Reference guide – unpacking the English 3–6 focus areas

Vocabulary

Overview

Vocabulary knowledge comprises breadth (number of words known), contextual sensitivity (understanding meanings in different contexts) and morphological awareness (recognising word structure) (Kieffer and Lesaux 2012). Vocabulary develops gradually through exposure, context and the explicit teaching of words (Notley and Bell 2023). Vocabulary is critical to reading comprehension. Reading requires more complex, and often more abstract vocabulary than that used in everyday oral interactions. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean.

The development of a rich oral vocabulary through speaking and listening activities is essential for all learners and particularly important for EAL/D learners to develop their reading vocabulary.

To facilitate vocabulary learning, teachers can promote word consciousness – an awareness and interest in words and their meanings, taught explicitly through context, morphology and language devices (Quigley 2018).

Considerations:

- How can students be supported to acquire a deep understanding of word knowledge?

- How often should vocabulary be taught? What words from the fluency passage will need explicit instruction?

- How many words should be selected to focus on each lesson/week?

- How can explicit vocabulary instruction be taught with other content in Component A?

Teaching and learning strategies

Vocabulary teaching and learning strategies could include:

- selecting text and focus words for instruction

- explicit instruction for selected words should include 3 components

    — a child-friendly definition of each word

    — multiple exposures to the word in meaningful contexts

    — several active processing activities for each word

- multiple ways for students to organise and consolidate their word knowledge using graphic organisers such as, Venn diagrams, word webs, Frayer diagrams, word chain, word clines.

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Further reading

- Effective reading in the early years of school – Vocabulary

- Stage 2 reading – Vocabulary in context

- [Stage 3 reading – Vocabulary in context](#)

- [Universal Resources Hub – Vocabulary resources](#)

Reading comprehension

Overview

Reading comprehension is an active process of problem-solving and thinking critically about texts. It relies on the reader's ability to recognise most or all words in a text. Comprehension is heavily dependent on a student's language comprehension skills and their ability to apply:

- background knowledge

- vocabulary knowledge

- knowledge about texts

- understanding of language structures

- reasoning skills.

Explicit teaching is required for students to understand and experience the cognitive processes involved in understanding texts (NESA 2022).

Considerations:

- Where might meaning break down in the fluency and close reading passage? Why?

- How can content areas be connected when planning and mapping lessons?

- What vocabulary and background knowledge will students need to access the text?

- What instructional methods and techniques will be most effective?

Teaching and learning strategies

Reading comprehension teaching and learning strategies could include:

- close reading, where teachers plan multiple opportunities for students to closely examine, interpret and evaluate the authorial and secretarial features of the text (Parkin 2019)

- implementing a systematic and sequential plan for developing and building students' background knowledge (Smith et al. 2021) and vocabulary to ensure that students have sufficient knowledge to engage, read and comprehend the text

- using graphic organisers to teach text structure and reading comprehension when teaching abstract thinking processes such as inferences

- using 'think-alouds', sentence pairs, mental imagery and visualisation techniques as effective approaches to teaching cohesive ties, inference and comprehension monitoring

- explicit instruction that involves readers in question answering, question generation and summarisation (Oakhill et al. 2023).

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English K–10 Syllabus © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2022.

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Further reading

Assessment of reading – Advice guide [PDF 107 KB]

Comprehension – Fix-up Strategies [PDF 275 KB]

Improving reading comprehension Years 3 to 10: A guide to support conversations about evidence-based practice in reading [PDF 1.5 MB]

Reading comprehension: Explicit comprehension instruction [PDF 113 KB]

Reading and writing: The evidence base in practice [PDF 3.0 MB]

Stage 2 reading

Reading fluency – Stage 2

Overview

Fluency is the ability to read text aloud with key elements of accuracy in word decoding, automaticity in recognising words, prosody or meaningful oral expression and monitoring reading fluency. While fluency holds significance in both silent and oral reading, research highlights that oral reading practice and instruction are particularly effective in enhancing this skill (Shanahan 2012). These fluency elements serve as a crucial link between word recognition accuracy and text comprehension (Pikulski and Chard 2005). Students need to integrate words into meaningful phrases with appropriate expression to make sense of a text.

Each aspect of fluency plays a specific role in supporting readers. Accurate word reading allows access to the author's intended meaning, automaticity facilitates ongoing interpretation, prosody aids in grouping words meaningfully, and monitoring comprehension enables students to check understanding and become independent readers of complex texts (Hudson et al. 2005). Effective strategies involve promoting automaticity and prosody through repetitive reading of texts, emphasising the importance of achieving the ideal level of repetition (Rasinski, Homan and Biggs 2009).

Note: reading fluency is a separate outcome and content area in Stage 2. In Stage 3, reading fluently is embedded within the Reading comprehension content area.

Considerations:

- How can a focus on repeated reading contribute to achieving fluency development?

- How can students be supported to develop skills in automaticity, reading rate and prosody?

- How does the ability to monitor reading fluency help students recognise when their reading breaks down?

- What are some effective strategies for fostering fluency?

Teaching and learning strategies

Reading fluency teaching and learning strategies could include:

- explicit teaching: demonstrate the skills and cognitive processes involved in fluent reading during modelled instruction. Model appropriate pace, expression, volume, rhythm and phrasing. Demonstrate where long and short pauses occur in a text and how to adjust prosody to reflect the author's intended messages.

- guided practice: support practise of the skills required for fluent reading. For example, Repeated reading: at least 3 repetitions of the same text (standard Repeated Reading) or a sufficiently similar text (Varied practice), Choral reading, and Paired/partner reading.

- independent practice: provide opportunities for students to participate in meaningful and engaging activities that ensure a focus on the learning intention for the lesson.

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Further reading

Fluency assessment tool

Fluency resources on Universal Resources Hub

Fluency: Explicit instruction [PDF 102 KB]

Teaching advice for Reading fluency

Creating written texts

Overview

The simple view of writing (Gough and Tunmer 1986) explains skilled written expression requires 2 equally important skills:

- transcription skills (handwriting, keyboarding and spelling)

- composition skills (idea generation and organisation, topic knowledge, audience awareness, vocabulary choices, sentence construction, grammar, punctuation and knowledge of literary genres).

In addition to these skills, executive function (working memory and attention) impacts students' writing development. Ideally, students develop automaticity and fluency of transcription skills so their focus can be on compositional skills such as planning, generating ideas and formulating sentences, to create effective and meaningful texts.

The writing process shows the stages involved in composing texts including planning, drafting and composing, editing and proofreading and publishing. These provide a framework for teachers to support students before they write, as they write and after they write.

The support cycle (NESA 2022) for teaching helps teachers explicitly teach students what to do in each of the stages of the writing process. Writing moves through the phases of building field/content knowledge, deconstructing exemplar texts, teacher modelling the writing process, shared writing, guided writing and independent writing. The cycle mirrors the gradual release of responsibility model as it slowly increases students' independence from teacher-led tasks to student-led tasks (Mackenzie and Scull 2018).

Considerations:

- How does learning in Component A support student writing in Component B?

- How do transcription and composition skills contribute to skilled writing?

- How can creating written texts content be integrated with other content areas?

- How can I teach writing using quality texts?

Teaching and learning strategies

Creating written texts teaching and learning strategies could include:

- explicit teaching instruction at each stage of the writing process using the support cycle for teaching writing

- explicit teaching of each component of writing, from word, sentence, paragraph to whole texts

- writing lessons embedded in authentic contexts

- using quality texts as motivation, inspiration and a model for student writing.

References

English K–10 Syllabus © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2022.

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Mackenzie N and Scull J (eds) (2018) *Understanding and Supporting Young Writers from Birth to 8,* Routledge, Abingdon, UK.

Myhill, Jones, Lines and Watson (2011) 'Re-thinking grammar: the impact of embedded grammar teaching on students' writing and students' metalinguistic understanding', *Research Papers in Education,* 27(2):139–166, doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2011.637640.

Sedita J (2023) *The Writing Rope A Framework for Explicit Writing Instruction in All Subjects*, Brookes Publishing Co. Baltimore.

Further reading

Creating written texts lesson advice guide [PDF 289KB]

Spelling

Overview

Explicitly teach the phonology (the units of speech sounds in words such as syllables, onset and rime, and individual phonemes), orthography (common letter patterns and rules) and morphology (the meaningful word parts and how they can connect) of words simultaneously (Devonshire and Fluck 2010; Madelaine 2023; Westwood 2023). This is known as Triple Word Form Theory (Garcia et al. 2010) (Daffern 2017).

Students should be taught how to read, spell, and understand the meaning of words. They should be given frequent and regular opportunities to develop their phonological, orthographic and morphological skills so that they can learn to make connections, increase efficiency and autonomy (Devonshire and Fluck 2010). Spelling should not be taught through visual memorisation of whole words and repetitive drills (Berninger and Fayol 2008).

Successful learning in spelling requires instruction to be embedded within the context of authentic reading experiences (Graham and Santangelo 2014). Consider using words that students have learnt to decode, pointing out patterns and discussing the relationship between phonology, orthography, and morphology.

Considerations:

- What role does quality literature play in teaching spelling, and how can it be effectively incorporated into spelling instruction?

- Why are phonological, orthographic and morphological skills essential for spelling?

- What words for inquiry could be selected and used to explicitly show students the coordination of phonology, orthography and morphology (Triple Word Form Theory) during the spelling process?

- In what ways can teachers explicitly teach, model and articulate spelling strategies during classroom activities to enhance student learning?

Teaching and learning strategies

Spelling teaching and learning strategies could include:

- applying the think aloud strategy to explain the strategies used, such as breaking words into syllables or recognising common spelling patterns. Modelling spelling strategies will help students internalise these approaches

- explicitly teaching new learning using metalanguage to explain the phonological, orthographical or morphological focus of the lesson

- using inquiry tools to support students to investigate or build words, using the phonological, orthographic and morphological components of spelling as a framework. Inquiry tools could include word sorts, word webs, word sums, flowcharts, word matrix.

References

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Further reading

Using Think-Alouds to Improve Reading Comprehension

Consonant generalisations [PDF 107 KB]

Orthographic linguistic features [PDF 81.6 KB]

Spelling instructional sequences

Spelling: Explicit spelling instruction [PDF 237 KB]

Standard Australian English phonemes [PDF 134 KB]

Summary of morphology terms [PDF 45.0 KB]

Consonant generalisations [PDF 107 KB]

Handwriting and digital transcription

Overview

The acquisition of proficient handwriting and digital transcription skills holds significant importance in the overall development of students' writing, reading and spelling abilities. Research has consistently shown that regular, explicit and systematic handwriting practice contributes to improved student performance in various language-related tasks (Medwell and Wray 2014). The mastery of both fluent and legible handwriting styles and efficient typing/word processing is crucial, as it enables students to automate the mechanical aspects of writing, thereby freeing up cognitive resources for more complex elements of text creation. By understanding the cognitive benefits of sensory-motor integration when handwriting, it is evident that continuing handwriting instruction in Years 3 to 6 is essential (Askvik et al. 2020). In the primary years, handwriting and typing skills enhance a student's ability to take notes, comprehend information and retain conceptual knowledge.

Considerations:

- What impact does teaching handwriting and digital transcription skills have on my students writing?

- How often and for how long should I be teaching handwriting and/or digital transcription each week?

- What should I be teaching in handwriting and digital transcription?

- How could these lessons be structured?

Teaching and learning strategies

Handwriting and digital transcription teaching and learning strategies could include:

- a focus on posture, pencil grasp and letter formation

- teaching touch typing skills, valuing accuracy of typing over speed

- scaffolding the learning by allowing students to progress from observing a model, to copying and then writing from memory

- encouraging students to evaluate their own handwriting and typing after practising – for example, asking them to circle the word that they believe is formed very well and evaluating the accuracy of their typing

- teaching students how to use software functions, including shortcuts, to support digital text creation

- at least 3 explicit teaching sessions per week of short, sharp lessons, lasting 15–20 minutes each.

(Mackenzie and Scull 2018).

References

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Further reading

In conversation about handwriting podcast (22:36)

Handwriting: Explicit handwriting instruction [PDF 160 KB]

Teaching advice for Handwriting and digital transcription

Handwriting and digital transcription instructional sequences

References

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