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INTRODUCTION

Reading is a complex linguistic achievement, and teaching children to read is a complex activity requiring a great deal of knowledge and skill.

Let us consider some of the knowledge and skills that we need in order to be effective teachers of reading. First, we must have knowledge about

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Phonological Awareness: The ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest units of sound in spoken language.

Decoding: The process of identifying unknown words by using knowledge of letter-sound correspondences.

Sight Recognition: Words recognized immediately on sight without need for deliberate decoding.

Receptive Vocabulary: The words comprehended but not necessarily produced spontaneously in speech.

Expressive Vocabulary: The words known and produced in spontaneous speech.

Grammatical Structure (Syntax): The grammar of the language—divided into simple and complex. Simple syntax includes declarative (e.g., “John saw Mary”), interrogative (e.g., “Did John see Mary?”), and imperative (e.g., “John, sit quietly!”) sentences. Complex syntax includes subordinate clauses (e.g., “I went yesterday *to see the show*”) and embedded clauses (e.g., “John, *who wore a yellow raincoat*, ran for the last bus”).

Discourse: The use of language for extended verbal interaction (e.g., conversation, storytelling, exposition.)

Genres: A category of artistic composition, as in music or literature, marked by a distinctive style, form, or content. Dominant literacy genres include storytelling or narrative and factual or expository.

the content of reading and what children need to learn in order to become successful readers. The National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) identified five core areas of learning for reading proficiency: phoneme awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. We need to have detailed knowledge of all of these areas and their subcomponents. Second, we need to know about the development of reading. This means that in addition to knowledge of what skills to teach, we need to know when to teach them, what level of texts are appropriate for which stage of development, and what differentiates a strong reader from a weaker reader. Third, we must have knowledge about how to teach the range of skills children need for reading competence, how to select the most appropriate method for each child, and how to ensure that these methods motivate children to learn to read and to find reading enjoyable. Fourth, we need to know how to assess students and how to use a range of assessment information to plan for the next steps in children’s reading development. Finally, we must have the skills to actually apply all this knowledge in the classroom.

As if all this were not enough, in addition to all the knowledge and skills we have already described, we include academic language as an important aspect in the teaching of reading. What is academic language and why do we include it? To answer this question, first we need to review what we mean

by reading and then we will discuss what we mean by academic language and how it is integral to reading.

What Is Reading?

Hollis Scarborough (2001) has catalogued the skills that need to be coordinated for reading to occur. These include *phonological awareness*, *decoding skills*, *sight recognition* of familiar words, background knowledge of the subject of the text, *receptive* and *expressive vocabulary*, knowledge of *grammatical structures*, inferential skills, and knowledge of different styles of *discourse*, including different *genres* (e.g., narrative, expository).

While reading requires the skillful coordination of many cognitive and linguistic abilities, at its essence it comes down to the recognition of arbitrary symbols on a page or screen that are known to convey meaning. The fluent decoding of combinations of symbols as *words* and of combinations of words as *sentences*, allows us to comprehend the meaning intended by the author. In this book, we pay close attention to the oral language (listening and speaking) antecedents of reading, as well as the often hard to assess and teach meaning-making goal of reading—comprehension.

Teachers anticipate that long before children are taught to read in school, they have been exposed to a rich base of oral language, have heard countless storybooks, and have comics and print-bearing toys in their homes or preschools. These *emergent literacy* experiences along with opportunities to listen to and use oral language extensively prepare students for taking language to the next level—deciphering and encoding it in print—themselves. However, due to differences in sociocultural contexts, not all children will have had such opportunities in English for many different reasons; English may not be the language of the home, they may not have attended a preschool that focuses on emergent literacy activities, or their families may not be in a position to provide such emergent literacy experiences themselves (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006). For many students, English is a second or, more accurately, an additional language, because students may learn English after they have already acquired both an indigenous language (e.g., Zapotec) and a national language (e.g., Spanish). English language learners (ELLs) acquire some reading skills (e.g., decoding) in English in much the same manner as native English-speaking students.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

Emergent Literacy: Reading-related behavior and activities prior to a child's acquisition of independent reading that demonstrate an understanding of the nature of reading and writing (e.g., looking at books, pretend reading/writing, telling a story from pictures).

SEVEN DIMENSIONS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

There are seven essential dimensions of formative assessment that, taken together, distinguish them from other kinds of assessments:

1. **Purpose of the Assessment:** Teachers must be able to identify the “gap” between the learner’s current status of understanding with respect to the desired learning goals and apply informed instructional actions to close the gap. Purpose also includes being clear about what you want from the assessments and having confidence that the assessment is valid (i.e., it actually assesses what you think it will assess).
2. **Degree of Spontaneity:** Formative assessment emerges spontaneously in the midst of instructional activity, or is planned in advance to elicit evidence through questioning, discussion, writing, or analysis of student artifacts.
3. **Interpretive Framework:** Learning progressions provide an interpretive framework that enable formative assessments to locate students’ current learning status on a continuum along which students are expected to progress.
4. **Feedback:** Formative assessment is a process that provides feedback to the teacher about current levels of student understanding. It also feeds back into the teaching and learning to guide what the next steps in learning should be and provides feedback to students about their learning and how they can improve.
5. **Student Involvement:** Students have an explicit role in formative assessment and through peer- and self-assessment they reflect on their learning and actively take steps to move their learning forward. Effective feedback supports student self-assessment.
6. **Time Interval:** The period between when the teacher collects the information and when she uses it for planning instruction is short. Action is taken in the course of learning.
7. **Locus of Control:** The teacher decides when to use formative assessment strategies, what strategies will be used, who will be assessed, and when the assessment will take place.

We will now look at each one of these dimensions in more detail to better understand the ways in which they characterize formative assessment.

RESOURCE C

Additional Formative Assessment Strategies for Listening and Speaking Skills

Below is a Formative Assessment Wheel. It contains the strategies already introduced in this chapter, along with several additional strategies. Below, we provide examples of many of these strategies. This is not an exhaustive list of strategies but the wheel is meant to remind you that it is the *collection* of many different strategies that will give you reliable evidence and a more complete picture of student progress (While not focused on formative assessment exclusively, see also Penny McKay’s (2006) *Assessing Young Language Learners*, Cambridge University Press, for excellent suggestions for assessing the oral language skills of children learning a second language.) Both the type and size of the “slices” of the wheel will differ for each student. Keeping this in mind will help ensure that you do not rely too much or too little on just one strategy.

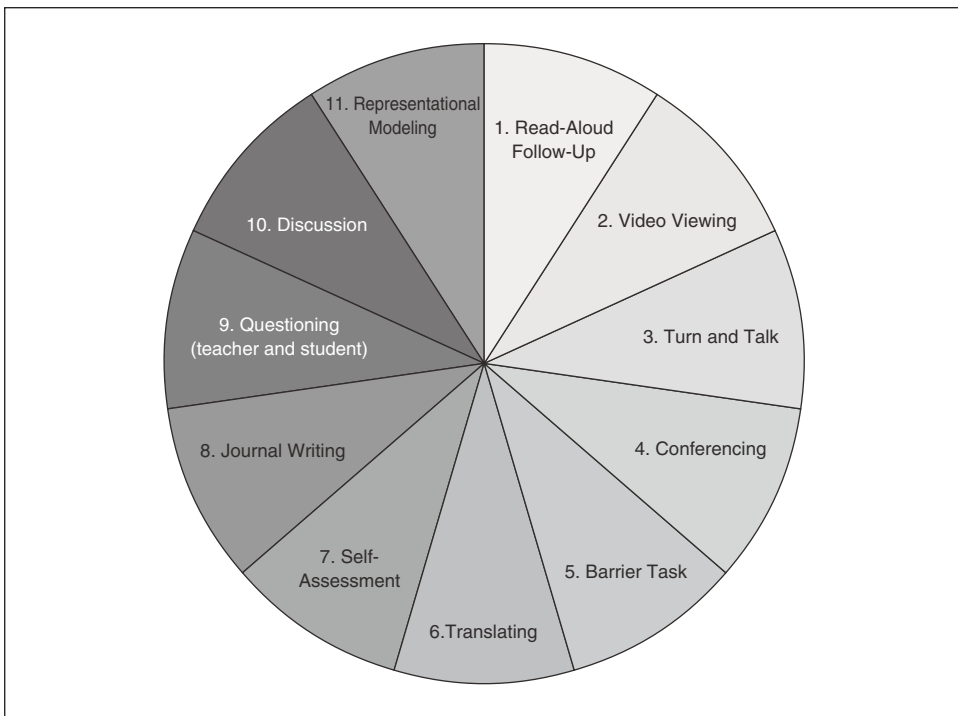


Figure 4.14 Formative Assessment Wheel: Strategies for Listening and Speaking