Oral language and beginning to read

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Abstract

This collaborative teacher-research study was conducted in children’s first year of school and explored ways young children’s use of oral language, vocabulary and phonology connected with beginning reading. A play-based oral language intervention was implemented and an analysis of oral language and reading suggested that spoken language did not provide a neat, sequential base which can be easily mapped to written language. Questions were raised about the view that oral language neatly underpins reading development and the study concluded that learning to read written English is influenced by children’s oral language development as well as their experience and understanding about written language structures.

Introduction

Oral language has long been regarded as the foundation for beginning reading as children draw on the meaning, syntax and the phonology of spoken language as a bridge to emergent literacy (Saracho & Spodek, 2007; NICHD, 2005; Poe, Burchinal & Roberts, 2004; Menyuk & Chesnick, 1997). Oral language and print knowledge are viewed as the two pillars of learning to read (Mol, Bus & De Jong, 2009). As oral language is related to learning to read many teachers are concerned about the vast diversity in the oral language capabilities of children starting school. In this small study of children in a metropolitan school in Adelaide the teachers commented that some children were beginning school with relatively small vocabularies and some used forms of nonstandard oral language. The teachers thought that children with nonstandard forms of English syntax may have difficulty accessing the syntax of books or book language to aid their beginning reading. Also the school had increasing numbers of children with English as an additional language as well as children who speak languages which have not been recorded in written form. The concern of these teachers led to questions about oral language and reading which are explored further through a review of literature, several case studies of groups of young children who are beginning to read emergent texts and an analysis of oral and written language.
Oral language as a predictor of early reading

The importance of oral language as a predictor of future literacy achievement is supported by research across a number of oral language domains. Young children need to have control over several aspects of oral language prior to starting the beginning to read process – phonology, vocabulary, syntax, discourse and pragmatics (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) in the United States in a review of research concluded that some aspects of oral language had substantial correlations with decoding and reading comprehension. There are several characteristics of oral language: word meanings (semantics), sentence structure (syntax), the architecture of words and word parts (morphology) and sounds (phonology) (Richgels, 2004). In this paper the particular characteristics of oral language phonology, syntax and vocabulary will be explored and compared to written language.

There has been a wealth of research evidence over the past 20 years demonstrating a strong link between phonological awareness and the ability to learn to read and spell. Measures of preschoolers’ level of phonemic awareness strongly predicts their future success in learning to read and ‘maybe the most important core and casual factor separating normal and disabled readers’ (Adams 1990, pp. 304–305). Children’s awareness of phonology, particularly rhyme and alliteration, was found to have a powerful effect in their eventual success in learning to read (Bradley & Bryant, 1983). Phonological skills, particularly rhyming, enable children to make analogies when learning to read and this is important in alphabetic literacy where there is a grapheme-to-phoneme relationship (Goswami & Bryant, 1990; Byrne, 1998). In learning to read, phoneme segmentation was also found important for the reading of sight words and the matching of sounds to words. Dixon, Stuart and Masterson (2002) found that children’s phoneme segmentation ability was related to not only learning new words quickly but also for building up a detailed representation of words useful for reading, proof reading and eventually spelling.

The use of syntax or grammar in oral language has been identified as important for beginning reading comprehension and vocabulary development (Bowyer-Crane et al., 2008). The areas of vocabulary, pragmatics and grammar are highlighted as an important underpinning for beginning reading (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2009). Bishop and Snowling (2004) propose a two-dimensional model of reading difficulties with phonological skills lying on one dimension and non phonological skills lying on the other. In this model phonological skills are related to decoding and non-phonological skills such as semantics and syntax relate to reading comprehension. It is argued that children with a high competence in oral language sentence construction bring rich narrative language to the new task of reading and writing (Dickinson & Snow, 1987; Roth, Speece & Cooper, 2002).

Vocabulary development is closely tied to reading comprehension
Children’s vocabulary at age 3 is strongly associated with learning to read and reading comprehension at the end of third grade (Hart & Risley, 2003). Dickinson and Tabors (2002) found the scores that kindergarteners achieved on measures (receptive vocabulary, narrative production, and emergent literacy) were highly predictive of their scores on reading comprehension and receptive vocabulary in fourth and seventh grade. Biemillar (2001) writes that differences in vocabulary knowledge remain over schooling unless educators facilitate vocabulary growth in the early years of school. Beck and McKeown (2007) report that reading aloud from children’s literature and rich and focused instruction on sophisticated words enhances children’s vocabulary. The importance of reading books aloud is emphasised because everyday spoken language has fewer rare words compared to the rare words that occur in books read aloud and reading aloud allows children to hear the syntax of written language. Hayes and Ahrens (1988) state that the lexical input from conversations are a limited source of learning new words outside of the most common terms. To develop lexical knowledge requires extensive reading across a broad range of subjects. Young children’s oral language vocabulary, when enhanced through the shared reading of picture books either in English or their primary language, has been shown to strengthen the vocabulary acquisition of English-language learners (Roberts, 2008).

Returning to the differences between written and oral language, phonology is auditory and written language is a graphic representation of sounds and meanings. Purcell-Gates (2001) compares oral and written language and argues that oral language, including its vocabulary, syntax and conventions differs in significant ways to written language. She writes that reading and writing should be concerned with the conceptual and procedural knowledge of how written language works and not with how children’s standard or non-standard oral language constitutes the base upon which literacy develops. Written language demands more conscious attention to form and this involves choices to do with semantics, syntax and phonology. For example, a four-year-old beginning speller who wants to write ‘I have a chair’ has to consider word order and meanings and when writing the word ‘chair’ the child needs to pay attention to phonemes in a way that they never had to when learning to speak (Richgels, 2004). Compared to spoken language, the act of writing takes more time. As well as being more time-consuming, the syntax of a written text is embedded with more adjectival and adverbial sentence clauses whereas spoken language consists of more fragments and repetitions. Also the vocabulary of written language reflects a greater range of vocabulary choice perhaps because there is more time to choose words than when engaged in a spontaneous conversation.
The importance of oral communication in school

While there may be differences between oral language and written language, the NICHD (2005) study concluded that oral language is important in its own right for ‘learning to learn’. Importantly, oral and written language are different ways of knowing (Halliday, 1985) and different oral language functions allow students to think and access knowledge in different ways (Halliday, 1975). Many children enter school with huge discrepancies in their oral language development and this study took place in a school where the staff were deeply concerned about this diversity. The children at the school came from a range of cultural backgrounds including many recently arrived immigrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Serbia, Sudan and other African countries as well as a small cohort of Aboriginal students. The school had a high proportion of low income families with 60–65% of families eligible for School Card (which means that school fees are waived). The high levels of complexity and diversity among the school population were noted as a strength in the school policy documents.

The relatively poor performance of some student groups prompted the staff at the school to initiate a research project focusing on reconceptualising oral language methodologies to facilitate more equitable learning outcomes for targeted groups of learners. It was proposed to develop an intensive and tailored oral language intervention program designed to develop oral language structures and vocabulary in rich play contexts. Additional analysis of the oral language trends of the children followed the intervention program.

Methodology

The study reported here involved a teacher-researcher and a university-based researcher collaboration based on similar research interests in early literacy and oral language. The research followed the formative and design methodology of Reinking and Bradley (2007). Formative and design methodology takes place in authentic environments and is grounded in developing understanding by seeking to accomplish practical and useful educational goals. In this case the research explored the connection between five-year-old children’s oral language and reading emergent literacy texts after children had been involved in an intervention program to improve children’s oral language. Formative design methodology is suited to literacy research in classrooms and employs multiple theoretical and methodological perspectives. This study involved data collection from screening tools for phonological awareness, children’s use of oral language, a standardised test of receptive vocabulary, reading levels based on levels of text difficulty as well as observation and interviews. The hope was that the research would be useful to teachers working in similar contexts with children from a range of diverse experiences.

The university-researcher worked with the teacher-researcher in weekly visits over twelve months of the school year. The visits included discussions
about oral language interventions and in particular the play-based intervention, different forms of oral language assessment and then assessment of children’s oral language vocabulary, phonology and a reading score based on book levels.

The research question guiding this study was: ‘In what ways do five-year-old children’s use of oral language, vocabulary and phonology connect to children’s beginning reading?’

**Play-based program for oral language intervention**

The teachers decided that a play-based program would be a developmentally appropriate and intrinsically motivating approach for children in order to experiment with oral language and get immediate feedback. Play-based activities also involved sustained symbolic thinking, use of narrative and the use of oral language to inform, hypothesise and imagine (Dickinson, Darrow & Tinubu, 2008; Stagnitti & Jellie, 2006). It was thought that the use of language in context would lead to purposeful talk, allow for the development of vocabulary in rich contexts and this was to be supported by authentic and relevant picture books. Oral language development in context, rather than a series of isolated vocabulary, grammar and phonological awareness drills, was thought to produce more robust oral language development.

The teachers created fifteen themed play boxes with sets of levelled questions for teachers/adults to use to stimulate children’s oral language. The children’s language could then be extended by the adults when appropriate. Each box contained books, both fiction and non-fiction, based around each theme together with materials/resources related to the theme. Oral language development was facilitated through structured and pretend play-based scenarios, and the teachers extended children’s language using levels of questioning (Blank, Rose & Berlin, 1978). The levelled questions, from concrete to abstract, ranged from questions that encouraged children to: 1. describe things, 2. describe thinking, 3. brainstorm 4. go beyond the here and now. To provide further demonstrations of language the fiction and non-fiction books were read aloud to provide additional vocabulary and models of different sentence structures. There were four junior primary classes participating in the program and the students were in mixed groups according to age/grade/oral language skills.

The use of narrative was encouraged in each play session with adults assisting students to formulate stories based around their play experiences. The adults worked with students to use the narrative genre framework to formulate characters, set complications, events, resolutions, endings and to make predictions about what will happen next. This essentially built on children’s oral language skills, presenting them with different syntactic structures to everyday oral language and worked to scaffold children’s learning for early writing and reading. The teachers photographed the play sessions and then
students dictated their stories which were recorded onto PowerPoint slides which were then replayed for the children to read. This language experience procedure enabled children to contemplate how spoken language can be represented in written form.

Assessing oral language and reading development
After several months of engagement in the play-based oral language program the teachers and the university researcher collected data on the children’s oral language, vocabulary, phonology and book levels using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4 (Dunn & Dunn, 2007), the School-Based Phonological Awareness Screening Tool (2006), and reading accuracy of 90–95% on reading levels with benchmark books. It was decided not to collect data on children’s oral language syntax using The Record of Oral Language (Clay, Gill, Glynn, McNaughton & Salmon, 2007) because the researchers decided the complex embedded syntactic structures in the assessment tool represented written language syntax. It was decided not to include the Junior Oral Language Screening Tool (Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2009) in the study. The teachers found the JOST useful very early in the school year to explore children’s vocabulary, pragmatics (social language) and grammar, however only a small number of children were assessed due to time constraints. This screening tool did, however, indicate a trend in some children towards oral language difficulties with grammatical constructions, including pronouns, plurals, negatives and tenses. It also indicated a trend towards limited knowledge in the area of pragmatics, including word choice in context, social skills and questions. The assessment tools used in the study are now described.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4: In this test the children point to one of four pictures on a page after the researcher says the target vocabulary word. For example the pictures may consist of a red, yellow, blue and grey circle, and the researcher says the word ‘red’ and the child points to the red circle. Words were presented in 12-word sets. A ceiling was reached when 8 or more items were missed in a 12-item set. This was a standardised test with a national United States norming sample.

Phonological Awareness Screening Tool: The School-Based Phonological Awareness Screening Tool was based on Gillon (2004). It covers a developmental sequence of phonological awareness skills, including segmenting sentences into words, rhyming words, blending syllables, reproducing a sound sequence, identifying the first sound, segmenting and blending sounds, producing multisyllabic words, repairing sentences (silly sentences), letter recognition, matching beginning sounds, isolating the end sound and matching the end sound.
Book Level: Levelled books, often organised from level 1 to 24, are sets of books used for instructional and assessment purposes (Brabham & Villaume, 2002; Hill, 2001). The use of levelled books has been influenced by Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993), an early intervention program which scaffolds the reading development of at-risk 6-year-old children by matching ‘the right book’ to ‘the right reader’ (Pitcher & Fang, 2007). Reading Recovery utilises Running Records of a child’s oral reading (Clay, 2002) as a day-to-day formative assessment, and this involves the practice of teachers marking errors while students read, figuring a reading accuracy rate, and analysing the types and qualities of students’ errors or ‘miscues’. Scores of 90–95% accuracy are viewed as an instructional reading level and appropriate for learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Country/culture of origin</th>
<th>Months at school</th>
<th>Child’s age</th>
<th>PPVT age equiv.</th>
<th>Book Level</th>
<th>PA/60</th>
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</thead>
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<td>6.9</td>
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<td>39</td>
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<tr>
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<td>6.7</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>6.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>5.11</td>
<td>6.6</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
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<td>5.11</td>
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<td>5.10</td>
<td>4.9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Child 15</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>55</td>
</tr>
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<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The school has 5th birthday admission to school at the beginning of each school term.
Data analysis and discussion
The data from the assessments of oral language and reading were collated and analysed after the play program had been in operation for several months (See Table 1). It was predicted that there would be a strong relationship between phonological awareness, vocabulary and reading. This was not the case.

The raw data on phonological awareness, vocabulary, book levels of the children was puzzling. There was not a neat connection between children’s oral language and reading achievement and further statistical analysis was undertaken to look for patterns or correlation between these factors.

Table 2. The relationships between vocabulary, reading and phonological awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>age</th>
<th>PPVT</th>
<th>Book level</th>
<th>Phoneme</th>
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<tr>
<td>age</td>
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<td>.111</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>.198</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklevel</td>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.640(**)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n 18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phoneme</td>
<td>Pear</td>
<td>.198</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n 18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The statistical analysis of the relationship between vocabulary, reading achievement and phonological awareness in Table 2 revealed a very strong relationship between reading and phonological awareness. There was not a strong relationship between oral vocabulary and reading achievement. The relationship between phonology and reading was highly significant and the children with high reading also scored high in phonology even when their vocabulary score was low.

Some children scored low on receptive vocabulary and high on reading. The children who fitted this pattern were children with English as an additional language and spoke a dialect of English or Hindi at home. Another group of children scored high on receptive vocabulary and low on reading and it had been expected that oral language and reading would have been more closely linked. Another group scored low on both oral language
vocabulary and reading. A statistical analysis showed that the relationship between receptive oral language and reading was not significant.

The links between oral language vocabulary, phonology and reading demanded further analysis as there appeared to be three groups of children with different oral language and reading patterns. Brief case studies of these groups will be discussed.

**Case Study: High Reading Low Vocabulary Children**

The children who scored high on reading based on text levels were children with English as an additional language who spoke Hindi at home. An example is a boy named Dharvil, from India who had been at school for 4 months and was aged 5.9 years and had a vocabulary score of 4.3 years and was reading at level 10. He had a phonological awareness score of 51/60.

The teachers reported that the parents of this group of children spent a great deal of time on homework which included drill and practice of reading high frequency words and teaching letters and sounds. The children knew the alphabet letter names before they began school and scored high on the phonological awareness screening tool developed by the school. Joshi (2005) writes that Indian children may typically wait for directions, value the views of teachers and are familiar with homework and spend a great deal of time reading and writing at home. The parents of the children asked why the children’s bags were so light to carry home from school as they expected the children to bring home a school bag of textbooks for homework. The teachers were concerned that the children in this particular group, who may read well early on, may need to focus on oral language vocabulary in order to comprehend more complex texts.

**Case Study: High Vocabulary Lower Reading**

Some children in the study had relatively high vocabulary scores and much lower reading scores. An example is a girl named Linda aged 5.5 years who spoke English at home and had been at school for 4 months. Her vocabulary score was 7.8 and she was just beginning to read at level 1. Her phonological awareness score was 41/60. As Linda had just started school it is possible that she may be following a fairly standard trajectory. The children in this group had relatively high scores on phonological awareness but were not yet moving ahead with reading. Teachers commented that many of the parents were highly literate, high income earners who made sure there were books at home and they read aloud to the children and spent a lot of time providing rich language experiences for example trips, outings and holidays. To the teachers this group of children were not putting it all together and did not see learning to read to be as important as their other social activities. The teachers view was that these children catch up in time and bring a great deal of background knowledge to their reading.
Case Study: Low Vocabulary and Low Reading
The children who scored low on vocabulary and low on reading also scored low on phonological awareness. An example is Penny, an Australian child who was aged 6.0 years and scored 3.9 years on vocabulary and was reading at level 1 with a phonological awareness score of 22/60. This group of children included children from low income families, children who were refugees from Africa and a large proportion of Aboriginal children. There were some gaps in the data collected due to the low school attendance rates of the children.

The teachers pointed out that the children who scored low on phonological awareness and reading often could not achieve the more difficult tasks to do with segmenting words into sounds, for example ‘What sounds can you hear in the word “cat”? where the correct response would be /c/ /a/ /t/. These children also had difficulties with blending words for example ‘Can you tell me what this word is /m/ /a/ /t/’, where the correct answer would be ‘mat’. According to Anthony, Lonigan, Driscoll, Phillips & Burgess (2003) there is a developmental framework for the order of acquisition of phonological sensitivity skills including four levels of linguistic complexity: identifying words, syllables, onsets and rimes such as c-at and finally identifying phonemes. Blending and segmenting words may be related to a sophisticated application of phonemic skills (Walsh, 2009).

Discussion: Disconnections between oral language and learning to read
This small study of a group of twenty-four children beginning school revealed that there was not a neat hierarchical step-by-step process from oral language to early reading and this was disappointing at first sight. The study raises many questions. How is it that children with low scores on oral language receptive vocabulary can be relatively advanced readers in the first year of school? Why are children who have high oral language scores not also advanced readers? Why are some children low on all counts of oral language and reading? There may be many explanations for this disconnection.

One explanation is that oral language differs in important ways from written language. Oral and written language have differences in vocabulary, syntax and the mechanics of representation (Purcell-Gates, 2001). The vocabulary, syntax and mechanics of representation in oral language and written language will now be contrasted.

Vocabulary
In oral language meanings can be expressed through gesture, facial expressions and intonations and the articulation of nouns may not be essential. However, in written language meanings must be accomplished through the use of explicit language and the grammatical use of the subject and object in written sentences. In oral language a sentence fragment may be ‘Sit over there.’ with a gesture. In the written language sentence ‘Tom sat on the chair.’ the subject
‘Tom’ is identified as well as the object ‘chair’. Purcell-Gates (2001) explains that oral language can have *exophoric* external references to meanings outside of the text but written language must have *endophoric* or within-text references.

Regarding vocabulary there are more rare words in written language than spoken language. As an example, the picture book *Where the wild things are* (Sendak, 1963) contains rare words such as ‘gnashing teeth’ and ‘terrible roars’ which may not occur in everyday conversation. In an analysis of a range of spoken and written texts, Hayes and Ahrens (1988) revealed the amount of rare words used in everyday speech to be 17.3 in one thousand words whereas in children’s books there were 30.9 rare words per one thousand words which is nearly double the amount in everyday speech. It is probable that children who experience being read to before school will be exposed to more rare words and increase their vocabulary more so than children who do not experience shared book reading at home. It is likely that written language read aloud provides models of syntax and vocabulary which then becomes used in children's oral language.

**Sentence structures**

The syntax of written language is different from oral language. For example in the book *Where the wild things are* we read about Max who ‘sailed off through night and day and in and out of weeks’ which is a poetic use of language different from conversational or everyday language. In another example from this book ‘And now,’ cried Max, ‘let the wild rumpus start!’ the subject, Max, occurs part way through the sentence for dramatic emphasis. When assessing children’s oral language syntax Clay, et al., (2007) suggest that a child can listen and repeat a series of increasingly complex sentences provided by an adult. However, the more complex, longer sentences are often similar to book language and can place a heavy burden on children’s short-term memory.

**Reference conventions or mechanics**

Written language contains letters to represent sounds, punctuation and various font styles to represent intonation, stress and pitch. In written language, divisions between sections or new ideas are represented with headings, paragraphs and words to show the sequence of ideas, for example first, second, last and summary.

This study, which set out to explore the connections between oral language and reading, did not find a neat relationship between vocabulary and beginning reading. There was, however, a strong relationship between reading and phonology. Phonological awareness is part of oral language and is related to decoding or cracking the code. Roth et al. (2002) found that phonological awareness skills measured in kindergarten predicted word reading in first and second grade, however phonological awareness did not predict reading comprehension in later grades. Similarly, Bishop and Snowling (2004) found
that phonology may influence decoding while semantics and syntax may influence comprehension. Roth et al. (2002) write that it is not phonology alone that influences beginning reading as oral language is multidimensional in its contribution to early reading.

Disagreement continues to persist about how the component skills of oral language and literacy relate to one another and to significant long-term outcomes. Snow and Van Hemel (2008) write that various oral language and literacy components are of obvious importance in their own right and that arguments about their predictive relationship to each other or to later developmental outcomes are unnecessary. Oral language is important for learning how to learn and is important in its own right. To build oral language may rely more on hearing the written language in books read aloud, as in this way children are exposed to more rare words than in everyday spoken language (Hayes & Ahrens, 1988). This means there is a strong case for exposure to books read aloud plus story telling, as this has the potential to not only increase vocabulary and word meanings but also to enhance phonology and syntax.

In addition, while researchers will continue to seek neat, predictive relationships between aspects of language and literacy development, Genishi and Dyson (2009) write that development varies widely within and across individual children. ‘Like anything related to language and literacy, assessment timelines for individual children do not follow a straight line’ (p. 136).

**Limitations**
This study employed the use of several assessment tools with a small group of 24 children. It raised a number of questions about assessing the different aspects or characteristics of oral language. One limitation of the study may be the use of the standardised Peabody Picture Vocabulary test which may be viewed as words out of context, however the child was asked to look at the pictures and point to the one picture articulated by the researcher. The pictures were in similar groups, for example a set of four colours, four vegetables or four animals. Another limitation may be the use of a teacher-developed, non standardised phonological awareness tool, however this did reveal the strengths and weaknesses of children's development in this area. The study may have been enhanced by employing pre and post testing of children's oral language and reading, however the school policy of fifth birthday admission made this difficult to undertake. In addition, future research may benefit from analysis of the relationship between children's use of complex oral language structures and early reading.

**Summary**
This research explored the question ‘In what ways do five-year-old children's use of oral language, vocabulary and phonology connect to children's beginning reading?’ The study suggests that spoken language does not provide a
neat, sequential base which can be easily mapped to written language. The study revealed that children learning to read will show different patterns of skills acquired, and being able to identify those patterns may be very helpful in assisting teachers work out how to support children as they are learning to read. Oral language is very important to beginning reading as the teacher’s and child’s talk and shared meanings about how written text works is pivotal in learning to read. The idea that oral language has different features from written language is very important for children who are dependent on school for learning how to read.

Finally, more collaborative school and university research is required to investigate the outcomes of practical, responsive, school-based interventions like the play-based program as discussed here. The play-based program provided opportunities for children to understand that language, whether written, spoken, visual or multimodal, is an object which can be explored within a particular situation and context. For example, in dramatic play children often take on the roles of talking like a baby, talking like a teacher or being a wild monster in a far away place. Once children see that language itself can be explored and this idea is taken on board, then all kinds of language can be investigated and language itself can be treated as an ‘object of contemplation’, not just a tool for communication. Interestingly perhaps the children who speak several languages may already view language as ‘an object of contemplation’; this also maybe a topic for further research.

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References


