



Session 3:
Language Comprehension
Teacher Professional Development Series



Recap

In our last session, we spent time...

- discussing the word recognition strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope.
- discussing how *phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition* shape a students' ability to read with automaticity.



Today's Objective

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

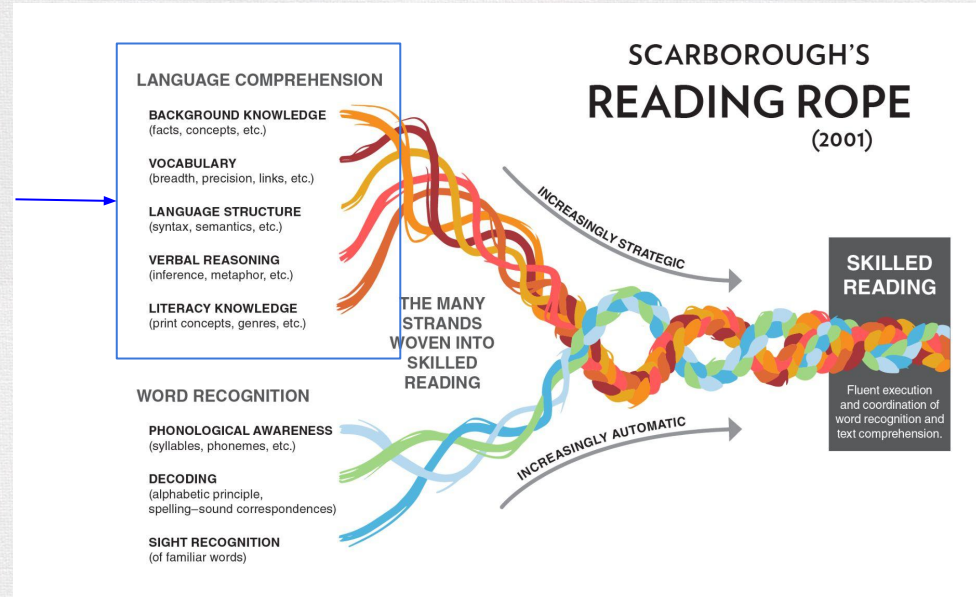
- ★ explain the role of language comprehension in developing skilled readers.
- ★ explain how background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy/print knowledge lead to reading comprehension.



Language Comprehension

- Language comprehension includes background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge
- These skills are woven over time so that they are used strategically while reading.

SOURCE: [Heggerty](#)



Background Knowledge

Studies have consistently shown that students with a greater amount of background knowledge tend to be stronger at reading comprehension than those with more limited background knowledge.

They must also be able to activate and readily access that background knowledge.

A child with lower reading skill can partially compensate by having a higher degree of background knowledge (particularly as it relates to recall, less significant when it comes to making inferences).

SOURCE: [Snow, Serry, and Hammond, 2021](#)



Background Knowledge

- Building a broad base of knowledge with your students is a crucial component of good reading instruction.
- As you build their knowledge base, they are able to think, speak about, and write about many different topics.
- Many of our widely used curricula have a focus on building a wide knowledge base among students.



Vocabulary

- Vocabulary is key to reading comprehension - if a student does not know what the words mean, they will not be able to comprehend them.
- Most vocabulary is learned indirectly through regular interactions and conversations, but some vocabulary must be explicitly taught.
- You can support learning of vocabulary indirectly by having students engage regularly in conversations with peers and adults, through read-alouds, and through independent reading.



Vocabulary

You can support direct learning of vocabulary by:

Indirect Instruction:

- Encourage wide reading
- Expose students to high-quality oral language

Direct Instruction:

- Promote word consciousness
- Teach word meaning directly
- Teach independent word-learning strategies, including the use of context clues, the use of word parts, and the efficient use of the dictionary

SOURCE: [Sedita](#) (2005)



Language Structure

Good language comprehension also requires an awareness of and skill with **syntax** - the rules that determine how sentences are structured.

Syntactic awareness refers to the ability to monitor the relationships among the words in a sentence in order to understand while reading or composing orally or in writing.

Poor syntactic awareness will also negatively impact reading comprehension - this is often a particularly challenging area for English language learners whose home language may have different syntactic patterns.

Source: Joan Sedita - Keys to Literacy



Verbal Reasoning

Verbal reasoning refers to understanding what you read by making connections to what you already know, inferencing, understanding metaphors, and being able to draw conclusions from text.

Do the students understand the deeper meanings of texts that aren't written explicitly? Do they understand idioms? Do they make connections between texts that they are reading and the knowledge that they already have?



Literacy/Print Knowledge



Literacy/Print Knowledge is another key thread in the science of reading.

-Does the student have an awareness of print concepts? An awareness that text moves from left to right, that there are spaces between words, that new paragraphs begin on separate lines?

Does the student understand the variety of genres that exist - fiction, nonfiction, poetry, etc? Can they distinguish between these genres and understand the author's purpose for writing in a particular genre?

Final Thoughts

- Language comprehension is as important as word recognition in developing skilled readers, but it is often a neglected component - particularly at the earliest levels.
- Understanding if and where a child is struggling when it comes to language comprehension can help you support their growth.
- Read-alouds, conversations, and opportunities to learn and express their thinking are key for building a child's ability to comprehend language.



Engage

Why are the language comprehension strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope essential for developing skilled readers? What will you do to support your students' ability to understand increasingly complex language?



References

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