

# Every Child is a Language Learner

California Reading Association –  
Professional Development Institute

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## Objectives

- ◆ Understand the theory of oral language from various sources
- ◆ Understand how opportunities to strengthen oral language can be provided throughout a Reading Recovery lesson
- ◆ Understand multiple ways to deepen our thinking regarding oral language development

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## Clay's Theory of Oral Language

“We know that entry into formal education settings such as schools reduces children’s opportunities for talking. And we know how schooling can prevent children from using the language which they used so effectively before they came to school. (Cazden, 2001)”

– Clay, M. (2013) *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, pg. 8

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## Early Language Opportunities

“For the first five years the child’s language growth is entirely dependent on what people say to him.”

“At each successive stage the child makes errors, but only because he is trying to use more and more of the available possibilities of the English language.”

– Clay, M. (1991) *Becoming Literate*, pg. 70

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## Moving Forward...

- ◆ Adults use various processes to expand and reformulate children’s language.
- ◆ Adults can provide immediate, specific feedback through this process.
- ◆ Children learn to reformulate their ideas so they can be understood.

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## Implications for Literacy Acquisition

“Children who are talking, writing, and reading could also be described as being involved in a complex dance or circular causation and computational activity.”

– Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 1

*Cazden on the development of language in Reading Recovery:*

“...it highlights some important features of successfully taking cultural differences into account: assuming that all children have language and ideas relevant to school learning, and that it is the teacher’s task to acknowledge and build on them.”

-- Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom Discourse: The Language of Teaching and Learning*, pg. 160

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## Supporting Theories of Oral Language

- ◆ Language is used as a cultural tool to help solve many social problems.
- ◆ All cultures have developed language.
- ◆ We use language to speak, write, draw and think.
- ◆ Language shapes the mind to function in the most efficient way for a particular culture.
- ◆ *Language is a mental tool – part of cognitive processing*  
-- Bodrova, E. and Leong, D.J. (2007). *Tools of the Mind*, pgs. 14, 65

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## Assessing Oral Language

- ◆ Record of Oral Language
  - ◆ Observe changes in children's language development
  - ◆ Provide a basis of selection of children whose language development requires special attention

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## Oral Language Progress Monitoring

- ◆ **Recording the longest utterance** – “Lengths of utterance is a reliable indicator of growth in early oral language skills.” – Clay, M. (2005). *LLDI Two*, pg. 51
- ◆ **Written sentence structures** – Analyzing what types of structures children use in their writing can help determine what they control. – Clay, M. (2005). *LLDI Two*, pgs. 53, 68, 213
- ◆ **Running Records** – “What led the child to do (or say) that?” – Clay, M. (2013). *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*, pg. 71

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## Conversations Throughout the Lesson

“Understand that children learn language easily through conversation.”

– Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 10

“As we talk with a child he revises and refines his language, experimenting, making funny errors but gaining all the while in control over the expressiveness and the complexity of the language.”

– Clay, M. (1991) *Becoming Literate*, pg. 69

“In every conversation you have with the little children, you can hear the construction of grammar going on.”

– Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 3

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## Fostering Children’s Language Development

◆ Create opportunities for them to talk, and then talk with them (not at them).

– Clay, M. (1991) *Becoming Literate*, pg. 69

\*\* What is the difference between talking with them and talking at them? – Have a brief conversation with someone next to you.

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**“There are no quick ways to extend language but the best available opportunity for the Reading Recovery teacher lies in the conversations she has with the child in and around his lessons.”**

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 51

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## Building the self-extending system through oral language

“Learning language is not about adding more items; it is about building more access roads – or more networks across more neurons! Expanding language networks means having more alternatives from which to choose.”

– Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 3

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## Create the need to produce language

### Where does this begin?

*Roaming Around the Known*

“If we plan instruction that links oral language and literacy (writing and reading) from the start – so that writing and reading and oral language processing move forward together, linked and patterned from the start – that instruction will be more powerful.”

– Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 9

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## Familiar Reading

- ◆ Discuss the story after reading – who is doing the talking and who should be doing the talking?
- ◆ Describe the conversations that are part of your familiar reading.
- ◆ How can you develop fluency not only in reading but in having conversations during this time?
- ◆ How might your conversations from this part of the lesson influence the writing composition?

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## Rereading Yesterday's New Book

- ◆ In early lessons, quickly check words, phrasing or language features that were teaching points for the book

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 97

- ◆ Engaging in brief, meaningful conversations can help a child negotiate meaning as well as develop oral language skills

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 97

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## Word Work

- ◆ Consider how word work changes over the course of a lesson series.

“Once the child knows how to work on words in different ways...Informal discussions should continue to arise over reading texts and especially over writing texts.”

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 149

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## Writing

**“Genuine but short conversation...”**

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## Conversations

- ◆ Start up a conversation, guided by all you know about this child. Talk about something that you feel sure he would be interested in. This should not be an interrogation. In a genuine but short conversation help reluctant children to compose something.

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 55

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## Constructing and Composing

- ◆ How do we help our students become storytellers so they have an advantage? – Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 50
- ◆ The child has been talking for several years now – we must now help the child get a short message recorded and it must be a shared activity. – Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 51

*“We know something has changed in the child’s language when we hear him construct part of a sentence in a new way.”*

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 51

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## Written Sentence Structures

- ◆ Refer to *LLDI Two*, pg. 213

*Questions to ask ourselves:*

1. What do you notice about the sentence structures?
2. How might you need to shift your conversation or prompting to help the child build the complexity of his writing?
3. How does this link to oral language?

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## New Book Choice

Knowing which structures a child controls can be useful when making decisions with book choices.

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 90

- ◆ Look at the child’s Record of Oral Language – what are the structures the child controls?
- ◆ Now look at the book choices – which book may be best considering what they already control in their oral language structures?

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## New Book Introduction

- ◆ Twin aims including: The teacher should support the continued expansion of the processing system itself to cope with more features of language. – Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 93

- ◆ Engaging in a brief conversation following the reading of the text can provide insight into the child’s understanding, including asking the child their opinion. This gives the child the message that the “whole story was the point of the reading activity.”

– Clay, M. (2005) *LLDI Two*, pg. 97

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## Deeper Analysis of Our Teaching

**Personalization** –

“the means by which the teacher brings the child’s own experiences to bear on the topic.”

– Van Dyke, J., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2006), pg. 27

**Appropriation** –

“the picking up of new language by the child...the active transformation of knowledge...can also be reciprocal.”

– Van Dyke, J., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2006), pg. 27

**Reformulation** –

“the teacher can appropriate a child’s utterance in order to revoice or reformulate it into a more mature form. Then the teacher’s language will be out there for the child’s subsequent appropriate if it is the ‘just-in-time’ language the child needs to be understood. (Cazden, 2001, p. 96)

– Van Dyke, J., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2006), pg. 27

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## What do you want to try on Monday?

- ◆ Consider two ways you already encourage or plan for oral language development in your lessons
- ◆ Consider two other ways you can further develop your child's oral language by shifting your teaching and thinking.

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## Final thoughts...

- ◆ Helping the brain learn to work on increasingly complex language structures results from the child's experiences talking, writing, and reading with teachers who are knowledgeable and supportive.

— Clay, M., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2004), pg. 14

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Clay, M. (2007). *Record of Oral Language*

Van Dyke, J., *Journal of Reading Recovery*, (Spring 2006)

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## Additional Resources

Clay, M. (2001). *Change Over Time in Children's Literacy Development*.

Clay, M. (2005). *Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals, Part One*

Genishi, C. and Dyson, A.H. (2009). *Children, Language and Learning: Diverse Learners in Diverse Times*.

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## Contact

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