanical errors resulting from too strict adherence to the rules of inflection (*childs* instead of *children*) or conjugation (*runned* instead of *ran*). No association was made between physical and operational development and language mastery.

##### **Linguistic Approach**

Studies spearheaded by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s formulated the theory that language ability is innate and develops through natural human maturation as environmental stimuli trigger acquisition of syntactical structures appropriate to each exposure level. The assumption of a hierarchy of syntax downplayed the significance of semantics. Because of the complexity of syntax and the relative speed with which children acquire language, linguists attributed language development to biological rather than cognitive or social influences.

## **Cognitive Approach**

Researchers in the 1970s proposed that language knowledge derives from both syntactic and semantic structures. Drawing on the studies of Piaget and other cognitive learning theorists, supporters of the cognitive approach maintained that children acquire knowledge of linguistic structures after they have acquired the cognitive structures necessary to process language. For example, joining words for specific meaning necessitates sensory-motor intelligence. The child must be able to coordinate movement and recognize objects before she can identify words to name the objects or word groups to describe the actions performed with those objects.

Adolescents must have developed the mental abilities for organizing concepts as well as concrete operations, predicting outcomes, and theorizing before they can assimilate and verbalize complex sentence structures, choose vocabulary for particular nuances of meaning, and examine semantic structures for tone and manipulative effect.

## **Socio-cognitive Approach**

Other theorists in the 1970s proposed that language development results from sociolinguistic competence. Language, cognitive, and social knowledge are interactive elements of total human development. Emphasis on verbal communication as the medium for language expression resulted in the inclusion of speech activities in most language arts curricula.

Unlike previous approaches, the socio-cognitive approach asserted that determining the appropriateness of language in given situations for specific listeners is as important as understanding semantic and syntactic structures. By engaging in conversation, children at all stages of development have opportunities to test their language skills, receive feedback, and make modifications. As a social activity, conversation is as structured by social order as grammar is structured by the rules of syntax. Conversation satisfies the learner's need to be heard and understood and to influence others. Thus, his choices of vocabulary, tone, and content are dictated by his ability to assess the language knowledge of his listeners. He is constantly applying his cognitive skills to using language in a social interaction. If the capacity to acquire language is inborn without an environment in which to practice language, a child would not pass beyond grunts and gestures as did primitive man.

Of course, the varying degrees of environmental stimuli to which children are exposed at all age levels creates a slower or faster development of language. Some children are prepared to articulate concepts and recognize symbolism by the time they enter fifth grade because they have been exposed to challenging reading and conversations with well-spoken adults at home or in their social groups. Others are still trying to master the sight recognition skills and are not yet ready to combine words in complex patterns.

## ***Stages of Language Acquisition***

There is wide agreement that there are generally five stages of second language development. The first stage is “pre-production.” While students may actually understand what someone says to them (for the most part), they have a much harder time responding in the target language.

Teachers must realize that if a student cannot “produce” the target language, it does not mean that they aren’t learning. Most likely, they are. They are taking it in, and their brains are trying to figure out what to do with all the new language.

The second phase is “early production.” This is where the student can actually start to produce the target language. It is quite limited, and teachers most likely should not expect students to produce eloquent speeches during this time.

The third phase is “emergent speech” or “speech emergence.” Longer, more complex sentences are used, particularly in speech, as well as in social situations. But students aren’t fully fluent in this stage, and they cannot handle complex academic language tasks.

The fourth phase is “intermediate fluency.” This is where more complex language is produced. Grammatical errors are common.

The fifth stage is “advanced fluency.” While students may appear to be completely fluent, they will still need academic and language support from teachers.

Many people say that there are prescribed periods of time in which students should reach each stage. However, teachers must keep in mind that it depends on the level at which students are exposed to the language. For example, students who get opportunities to practice with the target language outside of school may have greater ease in reaching the fifth stage. In general, though, it does take years to reach the fifth stage, and students should never be expected to have complete mastery within one school year.

## ***Factors that Affect Oral Language Development***

The development of speaking and listening skills requires an intensive attention to make sure that children acquire a good stock of words, learn to listen attentively, and speak clearly and confidently. In many instances, however, students with speech and listening disabilities will experience speaking and listening difficulties.

Some of the most common factors that affect oral language development are:

- **Blindness** Learners who are blind will not be able to see who is speaking nor will they be able to use facial expression and body language as an additional means of interpreting what other people are saying.
- **Hearing Impairments/Deafness** A young child's inability to hear properly can affect his or her ability to learn and develop language. Before they even reach school, children undergo hearing tests which can help determine a child's ability to hear. Hearing can be impaired for many reasons. They could have been born with a hearing deficiency, exposed to dangerously high decibel noise, or suffered a sickness.

For example, some children who have experienced recurring ear infections have been found to have delays in language development due to chronically having their ears "clogged" with fluid which inhibits clear hearing. Deaf learners who use sign language will only be able to follow a discussion by looking at their sign language interpreter. This will inevitably slow down the speed with which they can receive inputs, and it also means that they cannot always focus on the facial expressions of the speaker.

- **Autistic Disorders** Some learners with autistic disorders may find it very hard to communicate directly with other people. Their disability makes aspects of social communication (e.g., eye contact) particularly difficult.

For more information on delays in oral language development, see Skill 1.5.

### ***Strategies for Addressing Oral Language Needs***

See Skill 1.7.

**Skill 1.2 Knows characteristics and uses of informal and formal oral language assessments and uses multiple, ongoing assessments to monitor and evaluate students' oral language skills**

### ***Formal Assessments***

Formal assessment is summative in nature. It refers to tests given to students at the end of a unit, term, or course of study. The results of formal assessment usually translate into a mark or grade that the students receive to determine the percentage of achieved course objectives. The teacher or tester controls the testing environment for formal assessment, and all students perform the same assessment. Diagnostic assessment given at the end of a grade level is a formal assessment as well where the results are compared to that of a control group.

For assessing oral language, formal assessment can take the form of:

- Presentations that students have to prepare for and deliver to a group
- Debates
- Scheduled interviews between the teacher and student in which the student has to prepare answers to questions

### ***Informal Assessments***

Informal assessments pave the way for formal assessment. These assessments take place throughout the course of study and help prepare the student to succeed. The teacher uses informal assessments to determine where the student needs help or where the instruction needs to change to meet the needs of the student.

Ways in which teachers can use informal assessment for oral language include:

- Running records of students' reading
- Checklists of student behavior and needs while giving informal presentations
- Student questions and answers in class discussion
- Student discussion in Literature Circles
- Overall conversation in the class
- Interviews between student and teacher, such as in discussing the books students are reading and questioning on comprehension
- Anecdotal records of student performance, needs, and improvement

Some general language skills to evaluate during informal assessments include determining that the students:

- Converse easily
- Continue to extend oral vocabulary
- Have the ability to talk at length with few pauses and fill time with speech
- Have the ability to call up appropriate things to say in many contexts
- Increase the size and range of a their vocabulary and syntax skills
- Display coherence of their sentences and the ability to speak in reasoned and semantically dense sentences
- Possess knowledge of the various forms of interaction and conversation for various situations
- Possess knowledge of the standard rules of conversation and appropriate sentence structure
- Have the ability to be creative and imaginative with language and express themselves in original ways
- Have the ability to invent, entertain, and take risks in linguistic expression

See Skills 2.7 and 2.9.

**Skill 1.3 Provides language instruction that acknowledges students' current oral language skills and that builds on these skills to increase students' oral language proficiency**

Through instruction of the conventions of the English language and practice in writing and speaking, students develop knowledge of how to use these conventions in their oral language. Students often don't realize that speaking in conversations with their friends and speaking for different purposes require different oral language skills.

The use of the proper conventions of verb usage and subject-verb agreement is just as important in oral language as it is in written language. Development of student vocabulary is important to help them expand on their knowledge of words and their synonyms. Dialects often play a part in the difficulties students experience with oral language.

Teachers must take care when correcting students' use of words and help them develop more proper ways of communicating orally.

See Skills 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, and "Considering Individuality" in 1.7.

**Skill 1.4 Plans, implements, and adapts instruction that is based on informal and formal assessment of students' progress in oral language development and that addresses the needs, strengths, and interests of individual students, including English Language Learners**

Oral language skills are an important component of the Language Arts curriculum for middle school. Teachers need to take the objectives for each grade and plan experiences related to the reading material students are using in the class to find opportunities for oral language experiences for the students in which to engage. By making notes about specific observations, teachers can tailor instruction in subsequent classes to demonstrate how to use vocabulary and the proper conventions of language in all speaking experiences. These can take the form of mini-lessons for the whole class or small groups of students that need this instruction.

***Evaluating Messages***

Class presentations and speeches can be impromptu for students to learn how to speak in front of a group. These would not need to be assessed formally as the teacher can use them to determine the needs of the students and plan appropriate instruction.

Students need time to write their speeches and presentations, and they need time to practice. During the practice sessions, teachers can instruct the students on the proper way to project their voices, add expression, and provide constructive criticism on the content of the material. The writing can also take place within the context of a writing workshop where the teacher can conference with individual students, and the students can engage in peer editing.

As part of the process of planning and implementing instruction in oral language, students should be exposed to guest speakers in the classroom, or the teacher can use videotapes of speakers and ask students to critique the performance. Teachers can also videotape the students giving a presentation and ask the students to critique their own performances.

Analyzing the speech of others is a very good technique for helping students improve their own public speaking abilities. In most circumstances, students cannot view themselves as they give speeches and presentations, so when they get the opportunity to critique, question, and analyze others' speeches, they begin to learn what works and what doesn't work in effective public speaking.

However, a very important word of warning: DO NOT have students critique each others' public speaking skills. It could be very damaging to a student to have his or her peers point out what did not work in a speech. Instead, video is a great tool teachers can use. Any appropriate source of public speaking can be used in the classroom for students to analyze and critique.

Students should always know the assessment criteria for oral language so that they know what the teacher is looking for in a formal assessment. Exemplars demonstrating good, fair, and poor performances should be part of the instruction so students know what they should and should not do.

Some of the things students can pay attention to include the following:

- Volume: A speaker should use an appropriate volume—not too loud to be annoying but not too soft to be inaudible
- Pace: The rate at which words are spoken should be appropriate—not too fast to make the speech incomprehensible but not too slow so as to put listeners to sleep
- Pronunciation: A speaker should make sure words are spoken clearly. Listeners do not have a text to go back and re-read things they didn't catch
- Body language: While animated body language can help a speech, too much of it can be distracting. Body language should help convey the message, not detract from it
- Word choice: The words speakers choose should be consistent with their intended purpose and the audience

- Visual aids: Visual aids, like body language, should enhance a message. Many visual aids can be distracting, and that detracts from the message.

Overall, instead of telling students to keep these above factors in mind when presenting information orally, having them view speakers who do these things well and poorly will help them know and remember the next time they give a speech.

### ***Second Language Learners***

Students who are raised in homes where English is not the first language and/or where Standard English is not spoken may have difficulty with hearing the difference between similar sounding words like “send” and “sent.” Any student who is not in an environment where English phonology is practiced may have difficulty perceiving and demonstrating the differences between English language phonemes.

If students can not hear the difference between words that “sound the same” like “grow” and “glow,” they will be confused when these words appear in a print context. This confusion will, of course, sadly impact their comprehension.

Teachers should not use the same assessment criteria for assessing students learning English as they would for those who are native English speakers. This also applies to the instructional techniques the teacher uses as the second language learners may not understand all of the instruction.

Research recommends that ELL students learn to read initially in their first language. It has been found that a priority for ELL should be learning to speak English before being taught to read English. Research supports oral language development since it lays the foundation for phonological awareness.

### **Skill 1.5 Recognizes when oral language delays or differences warrant in-depth evaluation and additional help or intervention**

#### ***Delays in Oral Communication***

Speech or language delays in children can be cause for concern or intervention. Understanding the development of language in young children can provide information on delays or differences. The efficiency of language for children develops in a pragmatic manner from the caregivers and social environment that children are exposed to during this crucial time of language acquisition. The focus during this period of development should not be on perceived problems such as a child’s ability to pronounce certain vowels or consonants (for example, a child’s pronunciation of /r/ that sounds like /w/ making the word “right” sound like “white.”

Without immediate, consistent, and appropriate intervention, children who begin their formal education with cultural/language differences or delays in literacy development quickly fall behind and, typically, they do not “catch up.” By the time they reach middle school, these students may have already repeated several grades and/or have been assigned to numerous transition classes.

Speech intelligibility guidelines provide a tracking of a child’s oral speech development. General researchers have shown that the following guidelines are recognizable age/language acquisitions:

- Children at 2 years old should have speech patterns that are about 70% intelligible.
- Children at 3 years old should have an increased 10% speech pattern that is about 80% intelligible.
- Children at 4 years old should have a 20% speech pattern that is about 90% intelligible.
- Children at 5 years old should have a speech pattern that is 100% intelligible.
- Children >5 years old will develop speech patterns that continue at 100% intelligibility with increased vocabulary databases.

Given the speech intelligibility guidelines, parents, adult caregivers, and teachers are able to track what is normal development versus language developmental delays or differences. If a child is not developing intelligible and recognizable speech patterns at age appropriate development levels, intervention and additional in-depth evaluations will provide the proper tools to address and correct language delays that could have long range impacts on a child’s final development of speech pattern intelligibility.

By the time students are in middle school, they are expected to use reading as a primary method of learning and to be able to communicate effectively orally and in writing. Students who have fallen behind in the early grades fail to meet these expectations and are forced to develop coping strategies to compensate for their perceived failures. These coping strategies, which often include inappropriate, problematic, and disruptive behavior, serve to further isolate and remove these students from the mainstream educational process and from effective interventional efforts.

Middle school students with delays in literacy development can be identified in a number of ways: they avoid reading as much as possible; when reading out loud, they read everything at a slow or inhibited rate; they do not read outside of school; they demonstrate a limited vocabulary; they rely on teachers or classmates for information; they resist participation in classroom discussions; they have limited attention spans; they demonstrate a lack of comprehension of material they have read; they are unfamiliar with and do not exhibit reading strategies; they are poor listeners; their writing is unstructured and contains a

high rate of misspellings and grammatical and mechanical errors; they “give up” quickly when given a reading or writing task; they do not ask relevant questions; they do not know what to do when they encounter material they do not understand; and they read and write without a sense of purpose.

In addition to students with delayed literacy development, non-English-speaking students may also be in need of in-depth evaluation and intervention. Because command of the spoken language serves as a basis for understanding and learning alphabetic principles, as well as the structure and content of the language, oral proficiency precedes proficiency in reading and writing. Thus children without strong oral skills are in need of special consideration—assisting them in gaining oral proficiency must become the primary task.

There are trade books teachers can use with struggling students that are of interest to the age group yet do not have the higher level of vocabulary as books geared toward the middle grades. This allows these students to increase their reading skills and develop their vocabulary. The use of graphic organizers also helps struggling students as it helps them organize the material they read and helps prepare them for writing.

Teachers can make accommodations to the requirements for struggling students to allow them to experience success. The accommodations must not change the objectives of the course for the students so that they still achieve the outcomes of the grade or course.

Teachers and parents who have concerns about a child’s language development should be proactive in addressing language delays. Contacting speech pathologists, auditory specialists to test for hearing disorders, pediatricians to test for motor functioning delays, as well as utilizing other assessment resources for evaluation are effective steps for those concerned about a child’s language delays or differences. Early intervention is the key to addressing children’s language delays or differences.

**Skill 1.6 Knows how to provide explicit, systematic oral language instruction and supports students’ learning and use of oral language through meaningful and purposeful activities implemented one-to-one and in a group**

Explicit instruction and teacher modeling is essential for teaching oral language skills in the middle school setting. Quite often students at these grade levels use grammatically incorrect speech and, therefore, the teacher must provide the instruction necessary for the students to be able to recognize and correct the mistakes they make.

The teacher must model the proper conventions of the English language when speaking to the students. Reading aloud to the class presents an opportunity to

provide explicit instruction by stopping at places in the reading to point out mistakes in speech and asking the students what the correct speech would be.

By showing videotapes to students of different speakers and pointing out where improvements can be made, the teacher offers explicit instruction. Students can prepare charts individually or as a group about the qualities of good speakers. A class chart should be posted in the classroom where it is visible to all students.

When preparing students to critique presentations, the teacher should provide them with a checklist or what to look for in the presentation. This allows students to recognize mistakes and helps them prepare for speaking themselves. As a modeling exercise, the teacher should go through a presentation using the checklist and demonstrating how students can use it.

As a teacher of middle school students, the presentations the teacher uses to model conventions of oral language should never be those of students in the class. The presentations should be by people that the students do not know. This will prevent any student being held up to ridicule for the rest of the class.

Direct instruction in the conventions of language helps students in both their writing and speaking. Teachers need to determine the needs of the students and provide this instruction to the whole group (if there is a need for it) or to small groups of struggling students. Even one-on-one work with a struggling student is warranted if the situation demands.

Through informal assessment, teachers can find the mistakes students make and where each student needs intervention or instruction. It often becomes difficult for teachers to demonstrate for students the need for changing their language to suit the situation. Role-playing in the classroom is one way of providing instruction. One example of this could be having students use their normal language when interviewing for a job. Then the same students, or different ones, can role-play the same situation using conventional oral language that suits the situation. Group discussion can then help demonstrate the difference between the two and which role-play situation was more effective for the purpose. Explicit instruction in oral language skills also helps to reinforce the students' listening skills.

**Skill 1.7**      **Selects and uses instructional materials and strategies that promote students' oral language development; respond to students' individual strengths, needs and interests; reflect cultural diversity; and build on students' cultural, linguistic, and home backgrounds to enhance their oral language development**

***Strategies for Addressing Oral Language Needs***

Oral Language involves both expressive (speaking) and receptive (hearing) language skills. Some students with language impairments will request to have directions repeated, while others may not be self-monitoring enough to recognize their own lack of comprehension. Students with severe oral language disabilities will require extensive support services. However the following strategies may also be utilized with students:

- Demonstrate or model what you want the student to do, talking through the task while performing it
- Provide plenty of time for verbal responses to questions
- Have the student sit close to the teacher or in front of the classroom
- Have the student orally describe visual materials such as a picture or poster
- Increase oral fluency by having the student say as many words in a category as he or she can think of within a minute time period
- Use the student's interests and nonacademic and academic strengths as conversational topics

Teachers can support the development of listening and speaking skills in several ways by:

- Modeling how language is used to communicate – Children understand the meanings conveyed through facial expressions, body gestures, and voice tones. They can then learn how to pronounce specific words, make sense of standard of rules of grammar, and enlarge their vocabularies.
- **Talking with children** - Children should be encouraged to express their needs, feelings, ideas, stories, and imaginations. Children learn how to be conversation partners by taking turns, staying on the topic, and waiting until the speaker is finished
- **Reading to children** - This allows children to enjoy spending time with a favorite adult and associate reading with these positive feelings. Children also can begin to make discoveries about the connections between spoken and written words

### ***Activities for Promoting Oral Language***

The most basic activity is to let the children practice their oral language skills, so it's ok if your classroom is noisy at times. There are many activities that encourage the development of oral language. Activities can include the following:

- Using finger puppets for retellings of stories
- Utilizing computer games for stimulating language development
- Writing new verses to existing poems and then reading them aloud
- Singing songs and chants that are fun to say
- Engaging in "word play" activities in which children change beginning, middle, or ending letters of related words, thus changing the words they decode and spell
- Having discussions that focus on a variety of topics including problem solving
- Practicing rhyming word families

### ***Considering Individuality***

Students have individual strengths and weaknesses in oral language development. Teachers must take these individual differences into consideration. The goal is to take the students from where they are to the next level.

For students who are already well-developed in their oral language, teachers should praise them and allow them to experiment with other forms of the language. They should also provide students with many opportunities for speaking. Many students who have well-developed speaking skills may also be shy and, therefore, it is the job of the teacher to help them with their self-confidence issues.

For students who are experiencing difficulty, the teacher needs to take the family and cultural situations into consideration. Since these students may not recognize the mistakes they make, the teacher can point them out by conferencing one-on-one with the students. Another way of doing this is to provide mini-lessons to a small group of students who have similar needs.