




Fostering Early Language and Conversations

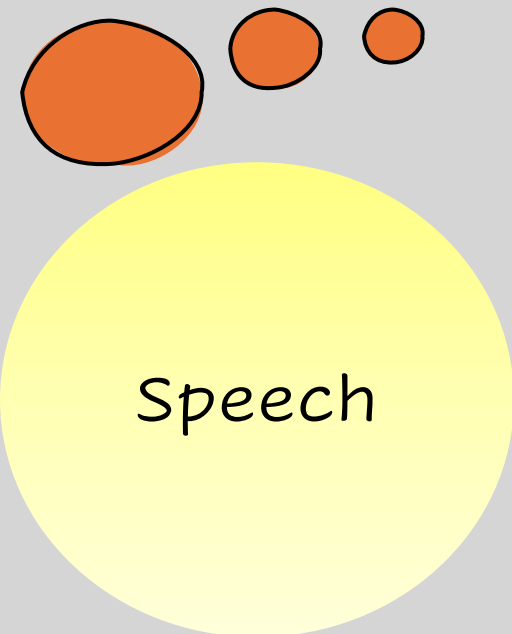
With Nina Rothery & Chloe Godwin



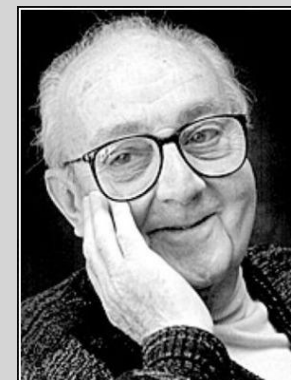
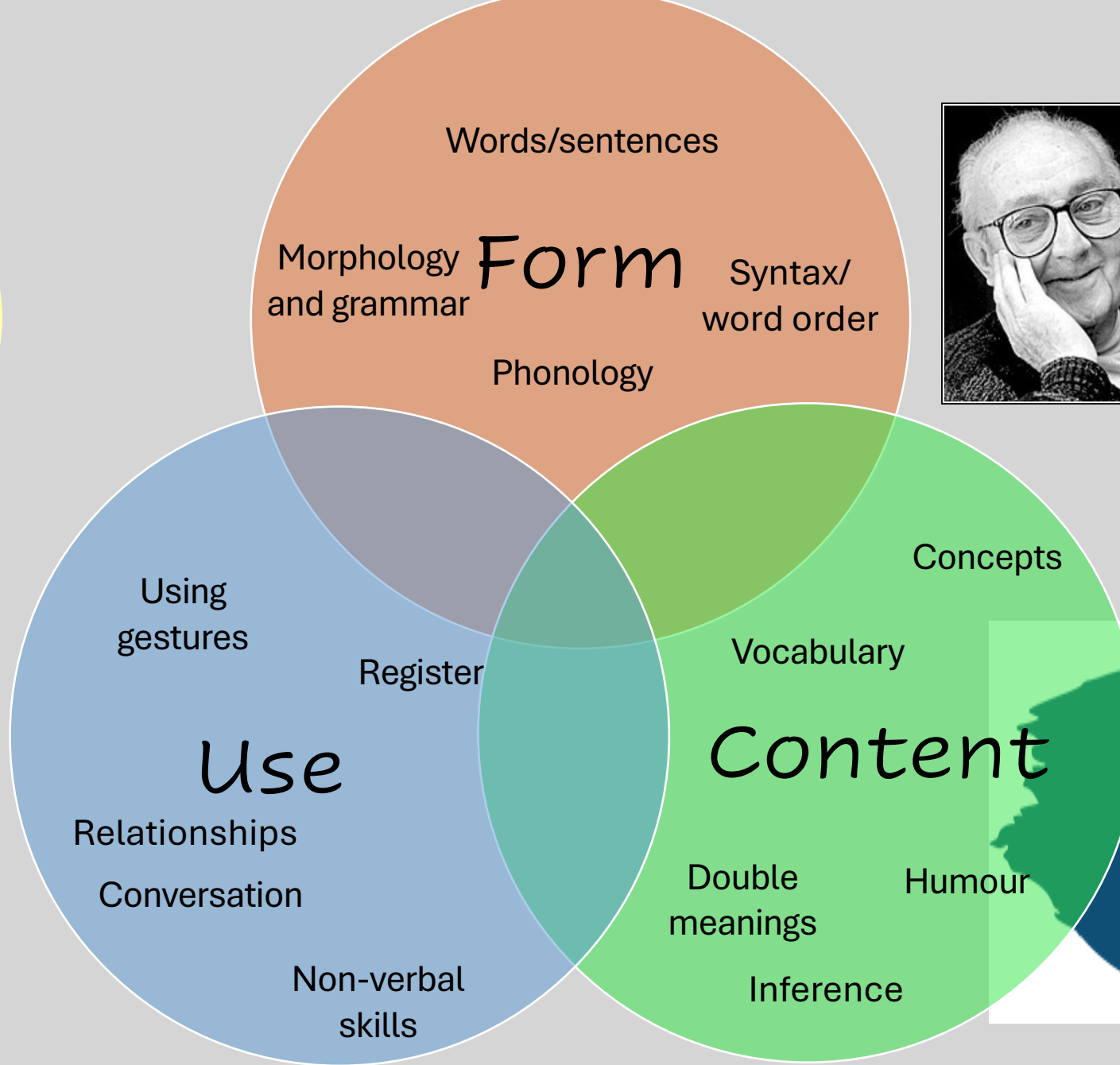
*The **Balancing Act** - Cornerstone English Hub Conference March 2025*



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Speech

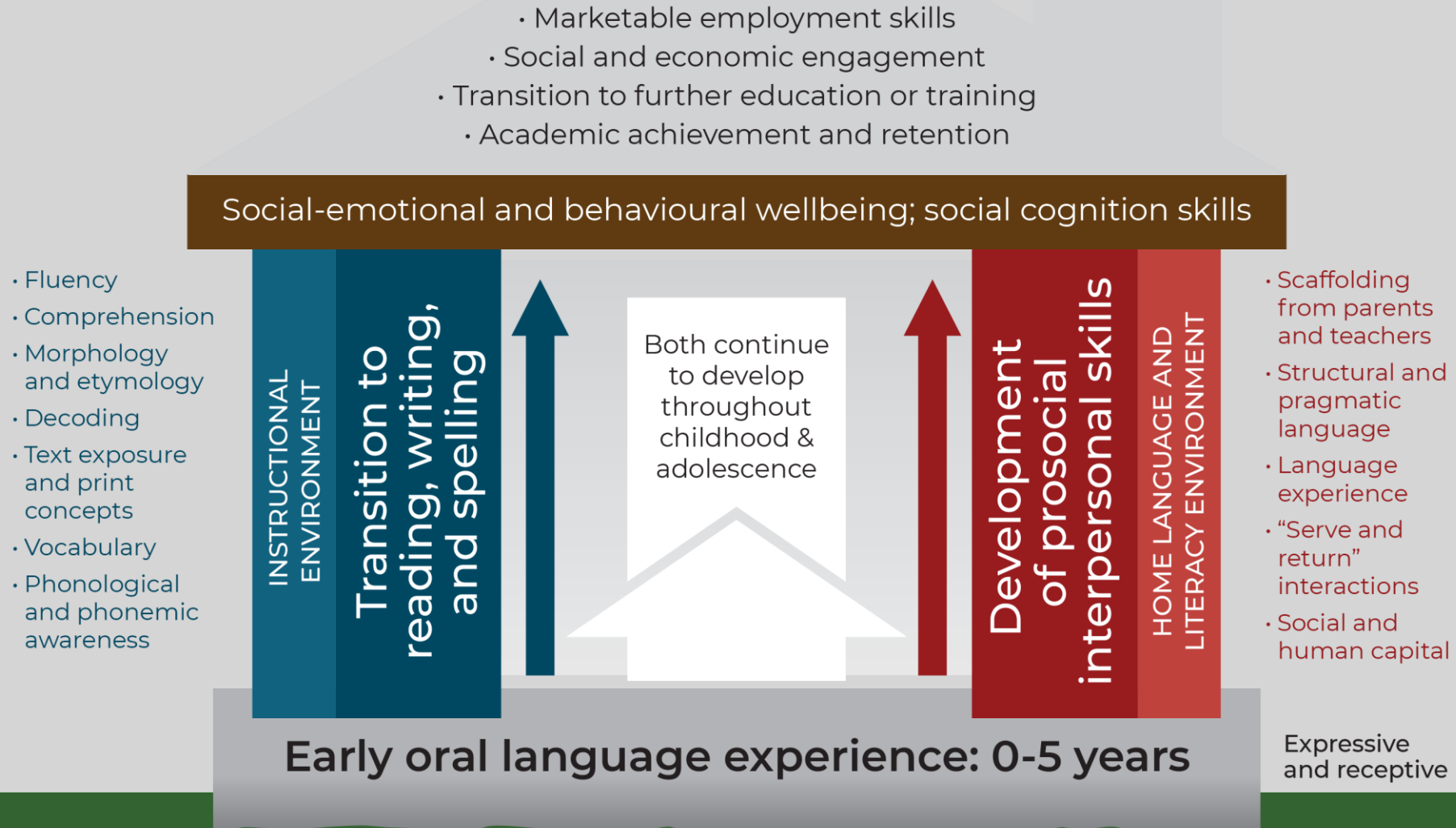
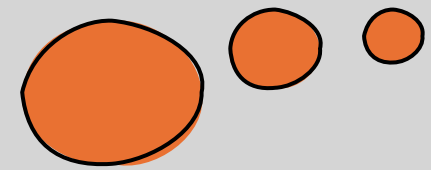


All models are approximations. Essentially, all models are wrong, but some are useful. However, the approximate nature of the model must always be borne in mind.

— George E. P. Box —

AZ QUOTES


A Model
for
Language



Solid ground: Social and emotional contexts for language use




Academic Attainment & Employability

- Language skills at age 5 are more **predictive of reading skills** at age 11 than factors such as behaviour, friendships, emotional wellbeing.
 - Poor language at age five means you are **four times more likely to struggle with reading** at age 11.
 - Children struggling in language development at 5 are:
 - **six times less likely to be behind in English** at age 11,
 - and **eleven times more likely to be behind in maths** at age 11.
 - Early language skills at five are linked with **employment outcomes at age 34**.
 - Approximately **60%** of young people in the youth justice system were identified as having SLCN (Bryan, 2015). Only **2%** of youth offenders in one study had **accessed** any form of **SALT** services (Lanz, 2009).
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Mental Health & Relationships

- Spoken language skills are important in **building and maintaining relationships, understanding and expressing feelings** and emotions – and **problem solving**.
 - Good spoken language skills are identified as supporting **resilience** when it comes to mental health.
 - Early language ability at two years predicts later **emotional and behavioural ability**
 - Good language skills at 7 predict better **quality friendships** at age 16
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Task 1: What is typical talk?



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What's typical talk at Primary?

This poster describes the stages of typical language development, with examples of what you might see and hear in a classroom or school environment.

Language development in the primary years steadily builds on the solid foundations that are established during the early years. Children's attention, listening, understanding, vocabulary, speech, grammar, storytelling and conversations all develop further in terms of skills, knowledge and complexity.

Children develop at different rates and this poster tells you what to expect at different ages. Although it is not an assessment, the information could help you identify children who are not developing language skills as expected.

Children with English as an additional language are at the same risk of speech, language and communication needs as any other child, however, this can be more difficult to identify.

Attention, Listening and Understanding	Vocabulary	Speech Sounds, Grammar and Sentence Building	Verbal Storytelling and Narrative	Conversations and Social Interaction
<h4>4-5 years</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Knows to look at who's talking and think about what they're saying.Listens to and understands instructions about what they are doing, without needing to look up.Understands 2 to 3 part spoken instructions: e.g. "Finish your picture, then sit on the carpet and look at a book."Can answer a 'Who' or 'Why' question: e.g. "Why do we need sunbats on?" "To stop the sun burning our face."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Understands a range of related words to describe concepts: e.g. soon, early and late, soft, hard, and smooth.Knows words can be put into groups and can give common examples in them: e.g. Animals: dog, cat, horse...Uses words more specifically to make the meaning clearer: e.g. "I saw a funny monkey. It was a spider monkey."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Says words clearly although may struggle with a few complex speech sounds, consonant blends or words with lots of syllables: e.g. 'Whabbit' for 'rabbit', 'bow' for 'blow', 'sketti' for 'spaghetti'.Uses well-formed sentences: e.g. "I played with Zoe in the park."but with some errors: e.g. "I folded down."Joins phrases with words such as: e.g. I, because, so, could.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Lists events with some detail: e.g. "I went to school. I had fat chips for tea. I played games on the poster."Retells favourite stories - using some of their own words: e.g. "...and she said what a nice rabbit you got and the wolf said, 'I can eat you! Guh'."Describes events but not always joined together or in the right order: e.g. "I went on the top of the bus with dad. That big slide is scary. We took the bus as well."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Confidently starts and takes part in individual and group conversations.Joins in and organises co-operative role play with friends and can pretend to be someone else talking.Uses language to ask, negotiate, give opinions and discuss ideas and feelings: e.g. "Now we're going to Nana's today! Can I take today with me? He will be sad by home!"
<h4>5-7 years</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Starts to ignore unimportant information.Is aware when a message is unclear and comments or asks for explanation.Understands complex 2 to 3 part instructions: e.g. "Finish your picture from yesterday then with a partner, choose one of the topic books and tell about it quietly on the carpet."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Compares words, the way they look, sound or mean: e.g. "There are two words 'top' of the beach, and you 'see' with your eyes."Can guess the word from clues, or give others clues using shape, size, function, etc.Uses newly learnt words in a specific and appropriate way: e.g. "Dad, you know when you have lots of items together it is called a pride of lions."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Speech is clear with occasional errors, especially with consonant blends.Has good knowledge of sounds in words.Asks lots of questions to find out specific information including 'Who' and 'Why'.Uses different ways to join phrases to help explain or justify an event: e.g. "I'm older than you so I will go first."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tells stories that set the scene, have a basic plot and a sequence of events.Begins to be aware of what the listener already knows and checks: e.g. "You know where I live, right? Well, in that big house by the shop."Accurately predicts what will happen in a story.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Takes turns to talk, listen, and respond in two-way conversations and groups.Keeps to a topic but easily prompted to move on if it takes over.Copies others' language and begins to be aware of current peer language: e.g. Copies swear words, says, "Cool", or "Yeah right!"Uses and experiments with different styles of talking with different people.
<h4>7-9 years</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Listens to key information and makes relevant, related comments: e.g. "So all mammals are warm blooded, how far or how and their babies all drink milk."Identifies clearly when they haven't understood: e.g. "What's maise?" or "Get a blue what?"able to infer meaning, reason and predict: e.g. "It's getting very hot in here," mimi open the window.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses a range of words related to time and measurement: e.g. century, calendar, breadth.Uses a wide range of verbs to express their thoughts, or about cause and effect: e.g. "I wonder what she's thinking, if, 'if we run we should get there on time but we might arrive late'."Joins in discussions about an activity using topic vocabulary: e.g. "The bee collects the pollen from the flowers and then flies to another flower and pollinates it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Speech is clear, uses words with three sounds together or words with lots of syllables: e.g. gush or giggle, rhinoceros or identical.Uses regular and unusual word endings: e.g. walked or felt.Uses complex grammar and sentences to clarify, summarise, explain and plan: e.g. "The bee collects the pollen from the flowers and then flies to another flower and pollinates it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stories have a good structure with a distinct plot, an exciting event, clear resolution and conclusion: e.g. "...and everyone got home safely which was great."Uses intention to make storytelling and details exciting and interesting.Adds detail or leaves information out according to how much is already known by the listener.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses formal language when appropriate in some familiar situations: e.g. Showing a visitor around school.Understands conversational rules: e.g. Looks at listener to judge feedback. Gives more detail if needed.Uses tone of voice, stress on words and gestures naturally to add meaning.Uses language for full range of different functions: e.g. complimenting, criticising, negotiating.
<h4>9-11 years</h4> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Sustains active listening to both what is said and the way it is said: e.g. "Leap" instead of "jump", "frighted" instead of "frightened".Follows longer instructions that are not familiar: e.g. "Put the empty folder that's on top of the cupboard into the bottom drawer of my desk."Understands different question types: e.g. open, closed, rhetorical.Understands simple jokes and simple idioms, but can't really explain why they are funny or what they mean: e.g. "You don't have your cake and eat it."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Makes choices from a wide and varied vocabulary: e.g. "Leap" instead of "jump", "frighted" instead of "frightened".Uses sophisticated words but the meaning might not always be accurate: e.g. "My bedroom was meticulous."Knows that words can have two meanings and uses them appropriately. Can't always explain how they are linked: e.g. "Word" (rigid object and tough person).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses long and complex sentence structures: e.g. "I will come with you only because it means you will stop going on at me."Uses questions to help conversations flow.Sentences average about 7 to 10 words - longer in stories than in conversation.Knows when a sentence is not grammatically correct and can explain rules of grammar.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tells elaborate entertaining stories which are full of detailed descriptions.Everyday language is detailed and not always about their immediate experience.Incorporates a subplot in telling stories and recalling events, before resolving the main storyline.Uses complex joining words: e.g. meanwhile, therefore.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses different language depending on where they are, who they are with and what they are doing: e.g. Formal style with the headteacher in school, relaxed and informal with family at home, and 'cool' language with friends in the park.Communicates successfully, shares ideas and information, gives advice and offers advice, and offers and takes notice of opinions.Realises when people don't fully understand and tries to help them.

For further information and advice visit:
www.talkingpoint.org.uk

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The Reading Framework

- Underpinning the reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage is the aim of reducing the language gap between children from language-rich homes and others.
- The progress of these children depends on adults engaging them in high-quality dialogue and direct teaching so that they can:

Develop their knowledge
across all areas of learning

Articulate what they know
and understand

- Critical to this are children's back and forth interactions with adults: These form the foundations for language and cognitive development.
 - The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial.
- 



Pronunciation

Talk

Understanding

Play

Looking & Listening

Attachment / Being Attuned

Development is not fully sequential – stages are met and revisited throughout development.

Sh



Share attention

Be at the child's level. Pay attention to what they are focused on.

R



Respond

Follow the child's lead. Respond to their non-verbal and verbal communications. You could make a brief comment on what they can see, hear or feel.

E



Expand

Repeat what the child says and build on it by adding more words to turn it into a sentence.

C



Conversation

Have extended back and forth interactions. Give children time to listen, process and reply.




High quality interactions in the
Early Years

The ShREC approach

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"Sustained shared thinking involves two or more people working together to solve a problem, clarify an issue, evaluate activities, or extend a narrative. Key features include all parties contributing to the interaction – one aimed at extending and developing children's thinking."

-Matt Bromley - SecEd



Sustained Shared
Thinking

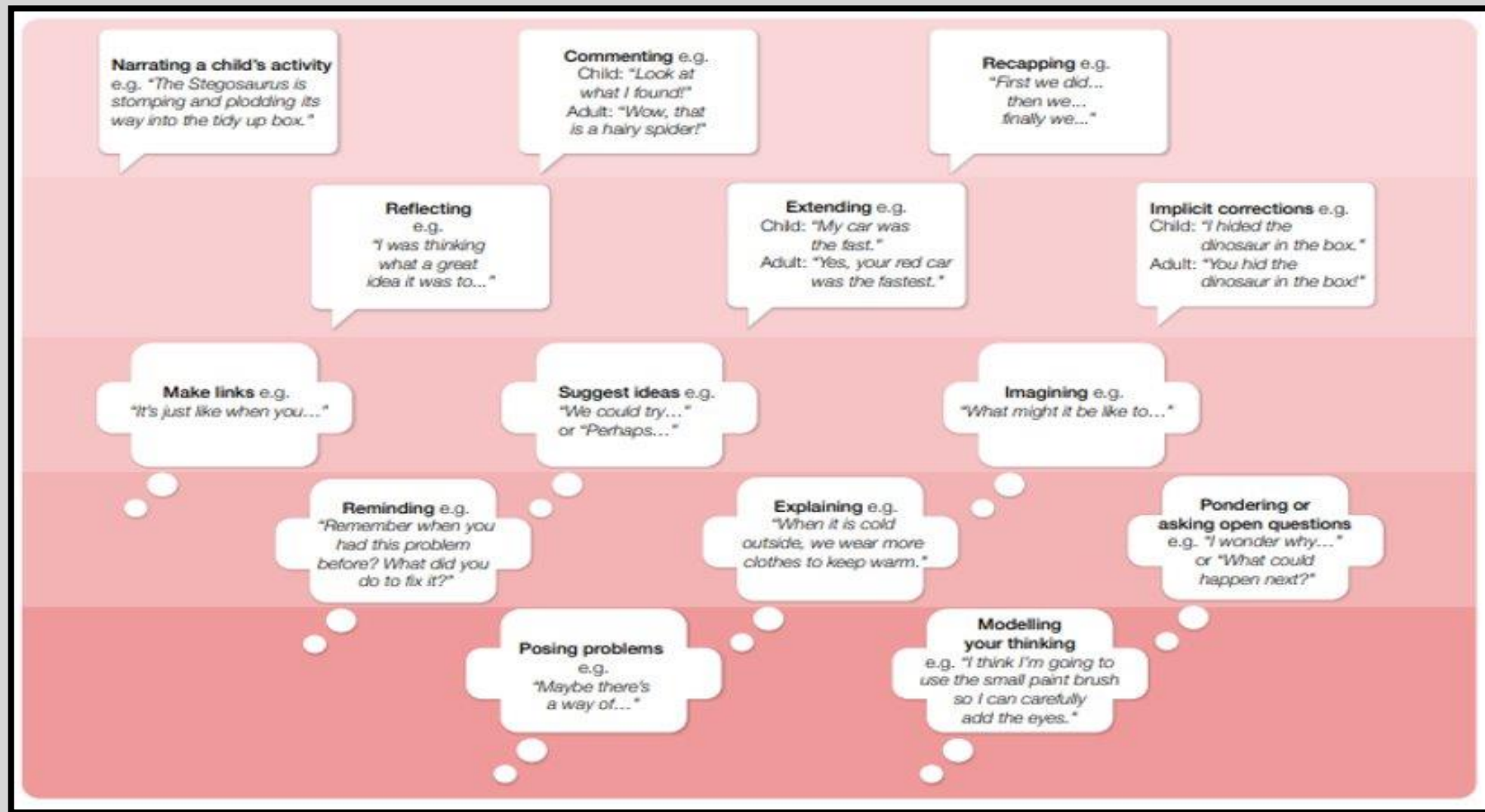


It can happen anywhere!

Incidental learning

Planned focus
activities

Play – indoors and
outdoors



Funded by





Adults scaffold talk through interaction

- What strategies were used well?
- What would be the next steps at a similar interaction with this child?

Environments scaffold talk through opportunities

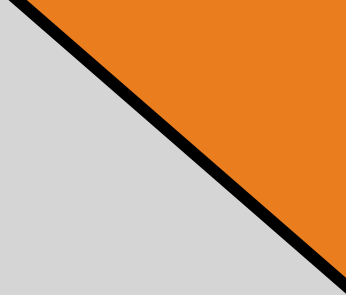



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Task 2: Communication Hotspots

- Create or think of a map of your classroom and / or school layout (inside and out)
- Observe children engaged in activities for a few set periods during the day
- Mark the hotspots on your map with a coloured cross – one cross for a place where there is some purposeful talk; more crosses where there is lots of purposeful talk
- With another coloured pen, mark the places where there is little talk



Teaching words and making them stick Extending and deepening children's vocabulary

Quantity and quality count



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What if you don't know some words?

How can you tell streaked tenrecs are ♦□♠✕☉● animals?

How do streaked tenrecs ♠□○○◆■✕♠☉◆♠?

Sometimes streaked tenrec families get ♦♠□☉□☉◆♠☰ in the rainforest and need to ♠□○○◆■✕♠☉◆♠ with each other. They make high-pitched sounds when they need to find each other. This process is called ♦◆□✕☰◆●☉◆✕□■.



Why Books?

Spoken Language	Written language
Less formal – greater use of colloquialisms	Formal tone
Spontaneous	Planned structure

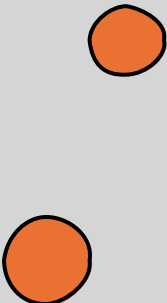
Everyday conversation

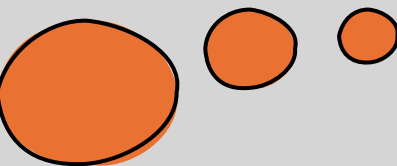


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Learning words

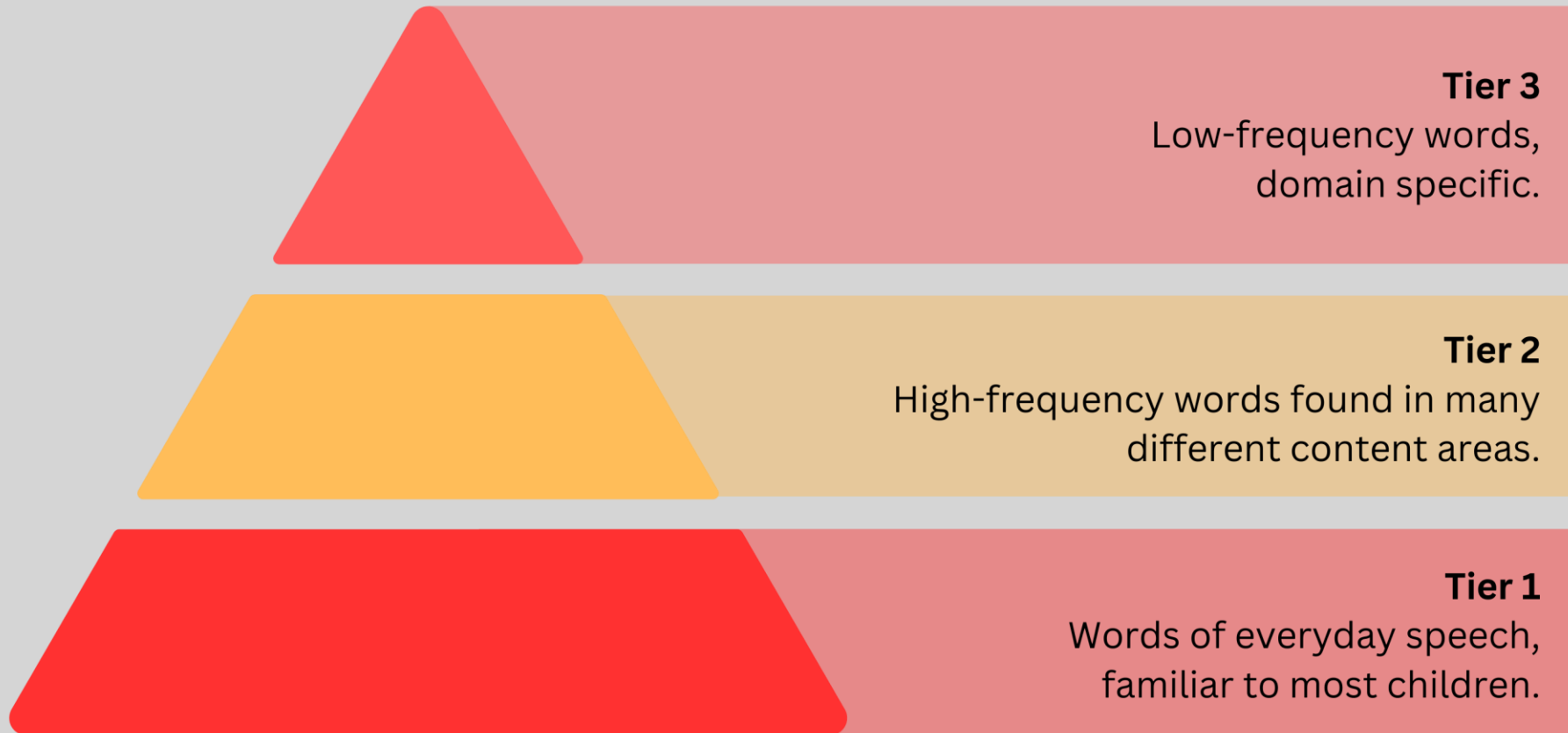
- Learning to recognise and produce the sounds of the words;
 - Learning the meaning of the word (dog = four-legged, furry animal that says woof); and
 - Learning how to develop the representation of the word and generalise the word correctly (such as learning that dog can be used to refer to all different types of dogs but cannot be used to refer to any cats, no matter how similar they may look to dogs; or that go can stand in for walk, run, stroll, or drive, but, for example, walk cannot always be used in place of go).
- 



Word	Rich, decontextualised Knowledge of a word's meaning, its relationship to other words, and its extension to metaphorical use	Knowledge of a word but not able to recall it readily enough to use in appropriate situation	Narrow context-bound knowledge	General sense; for example: 'mendacious has a negative connotation'	No knowledge
Palpable					
Admonish					
Ameliorate					
Heredity					
Table					
Fast					




What words to teach



Intro to Beck's work
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Some Criteria for Identifying Tier Two Words

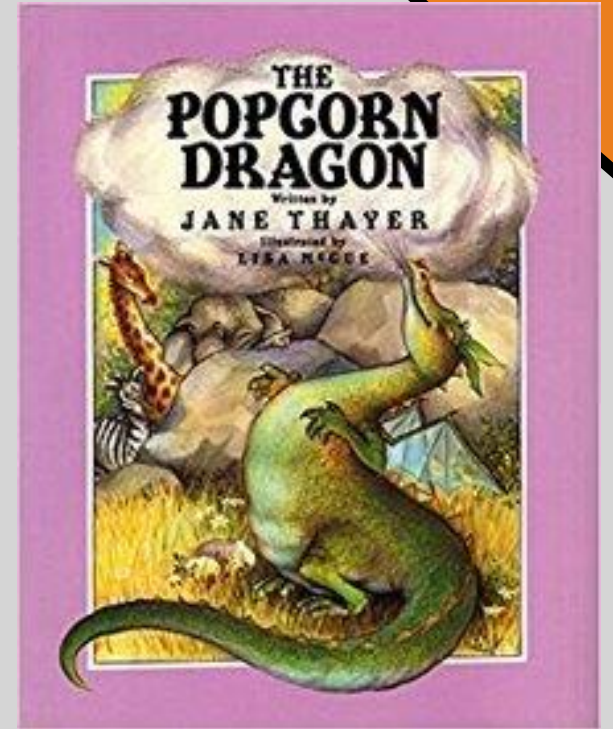
- *Importance and utility*: Words that are characteristic of mature language users and appear frequently across a variety of domains.
 - *Instructional potential*: Words that can be worked with in a variety of ways so that students can build rich representations of them and of their connections to other words and concepts.
 - *Conceptual understanding*: Words for which students understand the general concept but provide precision and specificity in describing the concept.
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Accidentally, drowsy, pranced, scorched,
envious, delighted and forlorn

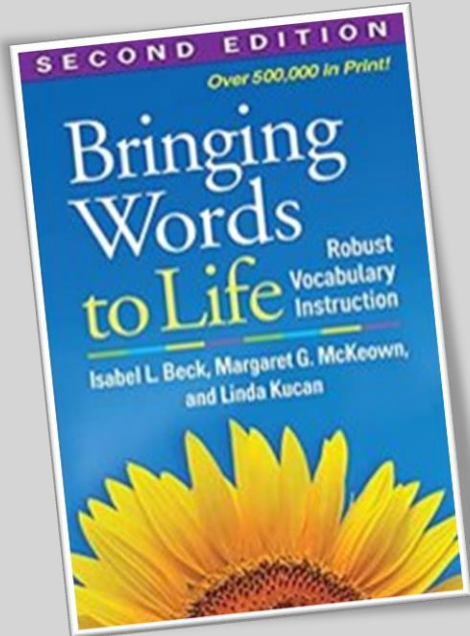
Envious- all 5 year olds know what it is like to want
something someone else has

Delighted- being very happy

Forlorn – being very sad



A structure for teaching a word




1. Introduce the word in the context of the story
2. Children say the word (develop awareness of syllables, initial sounds, saying tricky clusters)
3. Child friendly explanation, "This word means..."
4. Teacher provides example of the word out of the story context "I would/might/a time I was..."
5. Children engage and interact with the word
6. Children say the word again



PEER

This is a simple sequence that can be used to support shared, or 'dialogic', reading. When reading together, adults can pause and:

- **Prompt** the child to say something about the book;
 - **Evaluate** their response;
 - **Expand** their response by rephrasing or adding information to it; and
 - **Repeat** the prompt to help them learn from the expansion.
- 

PEER Example




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CROWD

There are **five** main types of prompts that can be used as part of the PEER sequence. The prompts can be remembered using the acronym **CROWD**:

- **C**ompletion—leave a blank at the end of a sentence for children to complete (this works particularly well with books with rhymes or repetitive phrases);
 - **R**ecall—ask children about something they have already read (these prompts support children to understand the story plot);
 - **O**pen-ended—often with a focus on pictures in books (this works well with illustrations and encourages children to express their ideas);
 - **W**h—prompts that begin with ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘why’, and ‘when’ (‘what’ questions can be used to develop vocabulary); and
 - **D**istancing—connects the book to children’s own life experiences and provides an opportunity for high quality discussion.
- 



Final Thoughts

- Is there anything you would like to share?
- Any takeaway thoughts?