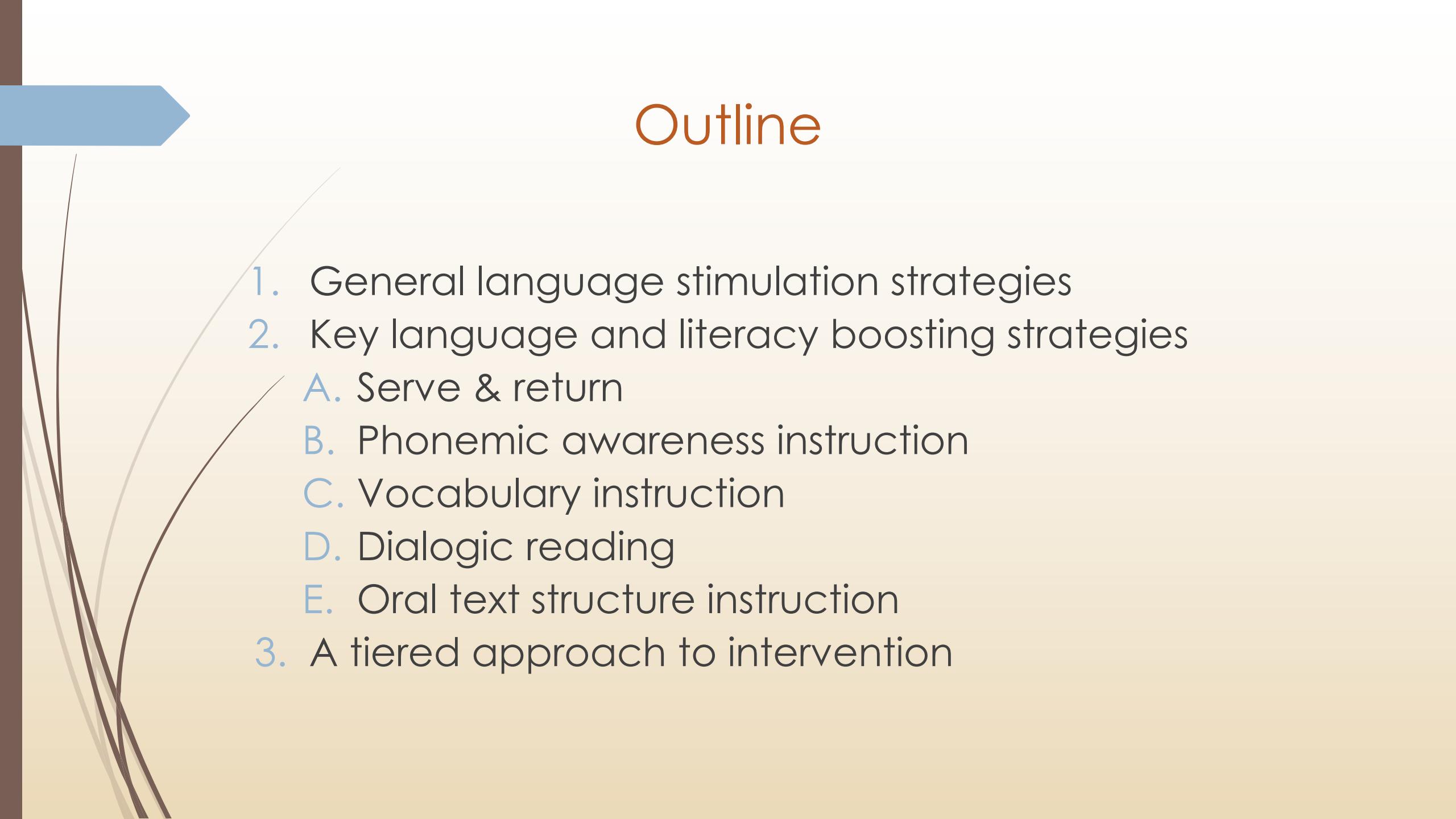# Effective Language and Literacy: Foundational Practices and Diagnostic Interventions in French Immersion

Caroline Erdos, PhD, S-LP(C)

November 13, 2025

Outline

1. General language stimulation strategies
2. Key language and literacy boosting strategies
   A. Serve & return
   B. Phonemic awareness instruction
   C. Vocabulary instruction
   D. Dialogic reading
   E. Oral text structure instruction
3. A tiered approach to intervention

Stages of Learning an Additional Language

1. **Home language use**
   - A few days to a few months

2. **Nonverbal period**
   - A few weeks to a few months

3. **Formulaic language use**
   - Memorized phrases like "I don't know", "So what?", "What's happening?"
   - A few weeks to a few months

4. **Productive language use**
   - Within the first year

Genesee et al., 2021

Comparison of Learners of a First (L1) or Second (L2) Language

Similarities
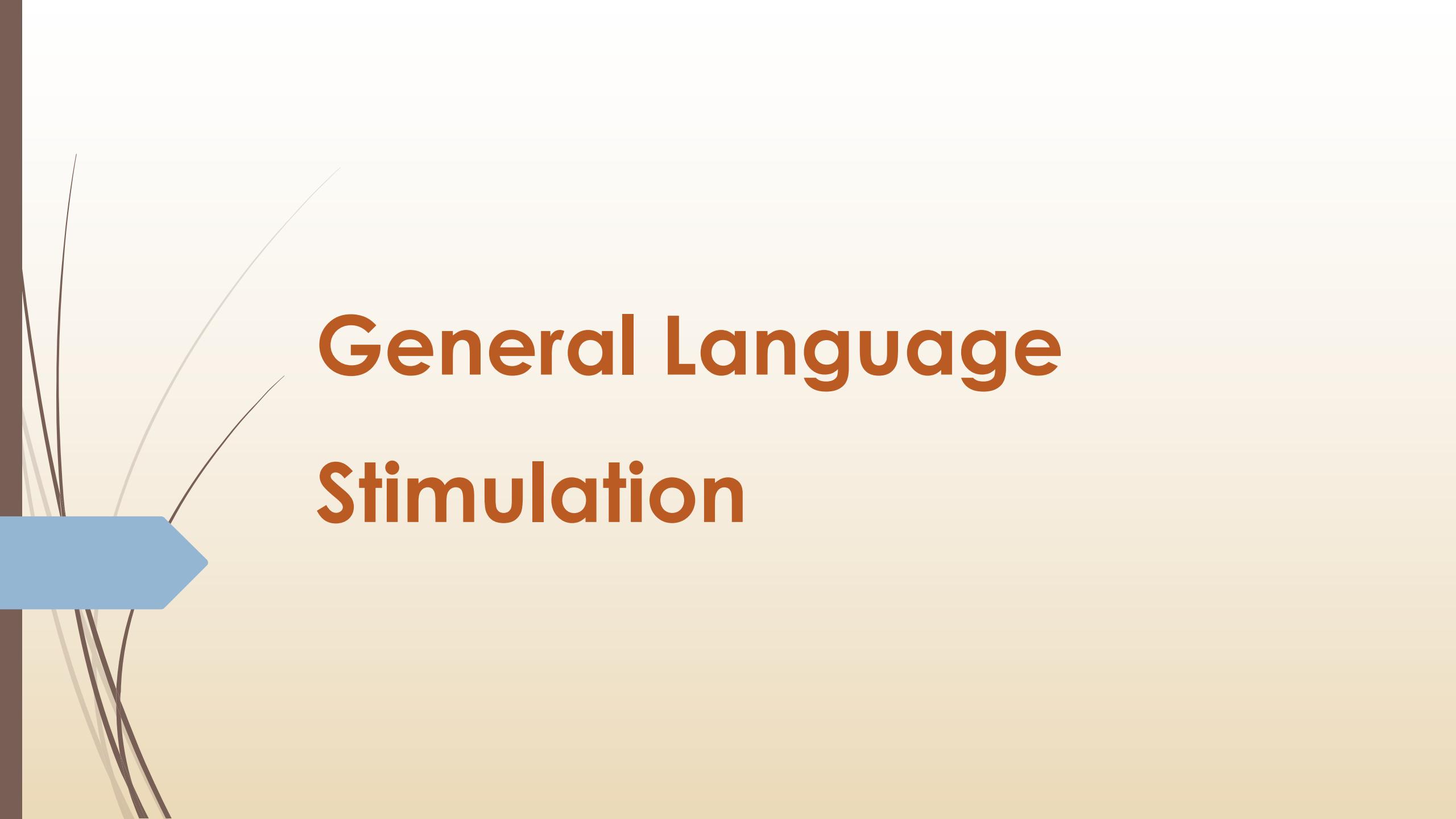
Both benefit from

- Play-based learning
- Contextual learning
- Imitation and repetition
- Use of modelling and nonverbal cues
- High interest and motivation

Differences

May differ with respect to

- Consistency of language exposure
- Cultural context
- Emotional connection to the language
- Scaffolding needs

General Language Stimulation

General Language Stimulation

Material and Room Layout

- **Duplicate toys.** At least 2 of each item to imitate, then add to their play and comment

- **Small spaces** within the classroom where only a few children can gather at a time while exploring

- **Varied pretend play material**: archeologist, entomologist, meteorologist, park ranger, designer, courier, mail carrier, chef, teacher, vet, doctor, firefighter, police officer, pilot, flight attendant

Responding to a Breakdown in Communication

Strategy	What you can say
Do not pretend to have understood	"I'm sorry. I didn't understand that."
Offer plausible choices	"Do you want milk or juice?"
Provide an option based on what you did understand	"Do you want to tell me about what happened outside?"
Ask a closed question	"Did you lose something?"
Prompt how to clarify	"Can you say that again?" or "Can you show me?"

Five Targeted Language & Literacy Strategies
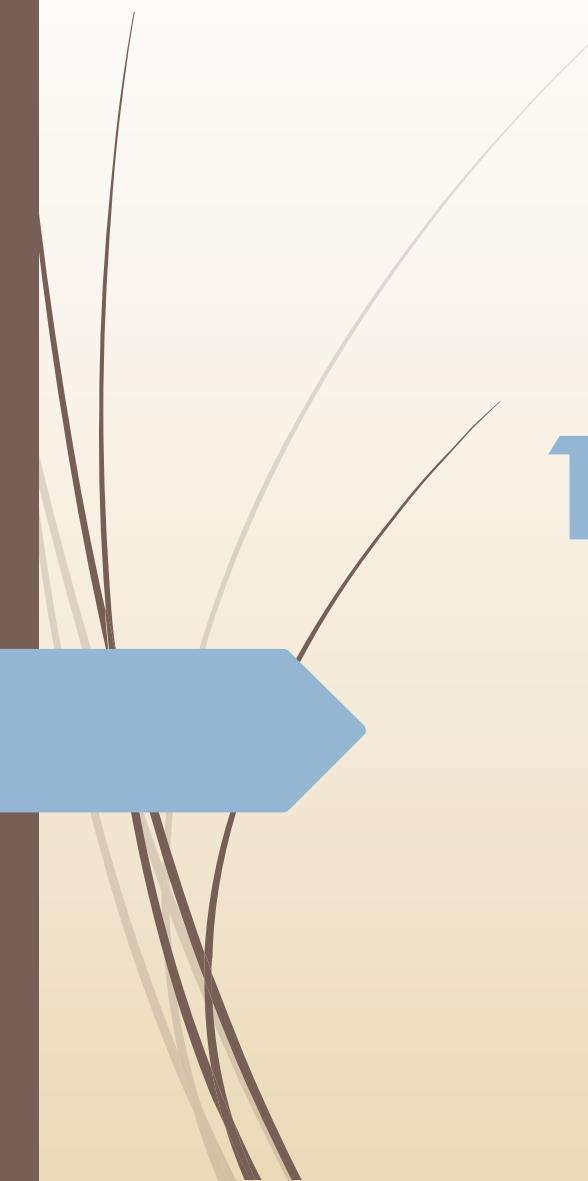
1. Serve and Return

Serve and Return

1) Notice and respond to the serve : Share the child's focus of attention. What is the child pointing at, looking at or saying
- child: "Papillon!"

2) Return the serve: Support and encourage.
- adult: "Oui, tu as raison. C'est un beau papillon."

3) Wait for a return and keep it going: Adult waits for another serve from the child.
- child: "J'aime les papillons."
- adult: "Quelle est ta couleur préférée pour un papillon?"

At least 2 turns each!

Watch examples of Serve and Return here.

Child Initiates "Serve"
Caregiver Responds "Return"
Child Responds Again "Serve"

Beyond the 30 Million Word Gap
Regarder p...   Partager

Romeo, 2018
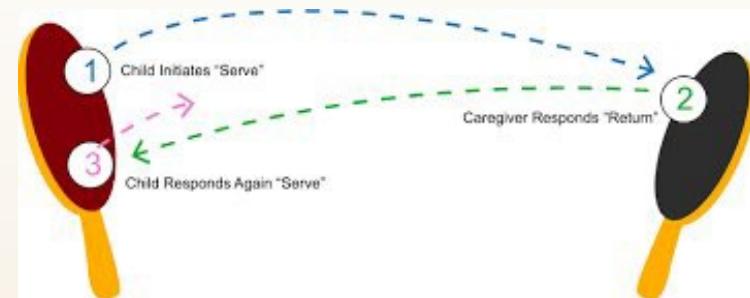
2. Phonemic Awareness

Phonological Awareness vs. Phonemic Awareness

Phonological Awareness

sentence awareness
"Le bébé dort "

syllable awareness
"bé-bé"

word awareness
" bébé"

phonemic awareness
"b-é-b-é"
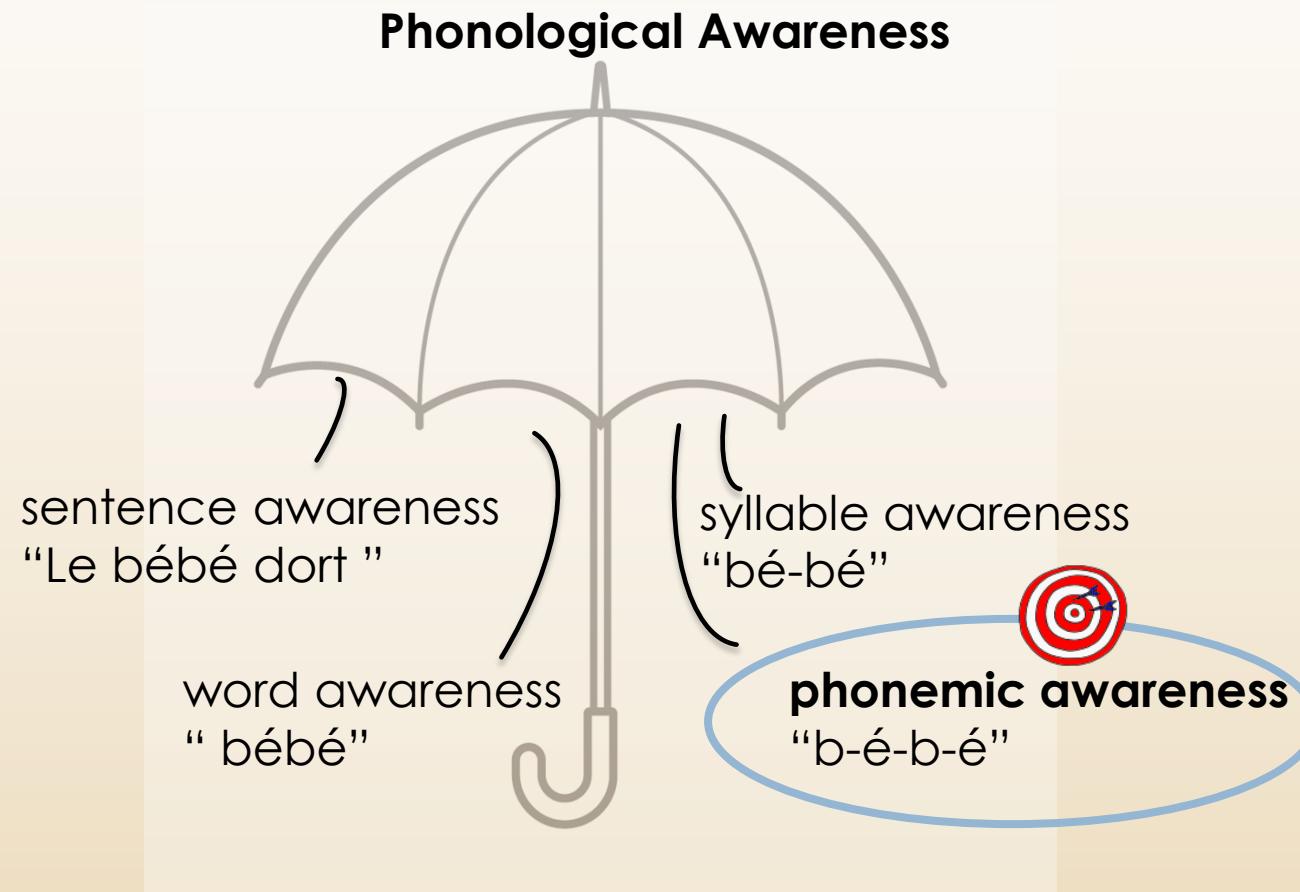
Phonological Awareness Across Languages

- The ability to **recognize and manipulate** the sound structure of spoken language; words, syllables, sounds (phonemes)

- Phonological awareness is an **oral language ability**

- Phonological awareness **underlies all languages** - it is not necessary to stick to the language of instruction

- During phonological awareness practice, **gains transfer from one language to another**
  - E.g., Côté, Savage & Petscher, 2021

Phonological Awareness Continuum

grapheme
(letter)

phoneme
(sound)

syllable

Blending then segmenting – **syllables**

Blending then segmenting – **sounds**

Blending then segmenting – **sounds with consonant clusters**

Source of images: LessonPix Clipart Library - Permission obtained
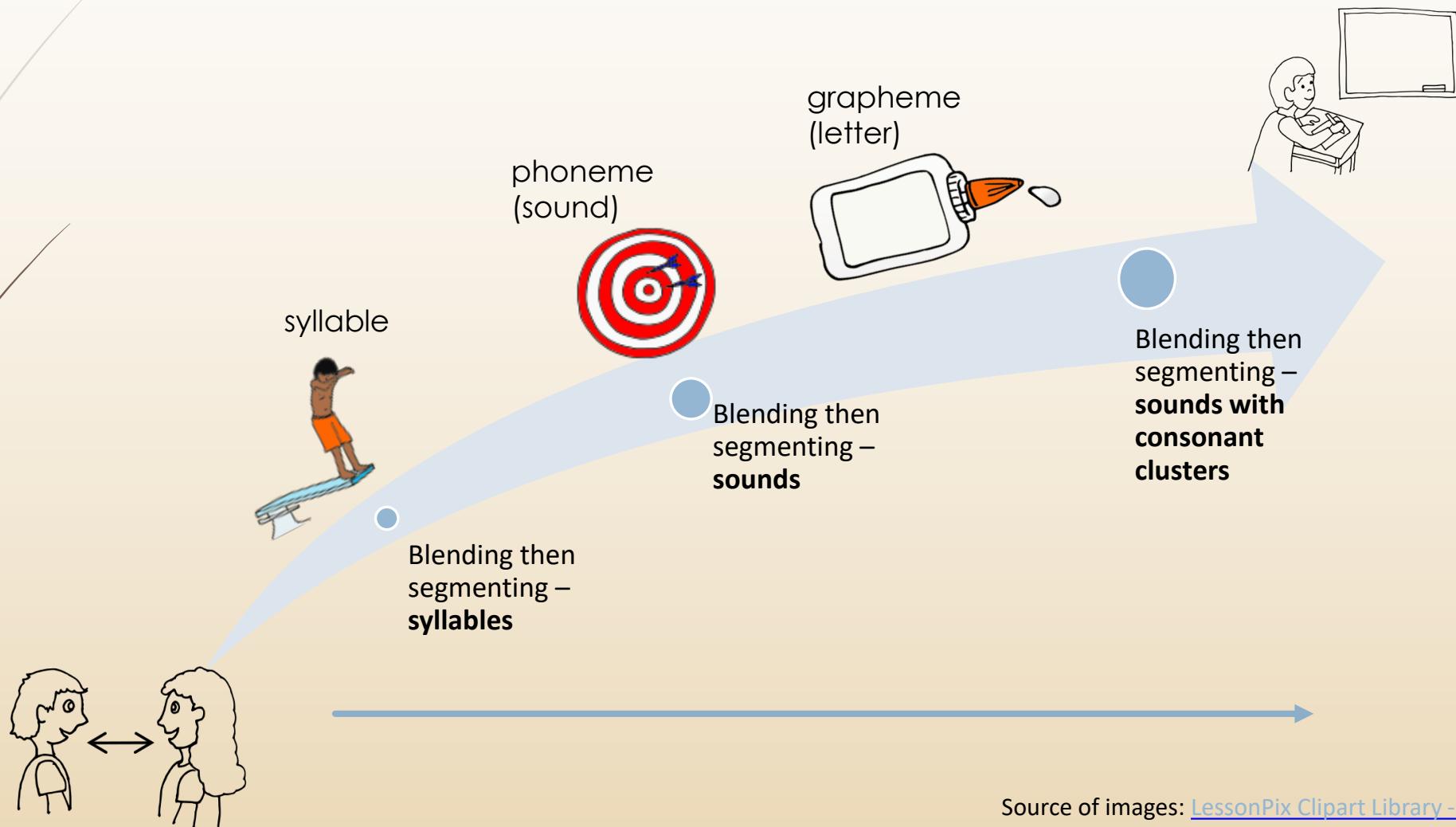
Phonemic Awareness in L1 and L2

Read: *piros*

Write:

Blending → necessary for decoding

Segmenting → necessary for spelling

Progression of Phonemic Awareness in L1 and L2

For each syllable structure, in order of difficulty…

1. (V)CV (a-mi, ma)
2. (V)CVC (é-cole, tasse)
3. CCV* (gris)
4. CCVC* (bloc)
5. CVCC* (parc)

…this is the progression of difficulty:

a) blending
b) segmenting

C-consonant
V-vowel

Complete Teaching Sequence

« bol »

/b//o//l/

Segmenting CVC
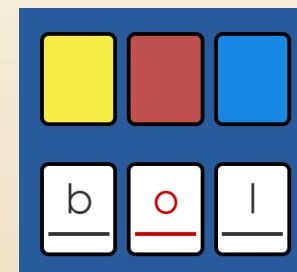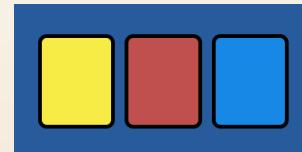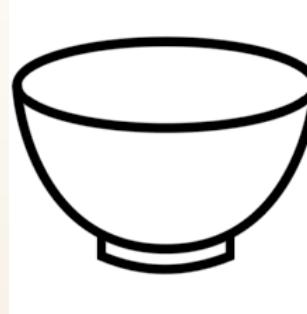
Blending CVC
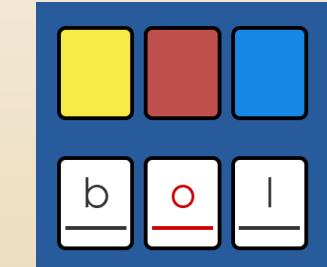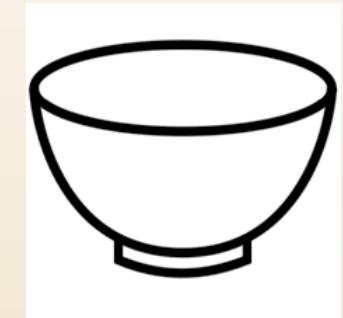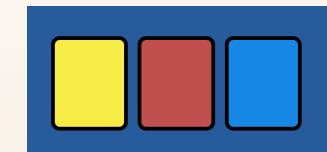
*Before formal reading/writing instruction, the teacher writes the word

Making Words Stick – Orthographic Mapping

Laura MacGrath, SLP - see also Laura's blog, Do You read Me?

Once formal reading/writing instruction has begun

1. Hear/say - **phonology**
2. Link to meaning - **semantics**
3. Break it down - phonology
4. Write the letter corresponding to each sound - **orthography**
5. Read the word

Resources to Work on Phonemic Awareness in French
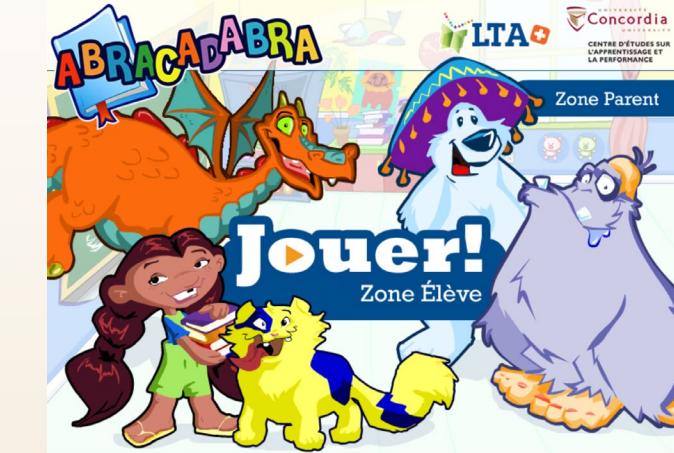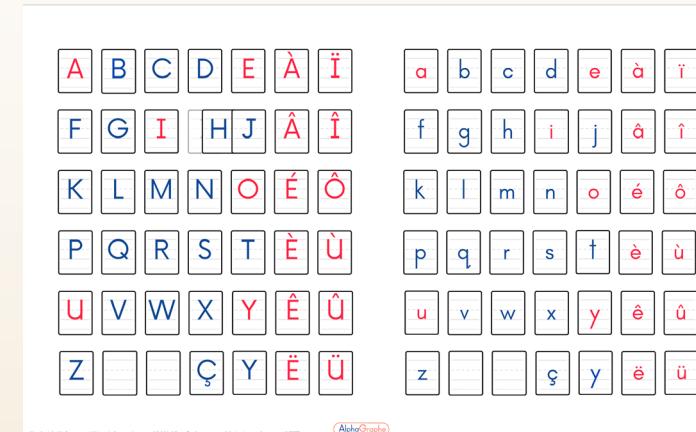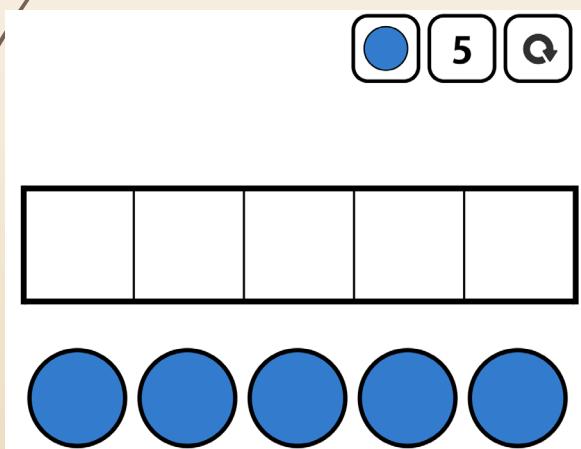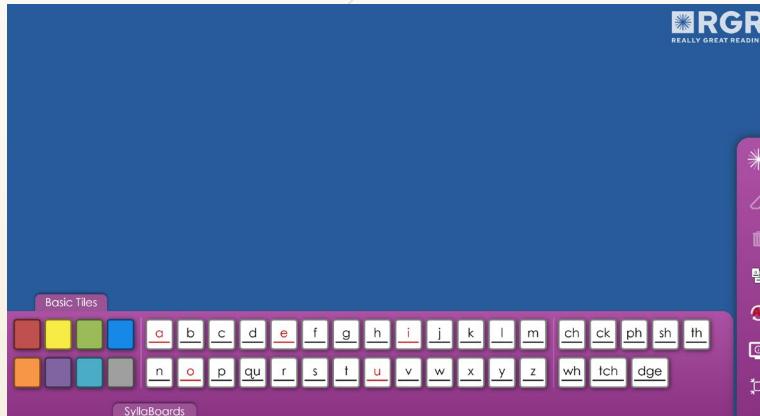
(choose je joue avec les lettres et les sons, *then* mission fusion*)*

Scope and Sequence of Phonological Awareness in L1 and L2

	Preschool 4 years old	Preschool 5 years old	Grade 1 6 years old
Blending syllables (slide together)	➡ ✓		
Segmenting syllables (break apart)	➡ ✓		
Blending 2-3 sounds – no consonant clusters (*bol*)		➡ ✓	
Segmenting 2-3 sounds – no consonant clusters (*fil*)		➡ ✓	
Blending 3+ sounds – with consonant clusters (*gris*)			➡ ✓
Segmenting 3+ sounds – with consonant clusters (*grand*)			➡ ✓

✓ = typical age of acquisition

MacGrath & Erdos, 2022

Phonics (Letters and their Sounds)

- **As soon as you are working at the phoneme (individual sound) level, graphemes (printed letters) should be integrated into the activity**

- Materials with embedded mnemonics may be more effective than materials without

Raconte-moi les sons (Fr)   Spelfabet (Eng)   Lively Letters (Eng)   AlphaGraphe (bilingual)

NRP, 2000; Shmidman & Ehri, 2010
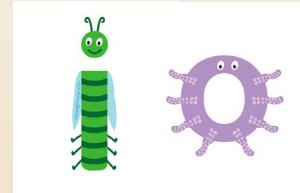
Guidelines for Systematic Phonics Instruction

	English examples	French examples
Start with GPCs that are useful to spell words	s, a, t, p, i, n	a, i, l, m, é, p
Start with stretchable sounds	s, a, i, n	a, i, l, m, é,
Teach approximately 3 new GPCs per week	✓	✓
Avoid letters that look similar in the same week	b/d/p/q, m/n	b/d/p/q, m/n
Avoid sounds that sound similar in the same week	i (*sit*)/e (*set*), p/b, t/d, k/g, s/z	é/è, p/b, t/d, k/g, s/z
Short vowels (*voyelles simples*) → consonants → digraphs → long vowels (*voyelles complexes*)	✓	✓
Teach blends as separate units	s-t-o-p	g-r-an-de
Frequent review of GPCs taught (in isolation & in text)	Decodable texts	BLAL
Resources (scope & sequence)	LETRS, UFLI, SPELL-Links	Graphone, ROLÉ, BLAL , A.N.A.E.

For French and English, no need to spend much time on consonant sounds in one language if these have first been taught in the other language

Phonological Awareness Across Languages

ELODIL, 2016
www.Elodil.umontreal.ca
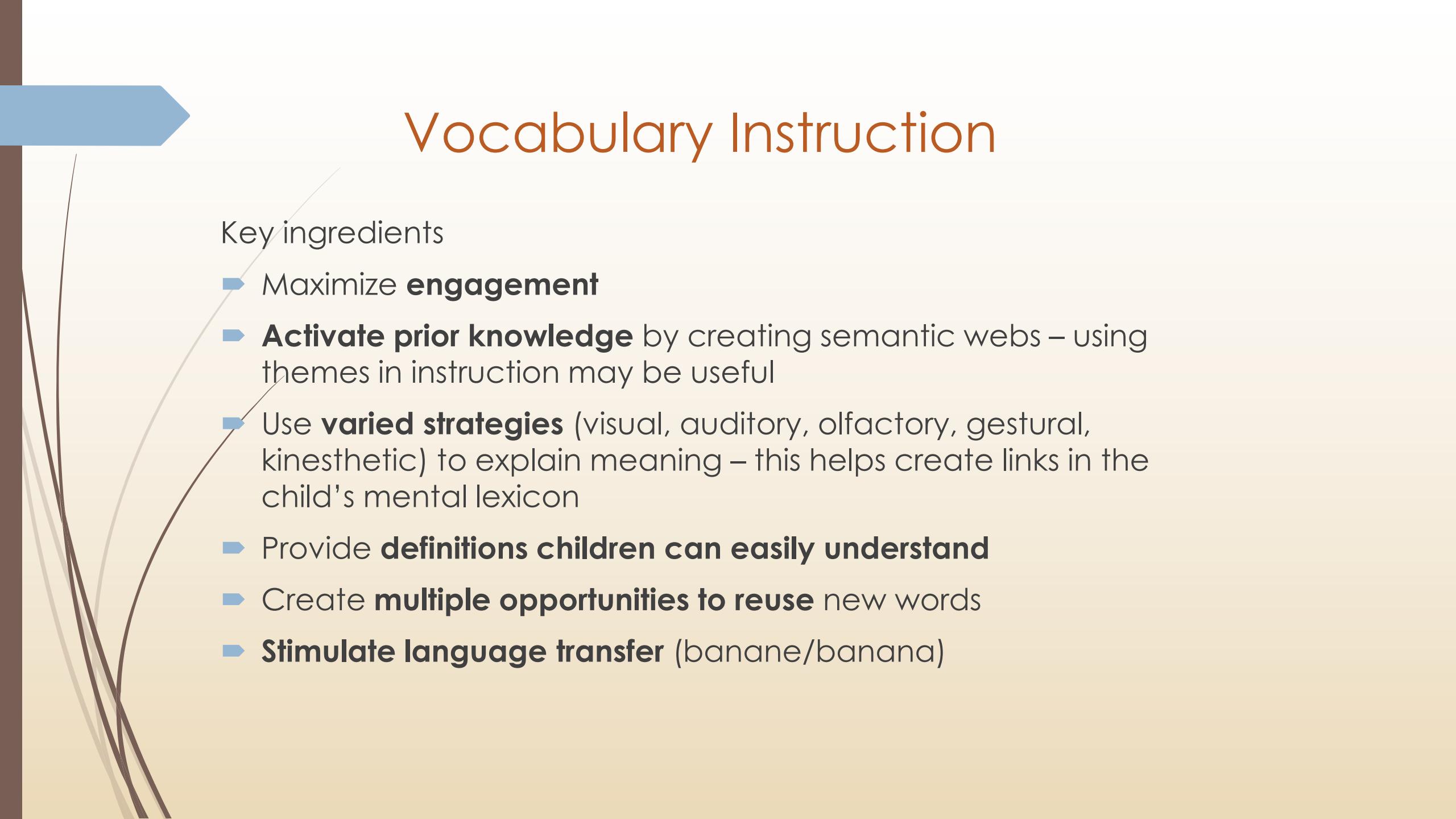
3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary Instruction

Key ingredients

- Maximize **engagement**

- **Activate prior knowledge** by creating semantic webs – using themes in instruction may be useful

- Use **varied strategies** (visual, auditory, olfactory, gestural, kinesthetic) to explain meaning – this helps create links in the child's mental lexicon

- Provide **definitions children can easily understand**

- Create **multiple opportunities to reuse** new words

- **Stimulate language transfer** (banane/banana)

Vocabulary Instruction in Action

Produire le mot dont on montre l'image
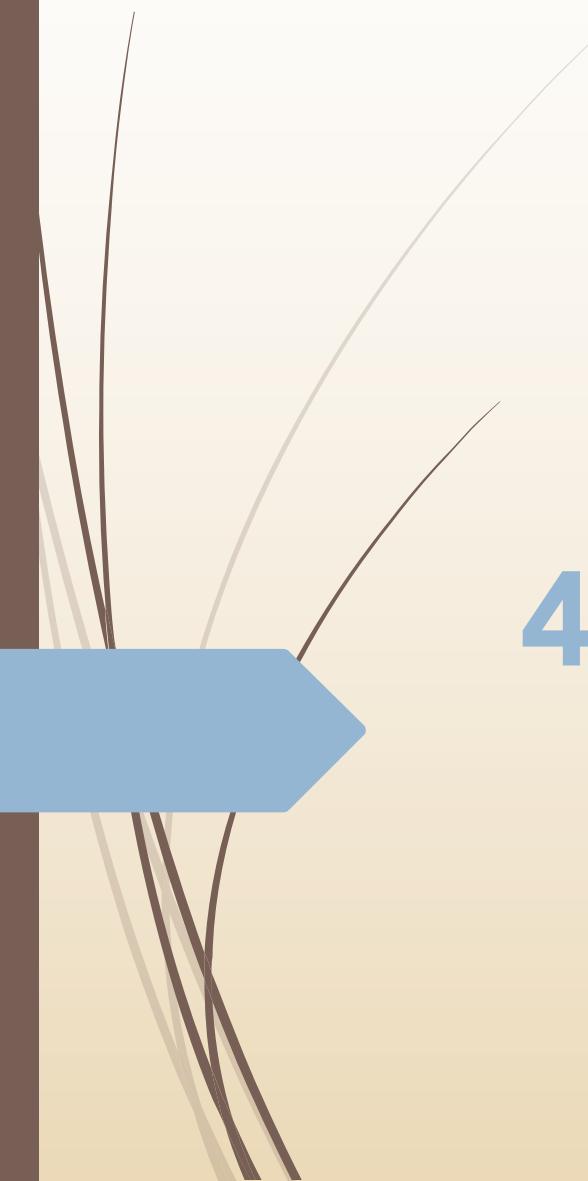
4. Dialogic Reading

Dialogic Reading

The **IÉÉR** acronym is a sequence of steps used in dialogic reading to encourage children to discuss a book. IÉER stands for:

- **Inciter -** prompt the child to say something about the book
- **Évaluer -** evaluate the child's response
- **Élargir -** expand the child's response
- **Répéter -** repeat the prompt to see if the child has learned

Bookmarks

PEER (IÉÉR-Fr)

Whitehurst, 1988
Dialogic Reading Module

Dialogic Reading

CMOGD is an acronym that helps teachers and parents remember the types of prompts to use **(I)** when using dialogic reading. CMOGD stands for:

- **Compléter -** Fill in the blank
- **Mémorisation -** Ask what happened in the story
- **Questions ouvertes –** Ask open-ended questions.
- **Questions guides**- Ask questions that start with "what", "where", "when", or "why"
- **Distanciation -** Ask questions that help children make connections between the book and their everyday lives
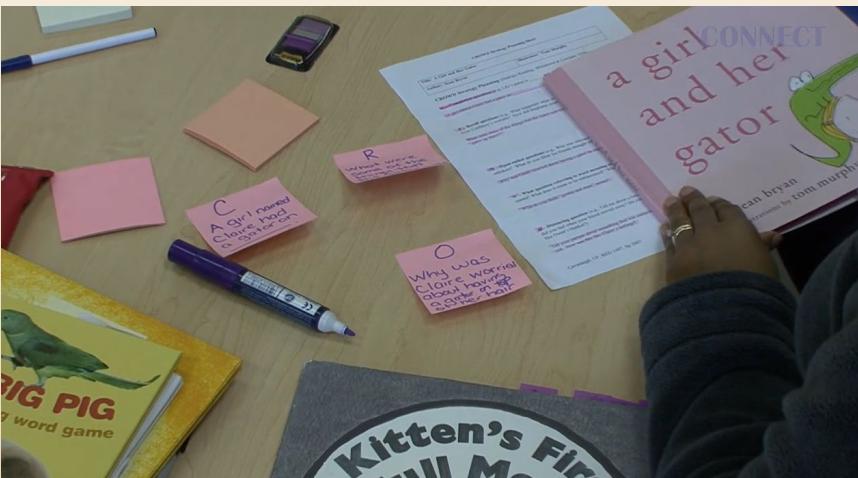
Bookmarks

CROWD (CMOGD-Fr)

Whitehurst, 1988

Dialogic Reading Module

5. Oral Text Structure
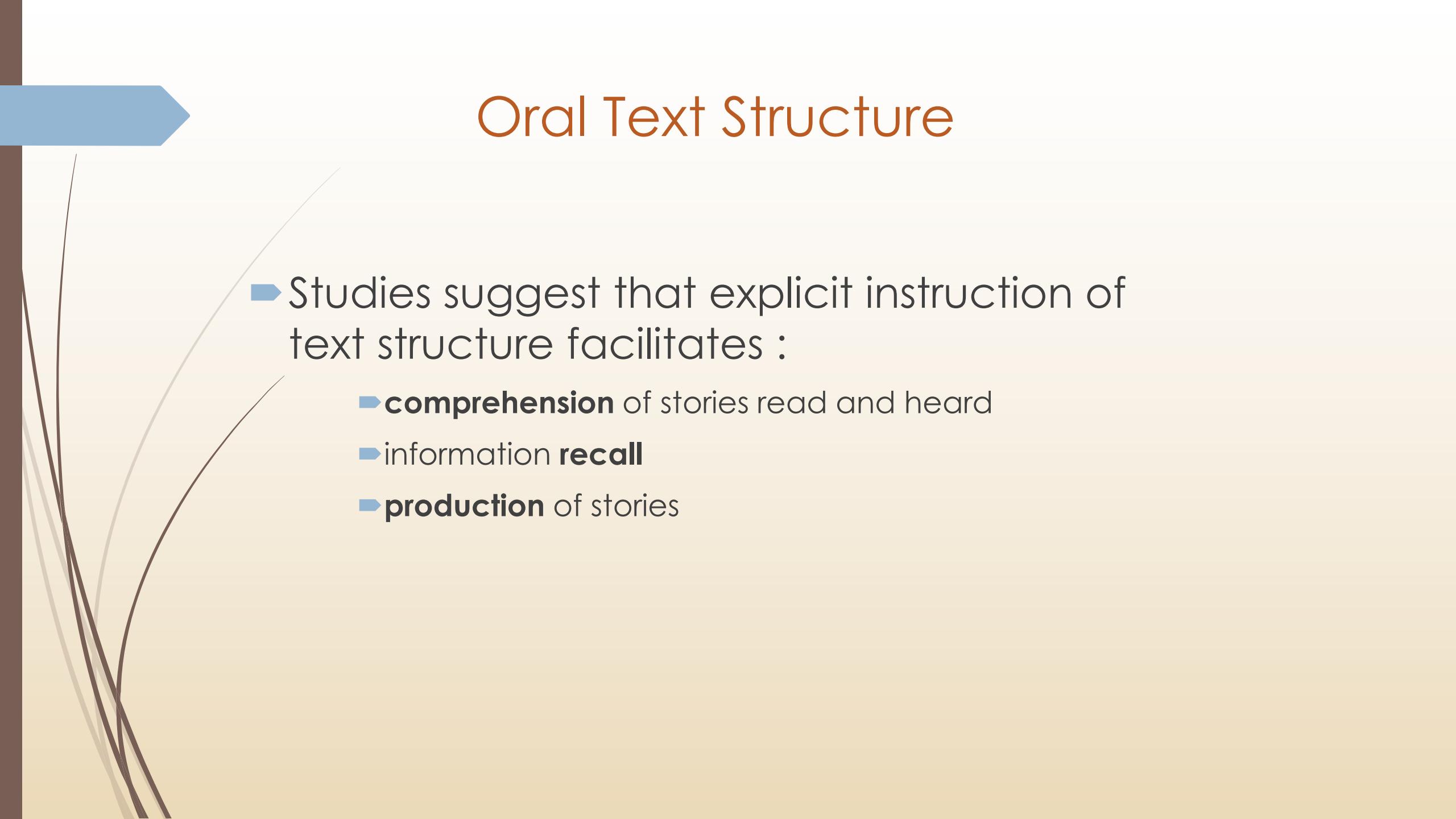
Oral Text Structure

- Studies suggest that explicit instruction of text structure facilitates :
  - **comprehension** of stories read and heard
  - information **recall**
  - **production** of stories

Oral Story Structure

- Story structure - basic
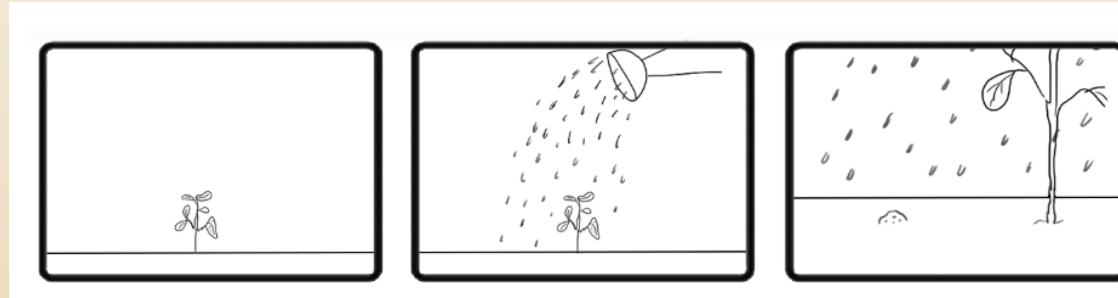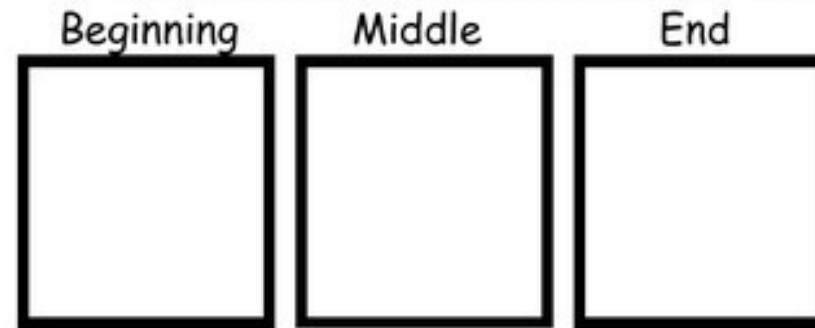
Oral Story Structure

- Narrative retell - complex
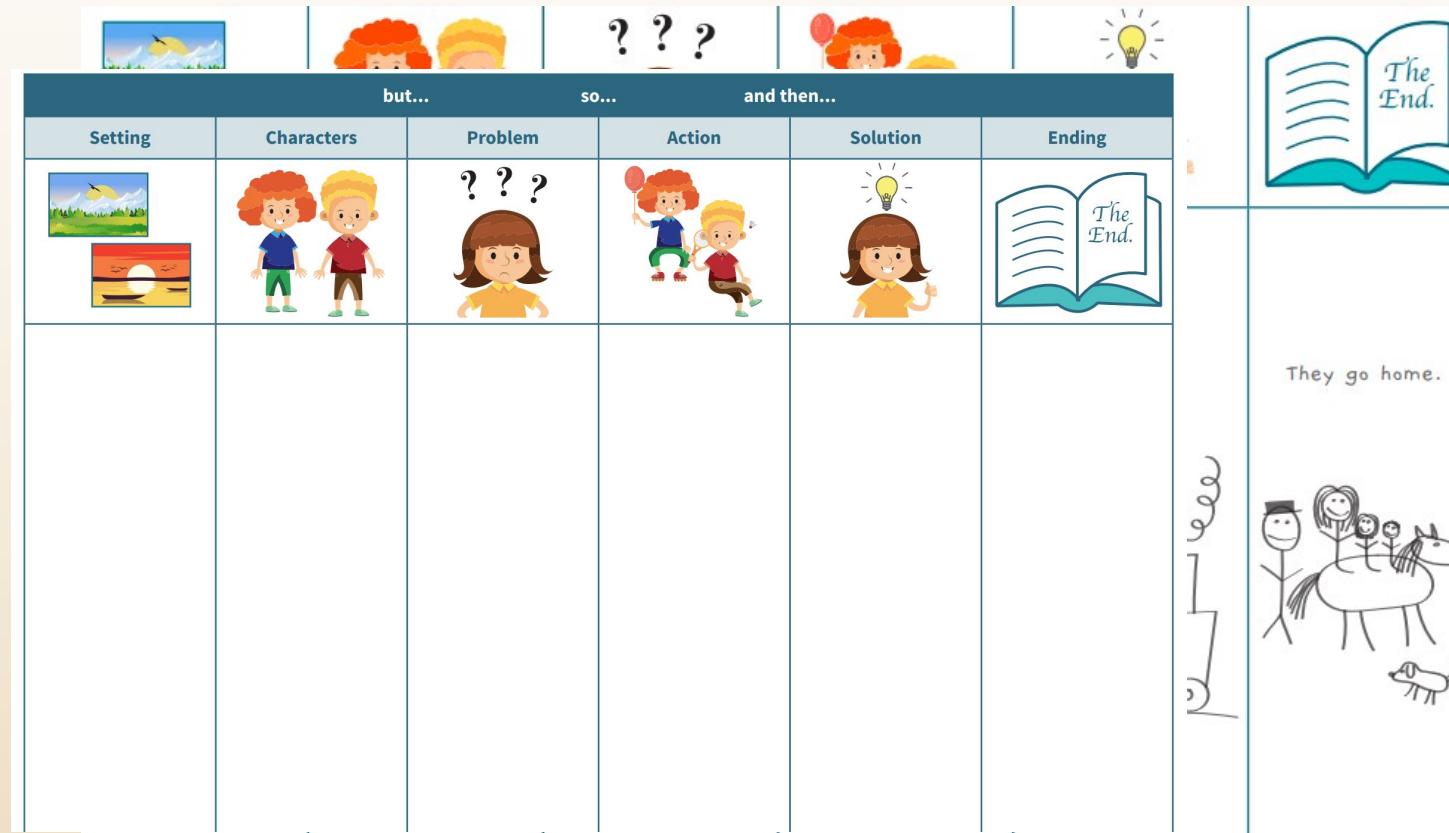
Oral Text Structure Beyond Narratives

Cause-effect semantic map

Causes   Effect

Web

Venn diagram

Timeline
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Problem-solution relationship
Problem

Solution

Position-reason flowchart

Position

Reason 1 — Reason 2

Why   Why   Why
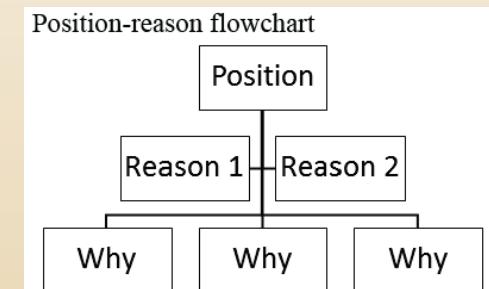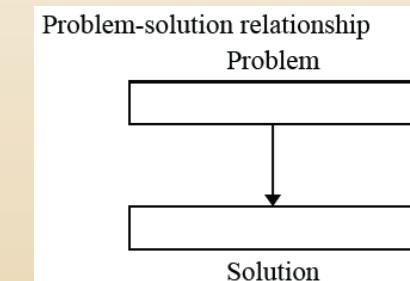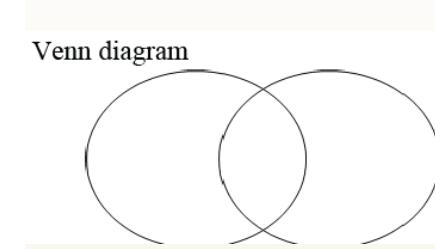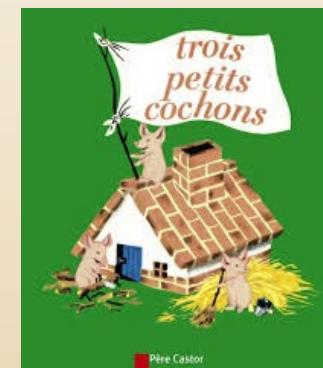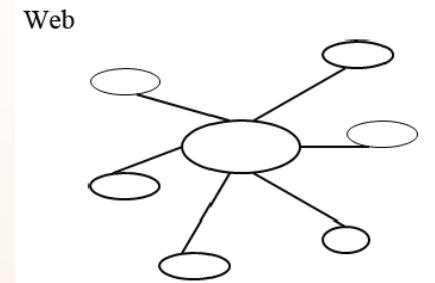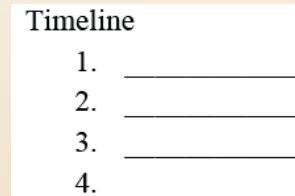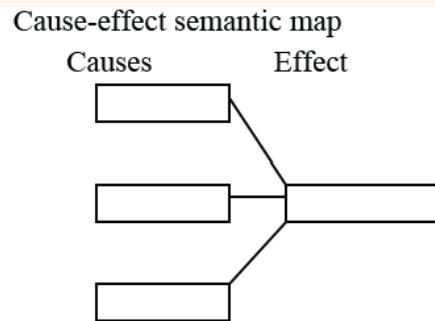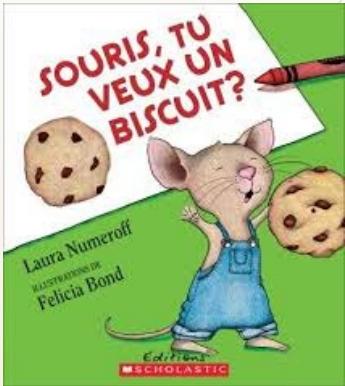
Optimal Duration of Instruction

- **Phonemic awareness**: 10 minutes/day
- **Phonics**: 20 minutes/day for formal instruction
- **Vocabulary instruction**: 20 minutes/day + repeated exposure
- **Book reading**: 30 minutes/day

A tiered approach to intervention

Response to Intervention (RtI)&
Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) - **Tier 1**

3 Tiers of Support

- Intensive Individual Intervention — Tier 3
- Targeted Small Group Instruction — Tier 2
- Core Classroom Instruction — Tier 1
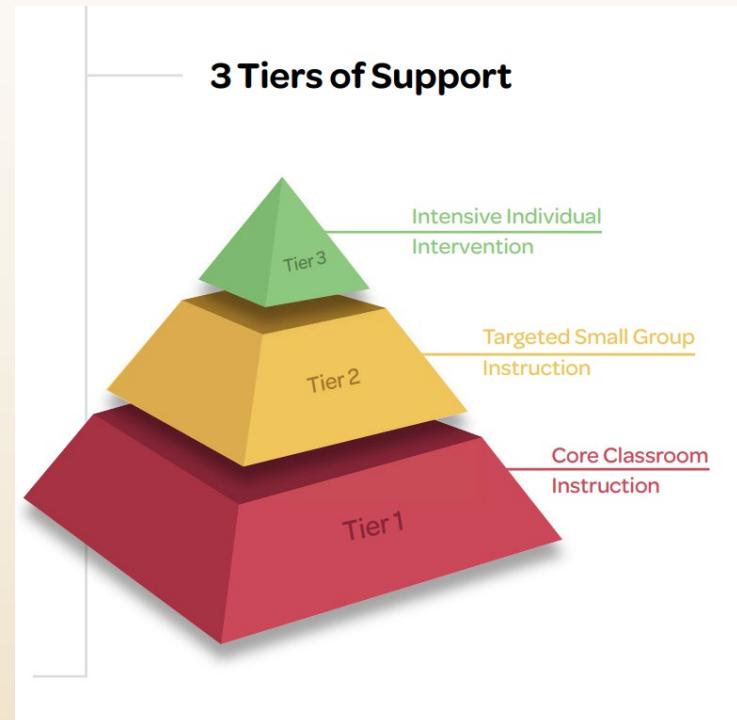
Classroom teachers
- *All students (100%)*

Tier 1 - Early Screening and Progress Monitoring

- **Screen vision of all** ([simulation](#)) (25%)
- **Screen hearing of all** ([simulation](#)) (8-15%)
- **Screen oral language abilities of all** (7%)
- **Screen literacy abilities of all** (7-18%)
- **Sensitive and specific tools** (>.80)
- **Administered by the student's teacher**
- **Progress monitoring at 2-3X/year**

Tier 1 - A Few Tools

Screening

- PEARL (Eng)*
  - K5
- DIBELS (Eng)
  - K-grade 8
- Acadience Reading Français (Fr)
  - K- grade 2
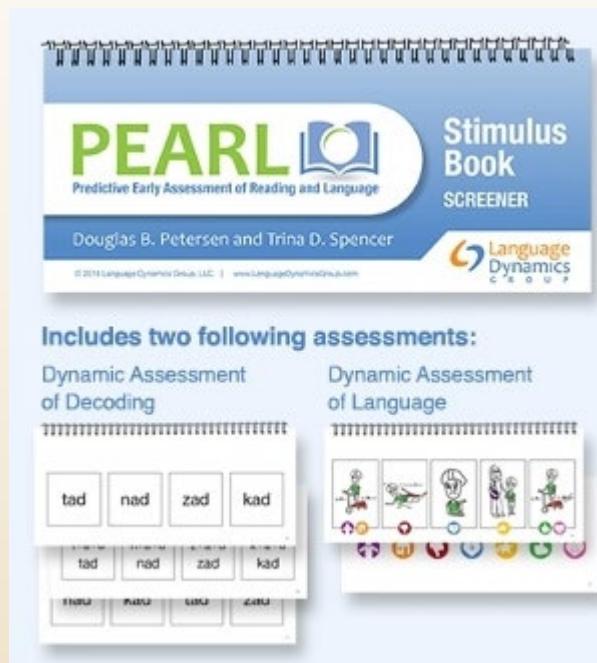
(informal French adaptation available)

*dynamic assessment: test-teach-retest

Language(s) of Screening

- Oral language – **dominant language**
- Phonological awareness – **L1 or L2**
- Written language – **language(s) of instruction**

Typical Literacy Milestones

With abundant exposure and practice in the classroom setting, students **in Immersion and non-Immersion programs** should be able to master these within the same timeframe. Generally,

- ➤ by the end of **K4**: **blending and segmenting syllables**

- ➤ by the end of **K5**: **blending and segmenting phonemes** and know **most letter sounds** in the language(s) of instruction

- ➤ by the end of **grade 1**: **decode** (read) and **encode** (write) words that follow **phonics rules taught** in grade 1, in the language(s) of instruction

- ➤ Beyond **grade 1: reading speed and accuracy**, in the language(s) of instruction

Geva et al., 2019; Bhalloo & Molnar, 2023

Response to Intervention (RtI)& Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) - **Tier 2**

3 Tiers of Support

- Tier 3 — Intensive Individual Intervention
- Tier 2 — Targeted Small Group Instruction
- Tier 1 — Core Classroom Instruction
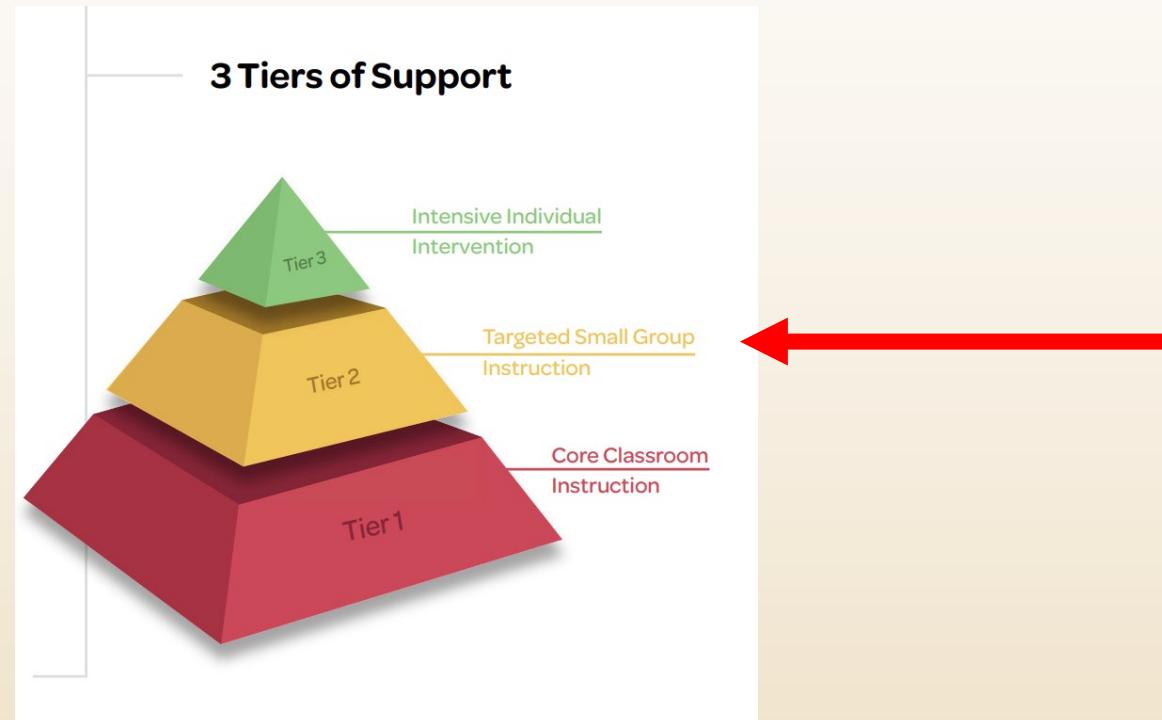
Resource teachers
Education assistants
- *Some students (20%)*

Principles of Intervention

- Support all languages in which the difficulties occur
- Target precise area of difficulty
  - Phonemic awareness
  - Letter-sound knowledge
  - Vocabulary
  - Story structure
- Intensive and sustained over time
- Supported by research evidence (e.g., structured and explicit literacy instruction)
- Progress should be monitored

Widening gap

Student Progress

Performance

This student is close to the norm

T1   T2

Time, age, ...

Reprinted with permission, Sabine de Meester
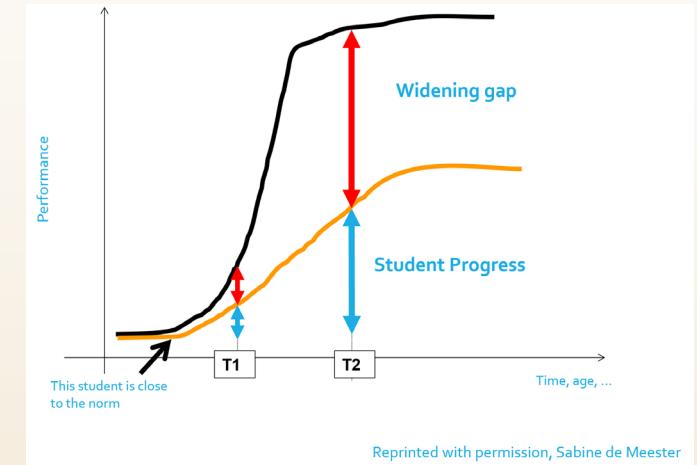
Language(s) of Intervention

- Oral language – **bilingual intervention** leads to superior gains
- Written language – **language(s) of instruction**
  - However, there is evidence of transfer of phonological awareness, phonics, and perhaps even decoding from first (L1) to second language (L2) when providing intervention in the first language

Ebert, Kohnert, Pham, Disher, & Payesteh, 2014; Côté, Savage, & Petscher, 2021; Lim et al., 2019; Paradis, Genesee, & Crago, 2021

Response to Intervention (RtI)& Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) - **Tier 3**

3 Tiers of Support

Tier 3 — Intensive Individual Intervention

Tier 2 — Targeted Small Group Instruction

Tier 1 — Core Classroom Instruction
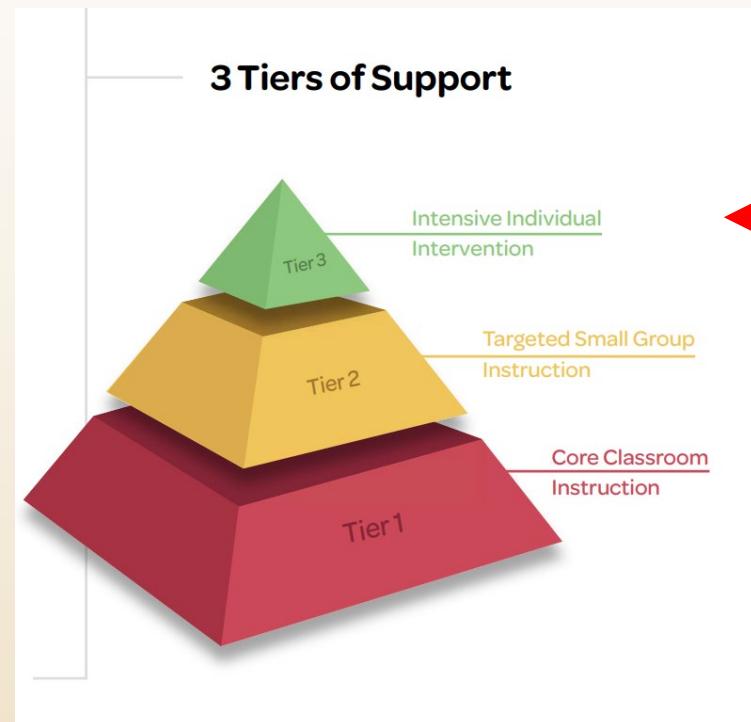
SLPs, psychologists
- *Few students (5%)*

Tier 3 - A Few Tools

Academic Testing

- WIAT (Fr & Eng)
- ECLAIR (Fr)

Language/ Literacy Testing

- TILLS (Eng)
- DYMOND (Eng)
- CELF-5(Fr & Eng)
- PPVT (Fr & Eng)
- EVT (Fr & Eng)

Cognitive Testing

- WISC (Fr & Eng)

Language Delay versus Language Disorder

Language delay due to incomplete acquisition of the additional language

- Has not yet accumulated 2 (conversational language) to 7 (academic language) years of exposure to the new language
- Difficulty understanding and speaking the new language only
- No issues noted or reported in the first language
- See ALDeQ questionnaire

At risk for language disorder

- Presence of risk factors
- Difficulty understanding and/or speaking both the first language and the additional language
- The language difficulties have always been present according to caregivers

Response to Intervention (RtI) & Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS)

3 Tiers of Support

- Tier 3 — Intensive Individual Intervention
- Tier 2 — Targeted Small Group Instruction
- Tier 1 — Core Classroom Instruction
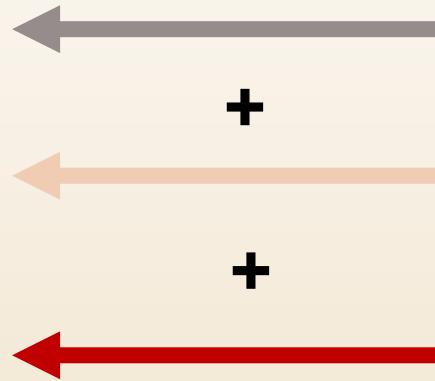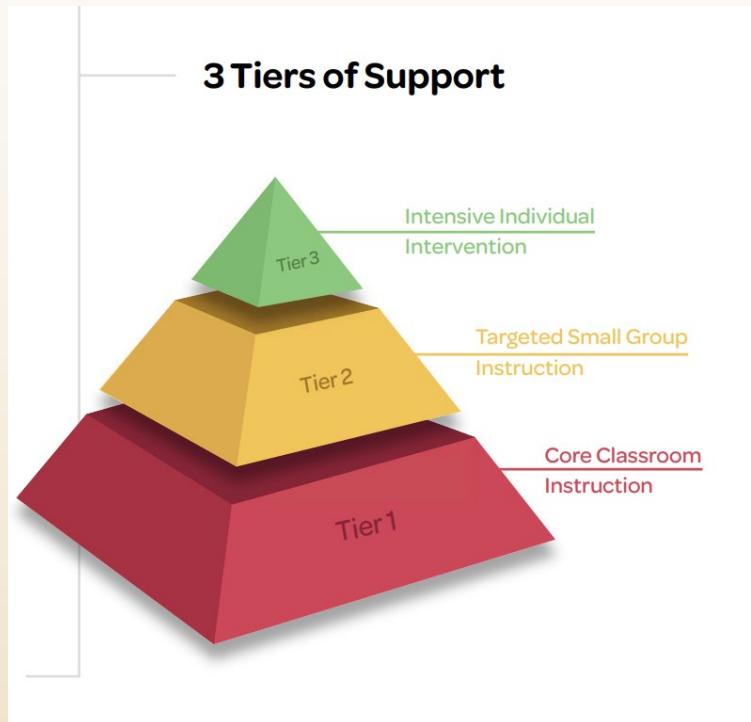
Speech-language Pathologists
- *Few students* (5%)

+

Resource teachers
- *Some students* (20%)

+

Classroom teachers
- *All students* (100%)

Diagnostic Gold Standard

Language or literacy issues are present despite

- intact vision and hearing,

- sufficiently rich stimulation and exposure, and

- targeted, sustained, evidence-based interventions.

Conclusion

- Serve & Return
- Phonemic Awareness instruction
- Vocabulary instruction
- Dialogic Reading
- Oral Text Structure instruction
- Screening tools

Which tool will you explore first?

References

References

- Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2013). Bringing Words to Life (2nd ed.). The Guilford Press.

- Blaxley, L., Kyte, C., Leggett, J., McWhirter, S. & Minor-Corriveau, M. (2014). Oral Language at Your Fingertips. Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA), Toronto, Author.

- Center on Teaching and Learning (n.d.). There are Five Big Ideas in Beginning Reading. University of Oregon. https://www.reading.uoregon.edu/big_ideas/

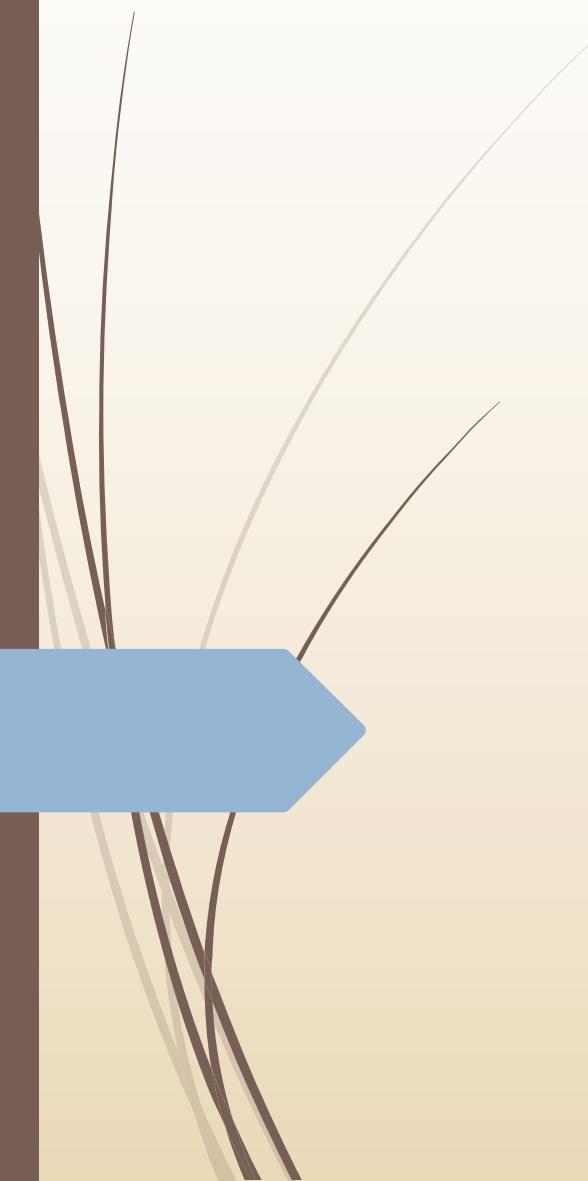- Cleave, P.L., Becker, S.D., Curran, M.K., Van Horne, A.J., & Fey, M.E. (2015). The efficacy of recasts in language intervention: a systematic review and meta-analysis. American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 24(2), 237-55. https://doi.org/10.1044/2015_AJSLP-14-0105

- Côté, M.F., Savage, R., & Petscher, Y. (2021). Cross Linguistic Transfer of Literacy Skills between English and French among Grade 1 Students Attending French Immersion Programs. Scientific Studies of Reading, 25(5), 383-396. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888438.2020.1817027

- Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Raab, M. (2013). An Implementation Science Framework for Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Fidelity in Early Childhood Intervention Studies. Journal of Early Intervention, 35(2), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053815113502235

References

- Lowry, L. (2023). Just Being in the Same Classroom Is Not Enough: How to Promote Peer Interactions That Benefit Children's Language Skills. The Hanen Centre. https://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Just-being-in-the-Same-Classroom-Is-Not-Enough.aspx

- Foorman, B. et al. (2019). Foundational skills to support reading for understanding in kindergarten through 3rd grade (NCEE 2016-4008). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/21

- Godin, M.P., & Chapleau, N. (novembre, 2015). Enseigner le vocabulaire dès l'entrée à l'école: les principes clés. https://www.taalecole.ca/enseigner-le-vocabulaire

- Haake, M., Hansson ,K., Gulz, A., Schötz, S., & Sahlén, B. (2014).The slower the better? Does the speaker's speech rate influence children's performance on a language comprehension test? International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 16(2),181-90. https://doi.10.3109/17549507.2013.845690

- Institut des troubles d'apprentissage (juin, 2022). Formation en ligne gratuite sur la détection et l'intervention précoces des difficultés de langage pour les éducatrices et éducateurs des SGEE. https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLenCgDRKLsLVFMLm5nuiC4UnaO8C7evYs

- Kelley, E., & Spencer, T. D. (2021). Feasible and Effective Language Intervention Strategies that Accelerate Students' Academic Achievement. Seminars in Speech and Language, 42(2), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0041-1723839

References

- Pillinger, C., & Vardy, E. J. (2022) The story so far: A systematic review of the dialogic reading literature. Journal of Research in Reading, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12407

- Romeo, R.R., Leonard, J.A., Robinson, S.T., et al. (2018). Beyond the 30-Million-Word Gap: Children's Conversational Exposure Is Associated With Language-Related Brain Function. Psychological Science,29(5), 700-710. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617742725

- Sprenger-Charolles, L., & Peereman, R. (2025, Septembre). Pourquoi et comment faciliter les débuts de l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture en français? (Note du CSEN n°14). Conseil scientifique de l'éducation nationale. https://www.reseau-canope.fr/fileadmin/user_upload/Projets/conseil_scientifique_education_nationale/notes_csen/Note_CSEN_14.pdf

- Stevens, E. A., & Vaughn, S. (2021). Using Paraphrasing and Text Structure Instruction to Support Main Idea Generation. Teaching Exceptional Children, 53(4), 300–308. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059920958738

- Teasley, S.D. (1997). Talking About Reasoning: How Important Is the Peer in Peer Collaboration?. In L.B. Resnick, R. Säljö, C. Pontecorvo, & B. Burge (Eds). Discourse, Tools and Reasoning. NATO ASI Series (NATO ASI F, volume 160). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-662-03362-3_16

- Van Kleeck, A., Schwarz, A. L., Fey, M. E., Kaiser, A., Miller, J., & Weitzman, E. (2010). Should we use telegraphic or grammatical input with children in the early stages of language development who have language impairments? A meta-analysis of the research and expert opinion. American Journal of Speech Language Pathology, 19, 3-21. http://dx.doi.org/10.1044/1058-0360(2009/08-0075)
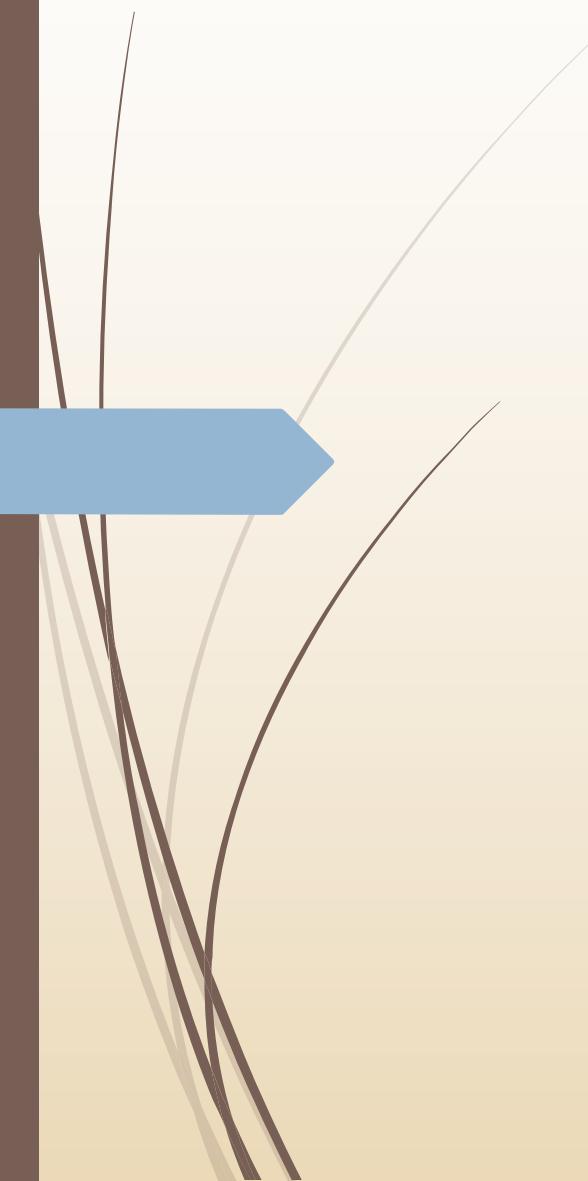
Questions/comments:

caroline.erdos@mail.mcgill.ca