

Unraveling the Myths, Mysteries, and Mechanics of Language

Implications for Literacy Screening and Progress Monitoring

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OUR STORY

EVIDENCE FIRST | IMPLEMENTATION READY

DISCLOSURE

Dr. Spencer is an owner of Language Dynamics Group, LLC. She is entitled to financial benefits related to the sale of their products.



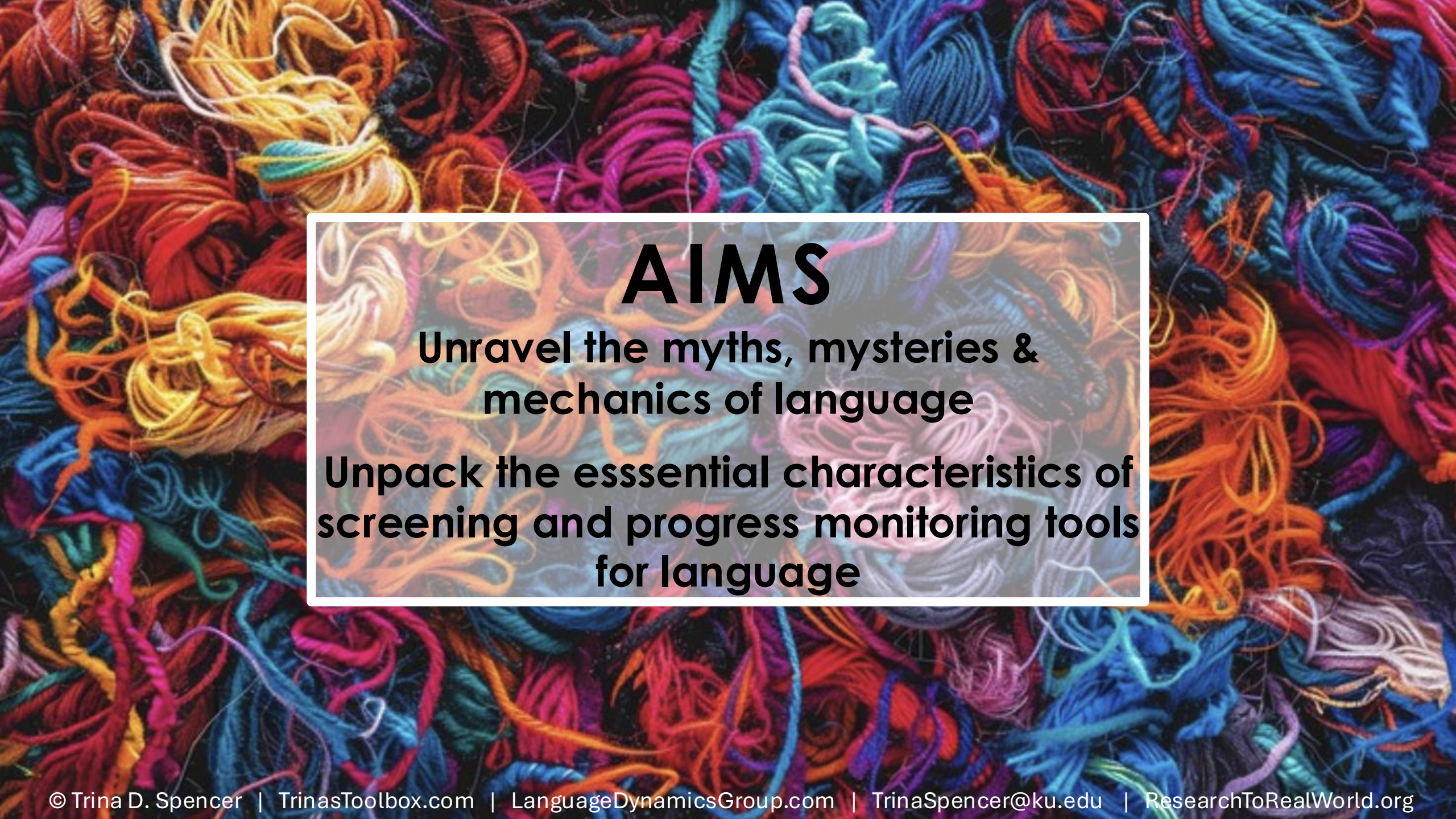
**The science of reading does
not undervalue language.
The way it has been taught to
educators does.**

My job is to fix this!

WHY?



- Language is largely misunderstood
- There are few assessment tools that (properly) measure language



AIMS

**Unravel the myths, mysteries &
mechanics of language**

**Unpack the essential characteristics of
screening and progress monitoring tools
for language**

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Myths that slow us down

None is ill-intended, but each pulls instruction off course.

1

Phonics is THE foundation

Print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency are ‘the foundational skills.’

2

Spoken language is too simple

Spoken language is less complex, so we must use written text to build comprehension.

3

It does not need to be taught

It is not necessary to teach spoken language directly because humans have an innate capacity to learn language.

4

Oral language is whole language

If we acknowledge oral language is critical for literacy, are we advocating a whole language approach?



Instruction Gets Off Course

- If the right foundation is not in place, our teaching is likely **ineffective** and **inefficient**.
- This wastes valuable human and financial resources and leads to readers with a lot of gaps.

PIVOTAL SKILLS

With a constrained scope of content, pivotal skills can be learned in a relatively brief time period. They are critical for learning how **print** maps onto **spoken language**.

Phonological Awareness
Print Concepts
Phonics
Fluency

WRITTEN LANGUAGE

STRONG SPOKEN LANGUAGE
prepares students for learning pivotal skills.

STRONG SPOKEN LANGUAGE
prepares students for reading comprehension and writing.

Eventually, students can acquire NEW KNOWLEDGE and LANGUAGE from reading that shows up in their spoken language.

SPOKEN LANGUAGE

Essential and Ongoing Foundation | Unconstrained | Enables All Aspects of Literacy

Birth

Foundational

Essential skills that form the base upon which other skills or knowledge are built.

Pivotal

Of critical importance at a specific point of development or transition; enable progress from one stage to another.

“Early language skills are
foundational—not just
consequential—to later
reading comprehension.”

--Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006



Additional Evidence

Strong early spoken language skills...

- Support the development of decoding
(Tunmer & Chapman, 2012; Lonigan et al., 2000; Nation & Snowling, 2004)
- Prevent later reading comprehension failure (Catts et al., 2006; Justice et al., 2005)



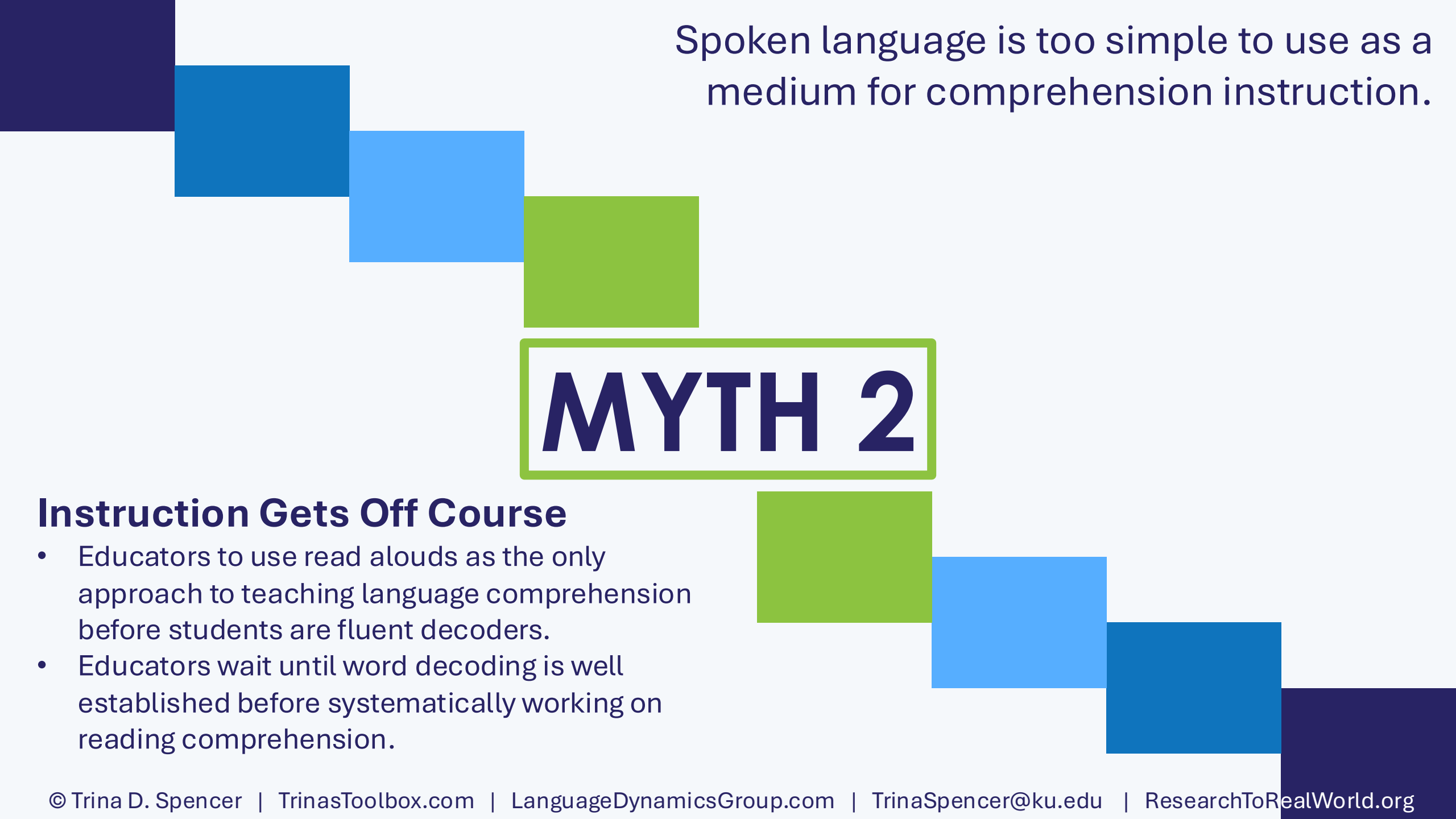
TRUTH 1

Spoken Language is the Essential and Ongoing Foundation of All Learning

MYTH: *Print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency are foundational skills.*

The code skills are critical, but they were likely called “foundational” to mean “lower order”. Spoken language is what print maps onto. You cannot map print onto words students cannot yet say, and students need to know the meaning of a word to be able to recognize it automatically.

Do This! *Be aware of and maybe change how you talk about “foundational skills.” Notice the differences between students’ spoken language abilities and consider how those differences impact literacy attainment.*



Spoken language is too simple to use as a medium for comprehension instruction.

MYTH 2

Instruction Gets Off Course

- Educators to use read alouds as the only approach to teaching language comprehension before students are fluent decoders.
- Educators wait until word decoding is well established before systematically working on reading comprehension.

Non-Decontextualized vs. Decontextualized Language

Differ in

- Vocabulary
- Syntax
- Discourse/
Narrative

Oral Language

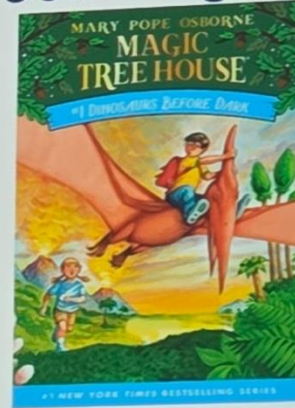


Look at this. See how it moves? No, not that one. You did it! Good job!

Communication Situation: **joint attention & shared knowledge**

Few adjectives & nouns, many verbs

Book Language



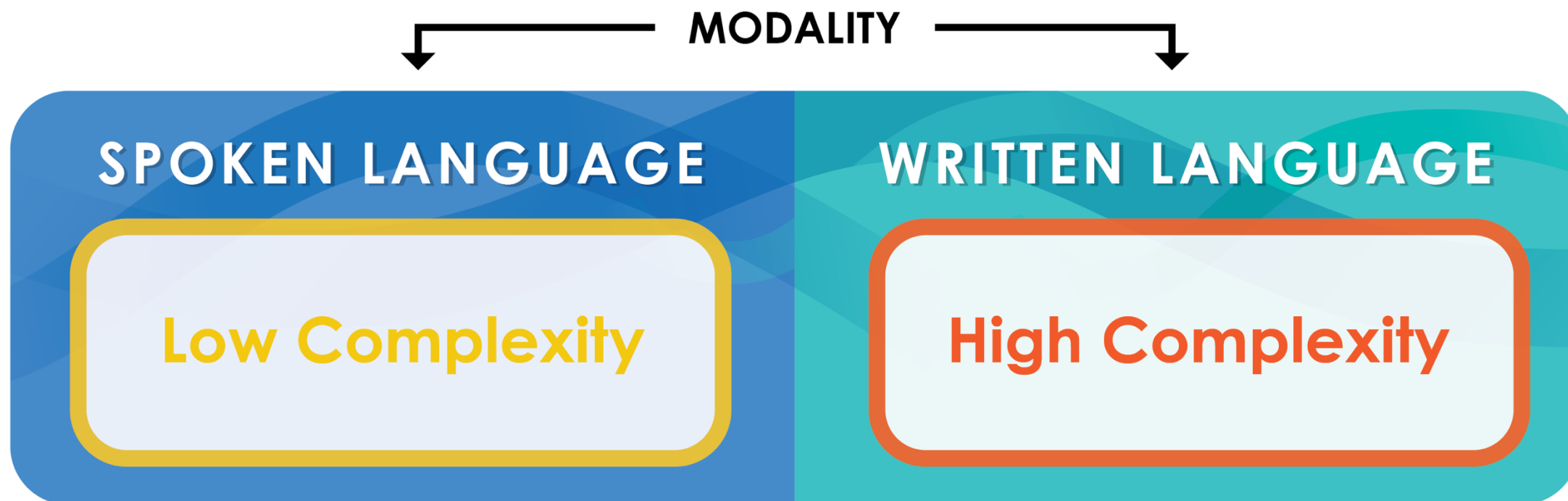
Bestselling chapter book known for its simple language

A giant creature was gliding above the treetops! It had a long, weird crest on the back of its head, a skinny beak, and huge bat-like wings!

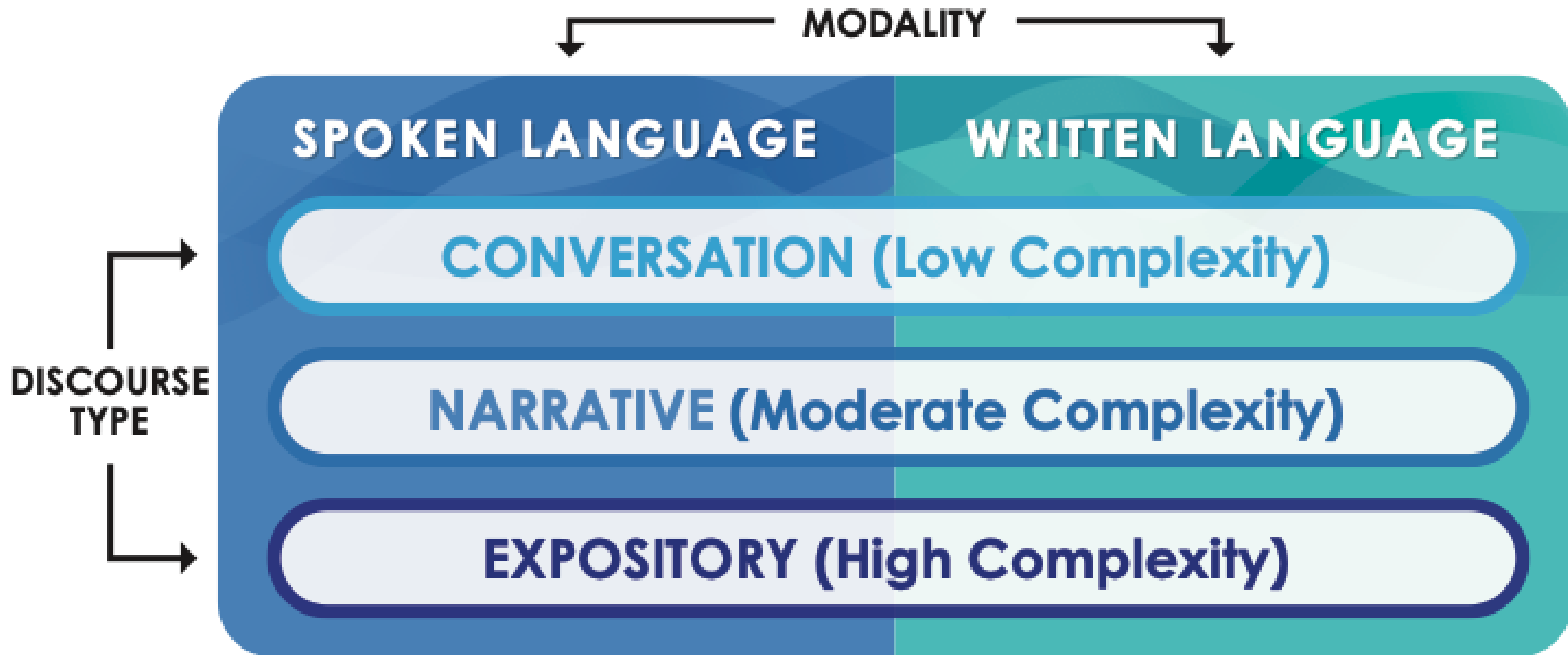
Situation: **little/no joint attention and shared knowledge.**

Narrative structure totally different

MISTAKE



REALITY



The Science of Reading Comprehension Instruction

Comprehension Instruction Should Begin Early

Given the absolute necessity of foundational word-reading skills, it is tempting to think that instruction should begin with a focus on developing those and later turn to comprehension. However, **research has supported a simultaneous, rather than sequential, model of reading instruction.** Along with the development of phonological awareness, print concepts, and alphabet knowledge, young learners in preschool and early elementary school benefit from efforts to develop oral language comprehension, including efforts to develop oral comprehension of written language (**i.e., through read-alouds**; e.g., Cervetti, 2020; Swanson et al., 2011).

As young learners begin to read texts themselves, comprehension instruction, alongside phonics and

Building Language Comprehension for Readers in Grades K–2

Putting It Together for K–2 Instruction

A robust body of research—known as the science of reading—highlights the instructional components that build both foundational word recognition and language comprehension skills in early childhood classrooms. Essential in these grades is **explicit instruction**, which the Florida Center for Reading Research defines as when “the teacher defines and teaches a concept, models the learning process, guides students through its application, and arranges for extended guided practice until mastery is achieved.” In explicit instruction, nothing is left up for student guessing or discovery; instead, teachers are direct, clear, and intentional in teacher-led instruction. Teachers’ actions are visible, as is what students are to do and to learn.

A long-standing tradition in many early childhood classrooms, **teacher-conducted read alouds are essential in building language comprehension.** In a read aloud, students and

teacher interact over a shared text, with an essential exchange of language. A rich body of research (Ness, 2024) confirms the academic, linguistic, and socioemotional benefits of read alouds; **however, read alouds require intentional planning to maximize language comprehension.** A key component of read alouds is high-quality text, both nonfiction and fiction. **High-quality texts** include sophisticated vocabulary opportunities, provide knowledge for students across multiple content areas, and jump-start **oral language** interactions between students and their teachers.

We are at an exciting time in our nation’s literacy landscape, where there is a sense of urgency about the implementation of the science of reading. Advancing literacy rates and enjoyment for our children requires intentional instruction of both word identification skills and language comprehension. Through intentional instruction loaded with rich discourse around engaging text, we build super readers who read with skill, purpose, and passion.

Reading aloud to students...

...ensures
they **HEAR**

complex
language

...but they do
not **USE**

complex
language



TRUTH 2

Discourse type matters most

MYTH: *Spoken language is too simple to use as an instructional medium for comprehension.*

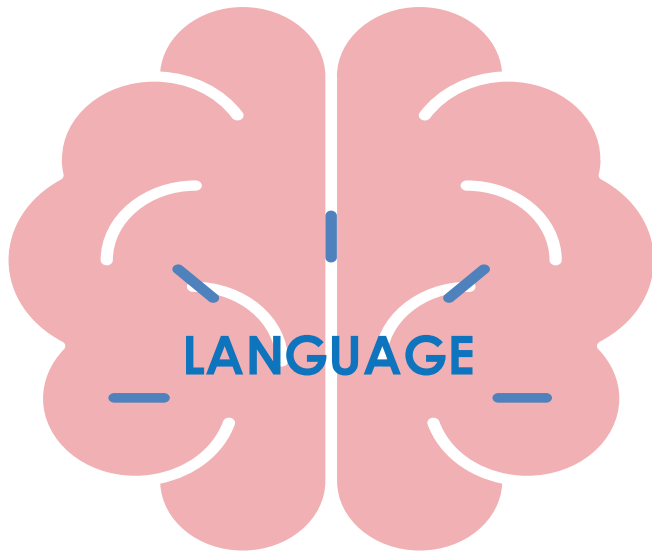
Conversation	Narrative	Expository	SPOKEN or WRITTEN; either modality can be simple or complex
Low complexity Question → answer, here- and-now, short turns (not decontextualized language)	Higher complexity Monologic; decontextualized; causal and temporal subordinate clauses	Highest complexity Teaches new knowledge; uncommon, domain- specific words; decontextualized; transition/signal words	

increasing complexity

Don't! *Rely on conversational discourse and book reading to build spoken language!*

Do This! *Work to engage students in monologic decontextualized language through narrative and expository discourse.*

It is not necessary to teach oral language because
humans have an innate capacity to learn it.



MYTH 3

Academic language is specialized language in its form and function, it is evident in both oral and written modalities, and it helps students acquire and use knowledge.

Schleppegrell, 2012

Not all types of language are equally important, but the type of language that has a robust and generalized impact on educational outcomes is known as academic language.

ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Snow & Uccelli, 2009

Academic language is the pivotal skill repertoire yet attention to it in primary grades is nearly absent.

Academic language consists of word, sentence, and discourse-level **PATTERNS** of language.

Phillips Galloway et al., 2020

SCARBOROUGH'S READING ROPE

LANGUAGE
COMPREHENSION

WORD
RECOGNITION



CONCEPTUAL

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

facts, concepts, etc

VOCABULARY

breadth, precision, links, etc

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

syntax, semantics, etc

VERBAL REASONING

inference, metaphor, etc

LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

print concepts, genres, etc

INSTRUCTIONAL

WORDS

general academic, multiple meaning, domain-specific, and morphologically complex words

SENTENCES

complex sentences with subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns

DISCOURSE

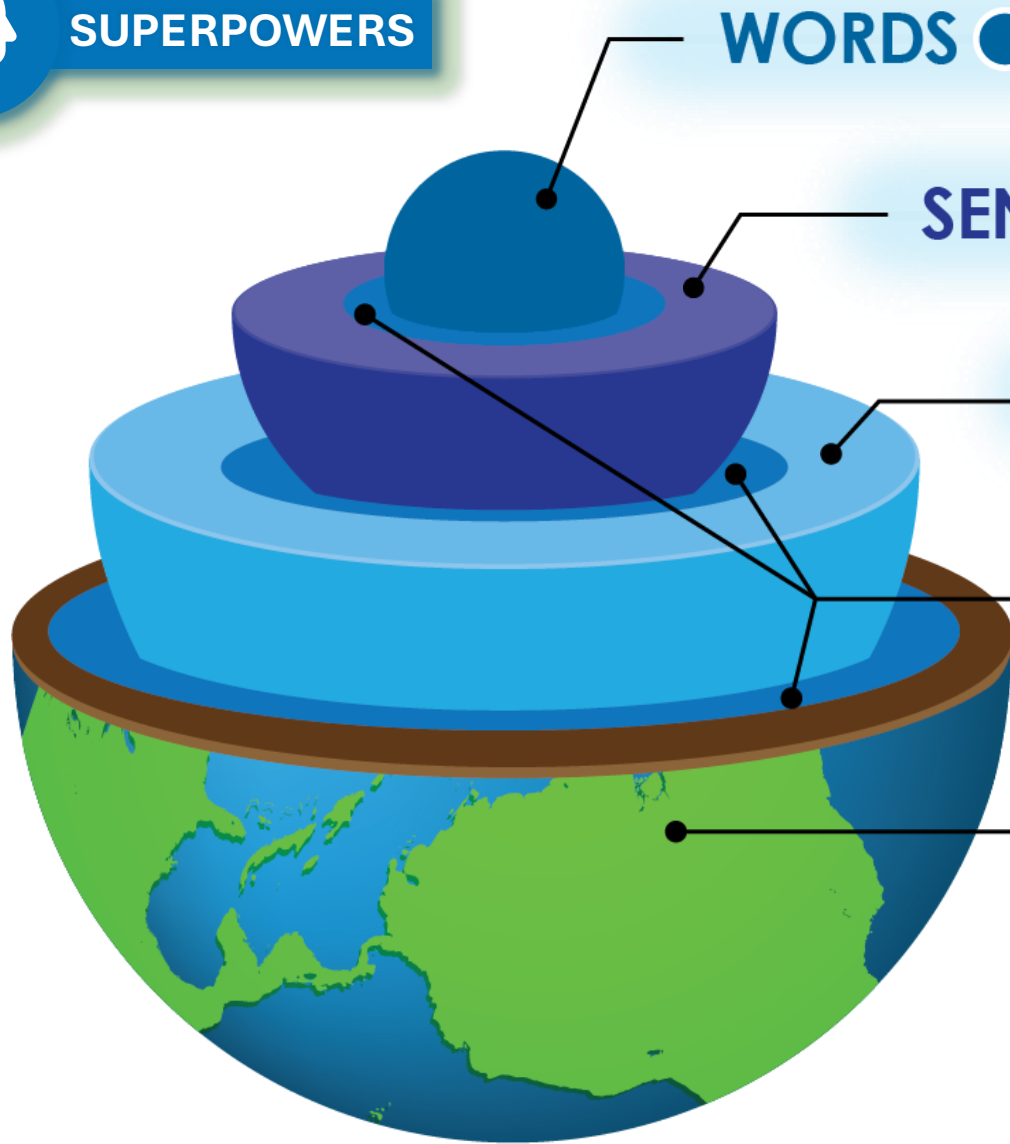
narrative and expository discourse patterns

INFERENTIAL STRATEGIES

strategic use of inferencing to understand figurative language and make text-to-text and text-to-self connections

CONTENT

facts and concepts needed for text-to-world connections



WORDS

SENTENCES

DISCOURSE

INFERENTIAL
STRATEGIES

CONTENT

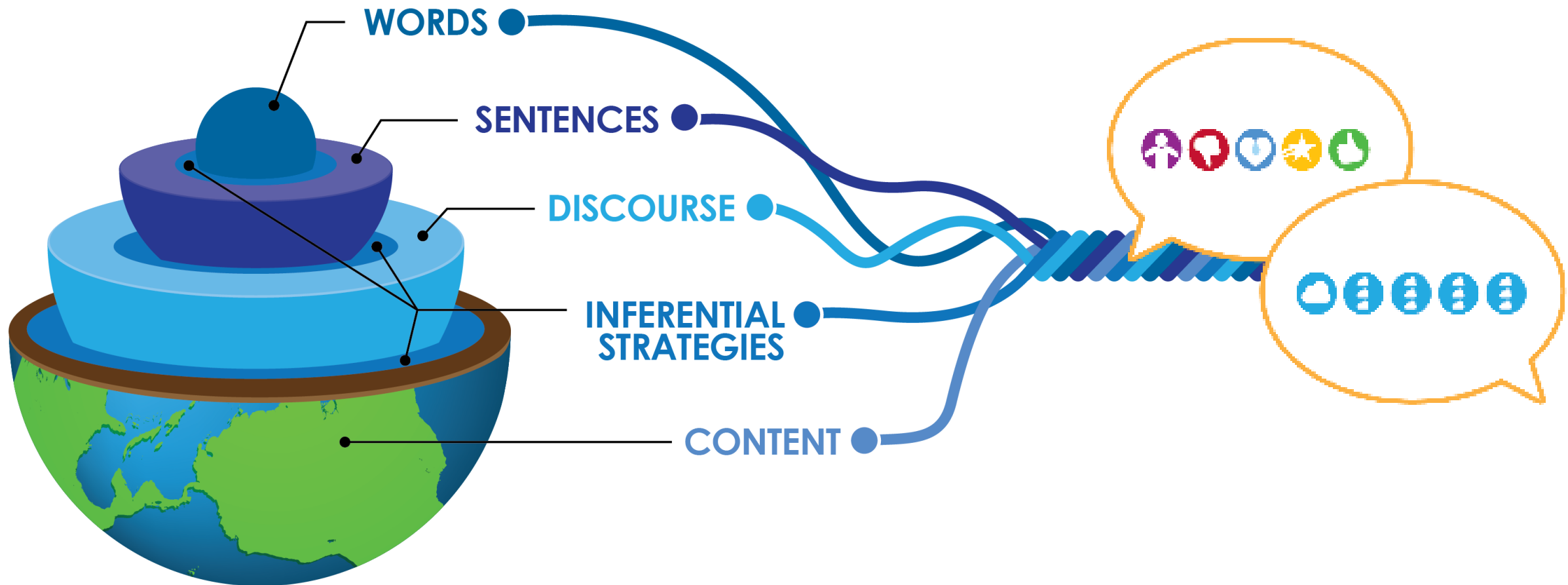
These
dimensions of
language
have patterns!

Not unlike....
CVC
CCVC
CVCC
CVCV
etc.

Dimensionality of
Language
(LARRC, 2015)



Narrative and Expository Discourse are Replete with Academic Language



INSTRUCTION GETS OFF COURSE IF WE DO NOT TEACH ACADEMIC LANGUAGE

Not drill-and-kill | Making the invisible patterns of language visible

Exposure is Insufficient

Many students will not get enough repeated, varied exposure to academic language outside of school to build automaticity.

Patterns are not Obvious

Students need help noticing the patterns in discourse, complex sentences, and uncommon words (and word parts). Train with the grain of the brain!

Cognitive Load is Real

When the language itself is hard, students have less capacity for content. Teaching the language reduces the load and frees cognition for learning knowledge.

Equity and Access

Relying on implicitly learned language privileges students from affluent backgrounds. Explicit instruction ensures access for all learners.



IF WE ARE GOING TO TEACH IT INTENTIONALLY, HOW SHOULD WE DO IT?

"Structured Literacy is a **comprehensive, integrated approach** to reading and writing instruction that directly and systematically **BUILDS ON AND DEVELOPS oral language** while explicitly teaching the **structure of written language.**"

IDA, 2024

The definition involves oral language across five domains: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics



TRUTH 3

Structured literacy is for language too!

Explicit

Direct and clear. Skills are modeled, rules explained, and guided practice given — nothing left to discovery. Frequent student responding throughout.

Systematic & Cumulative

A planned sequence from simple to complex, where each lesson reinforces and builds on the last.

Diagnostic

Responsive to performance. Teachers monitor, analyze errors, and adjust instruction based on formal and informal data.

Contextualized vs. Synthetic

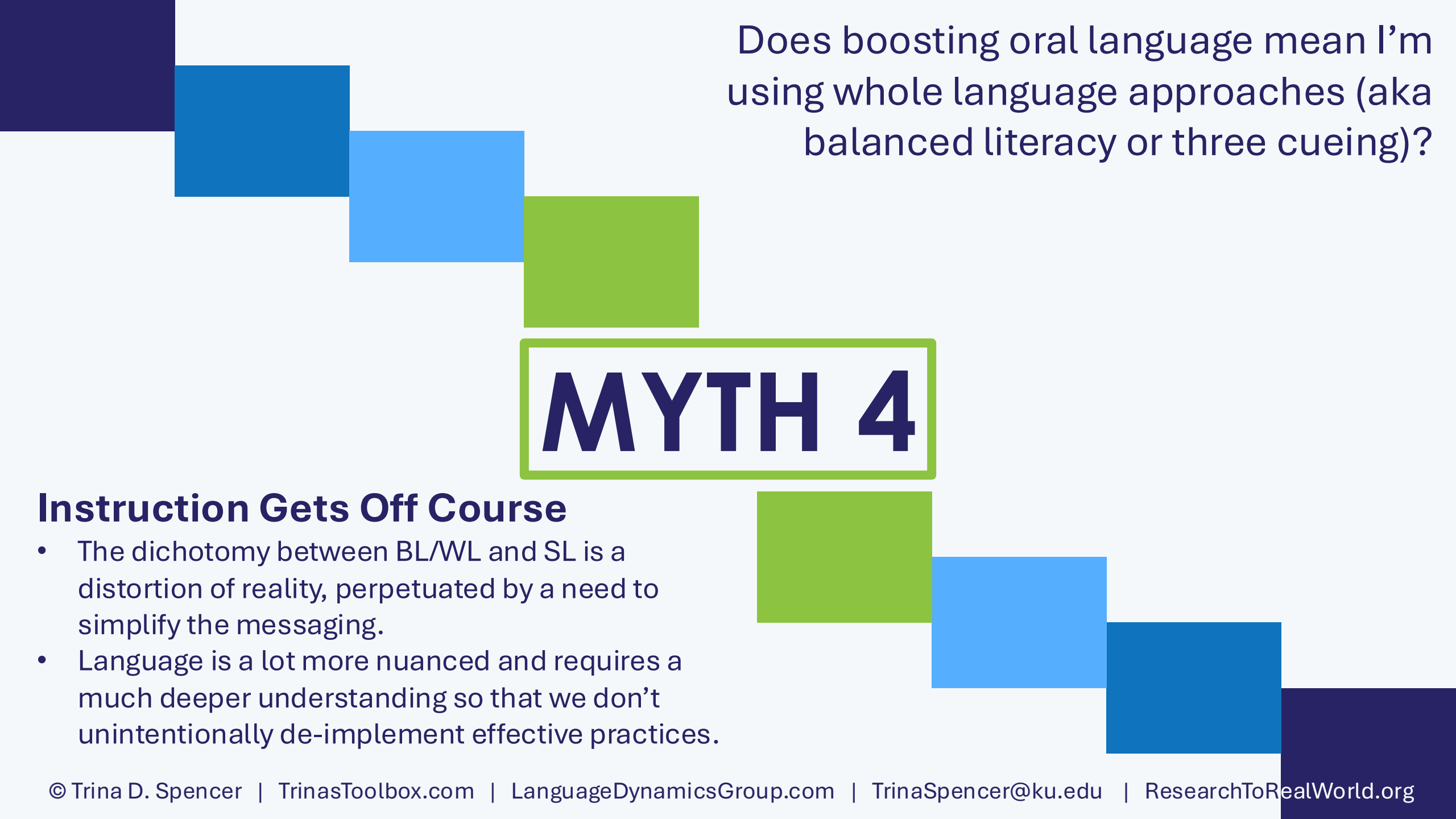
The one real difference: word recognition is taught synthetically; language comprehension must be taught in meaningful (decontextualized) contexts.

Necessary. But not sufficient.

DOES A READ-ALoud QUALIFY AS STRUCTURED LITERACY?

- ✗ **Explicit: Frequent responding?** One child at a time; Q & A
- ✗ **Explicit: Guided practice?** Primarily passive listening
- ✗ **Systematic: Strategic sequence?** Not by design
- ✗ **Diagnostic: Adjust based on data?** Data...what data?

Do This! Keep reading aloud but about 30 minutes of ELA should be spent on explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic language instruction within meaningful narrative and expository discourse.



Does boosting oral language mean I'm using whole language approaches (aka balanced literacy or three cueing)?

MYTH 4

Instruction Gets Off Course

- The dichotomy between BL/WL and SL is a distortion of reality, perpetuated by a need to simplify the messaging.
- Language is a lot more nuanced and requires a much deeper understanding so that we don't unintentionally de-implement effective practices.



**Let's understand LANGUAGE so well
that we can keep the baby in the bathwater!**



**Perhaps, the pendulum
would stop swinging.**



REVIEW

Open Access

An exploratory quantitative analysis of research on balanced literacy and structured literacy



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Abstract

Effective literacy instruction is crucial for educational success, and the debate between phonics and Whole Language approaches has been longstanding. In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) [1] conducted a meta-analysis highlighting the superiority of phonics over Whole Language instruction. However, resistance to Systematic Phonics instruction persists in educational institutions, with some proponents advocating for a "balanced literacy" (BL) approach. BL encompasses various programs, such as Reading Recovery, Leveled Literacy Instruction, and Units of Study, but a universally accepted definition remains elusive. In this study, we conducted an exploratory quantitative analysis of 40 "structured literacy" (SL) studies and 28 BL studies. The SL programs demonstrated a mean unweighted effect size of .43, 95% confidence intervals of .28 to .57 and a fixed weighted mean effect size of .46. These findings are essentially identical to the findings of the NRP [1], suggesting that systematic phonics research findings have been consistent for twenty years. BL programs, which were consistent with the NRP [1] definitions of whole language, had a mean unweighted effect size of .19, 95% confidence intervals of – .02 to .41 and a fixed weighted mean of .29. These findings suggest that SL approaches may yield larger positive effects on student learning compared to BL approaches. However, they also suggested that whole language programs may have improved slightly over the last two decades. SL effect sizes were especially larger when looking at long term studies with a mean difference in effect sizes of .13.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

BL = whole language

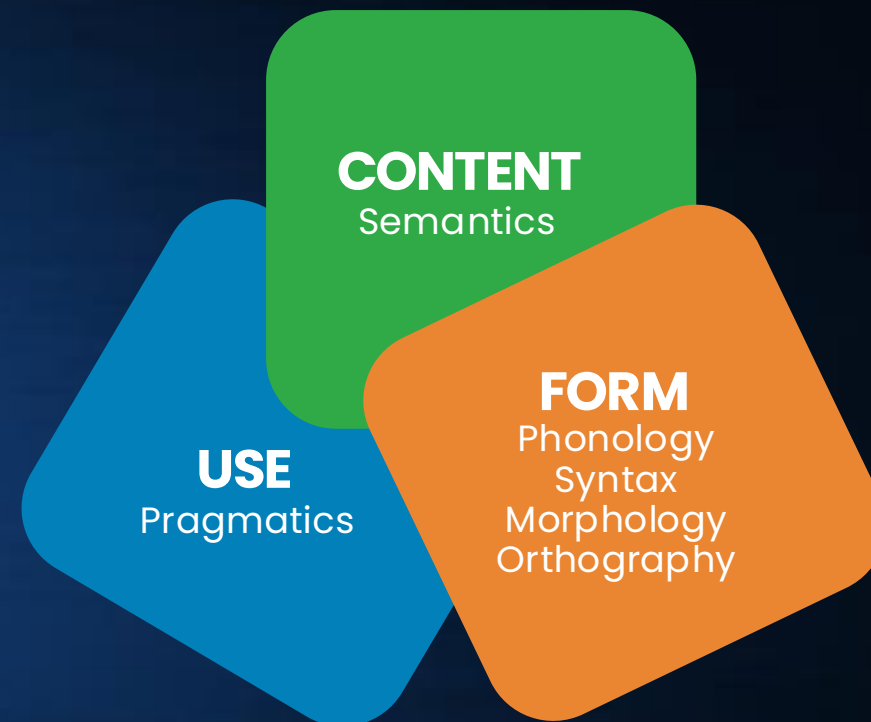
SL = systematic phonics

- SL consistently produces larger effects than BL on decoding measures (ES = .74)
- BL produced greater effects than SL on comprehension (ES = .81); however, caution was noted because there were only two BL studies.

MECHANICS

LANGUAGE

A conventional, rule-governed, and generative system of symbols that humans use to represent and share meaning—supporting thought, communication, and social action across modalities.



This framing does not align easily with the Reading Rope model

The IDA (2024) definition involves oral language across five domains: phonology, morphology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics

LANGUAGE SYSTEMS

Readers and writers draw on all of these to make sense of print and to produce it.

Language Resource	Focus	Primary Contribution
Phonology	Speech sounds	Phonemic awareness
Graphophonic	Sound-symbol mapping	Decoding and encoding (spelling)
Orthography	Written patterns	Decoding fluency and spelling
Morphology	Meaningful word parts	Comprehension
Semantics	Word meanings and content	Comprehension
Syntax	Sentence structure	Comprehension
Pragmatics	Context and use	Inferencing and knowledge building within discourse



Phonology ①
Graphophonics ②
Orthography ③

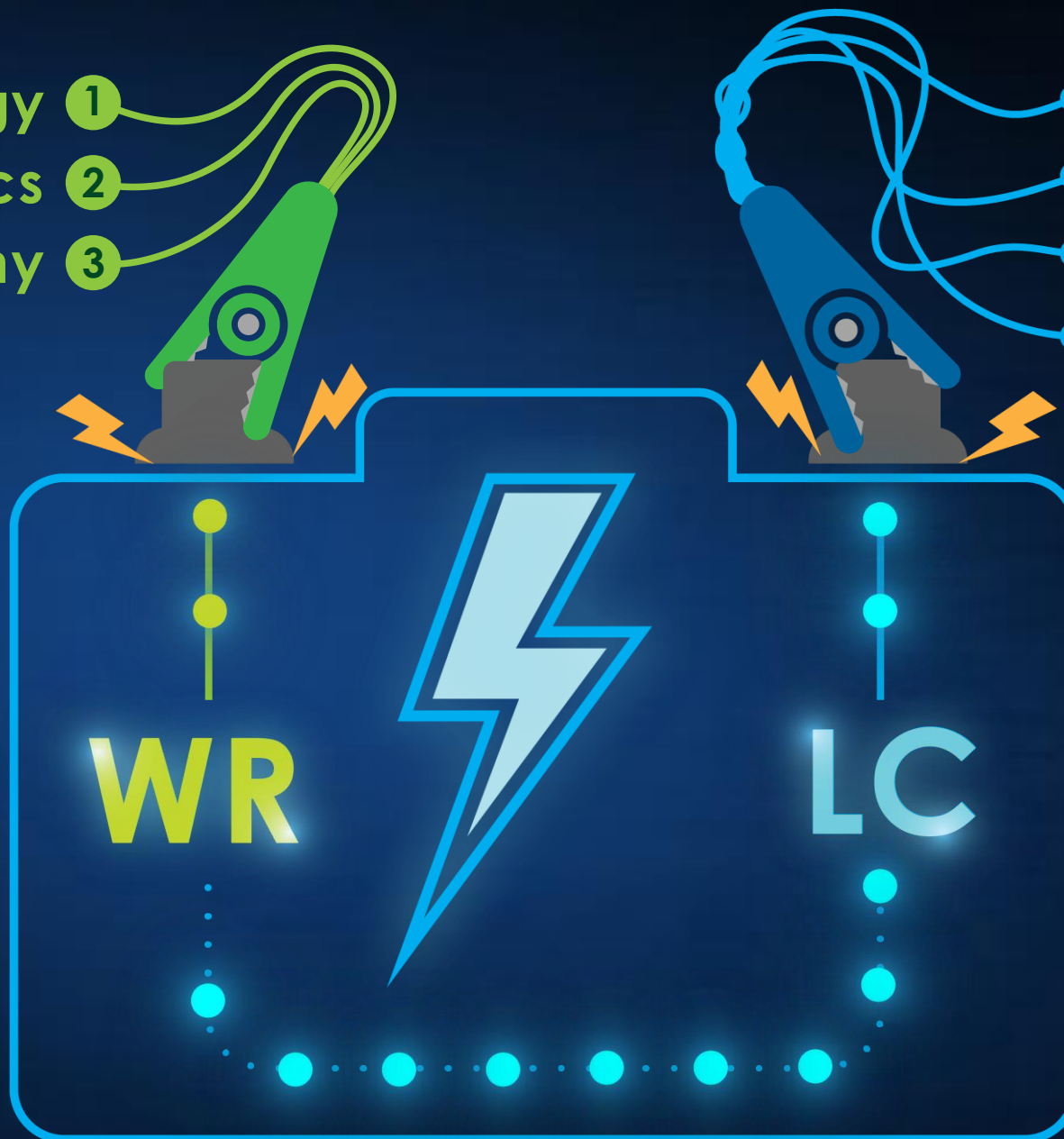
Pragmatics
Semantics
Syntax
Morphology

Semantics and **pragmatics** help students **recognize** and confirm irregular words.

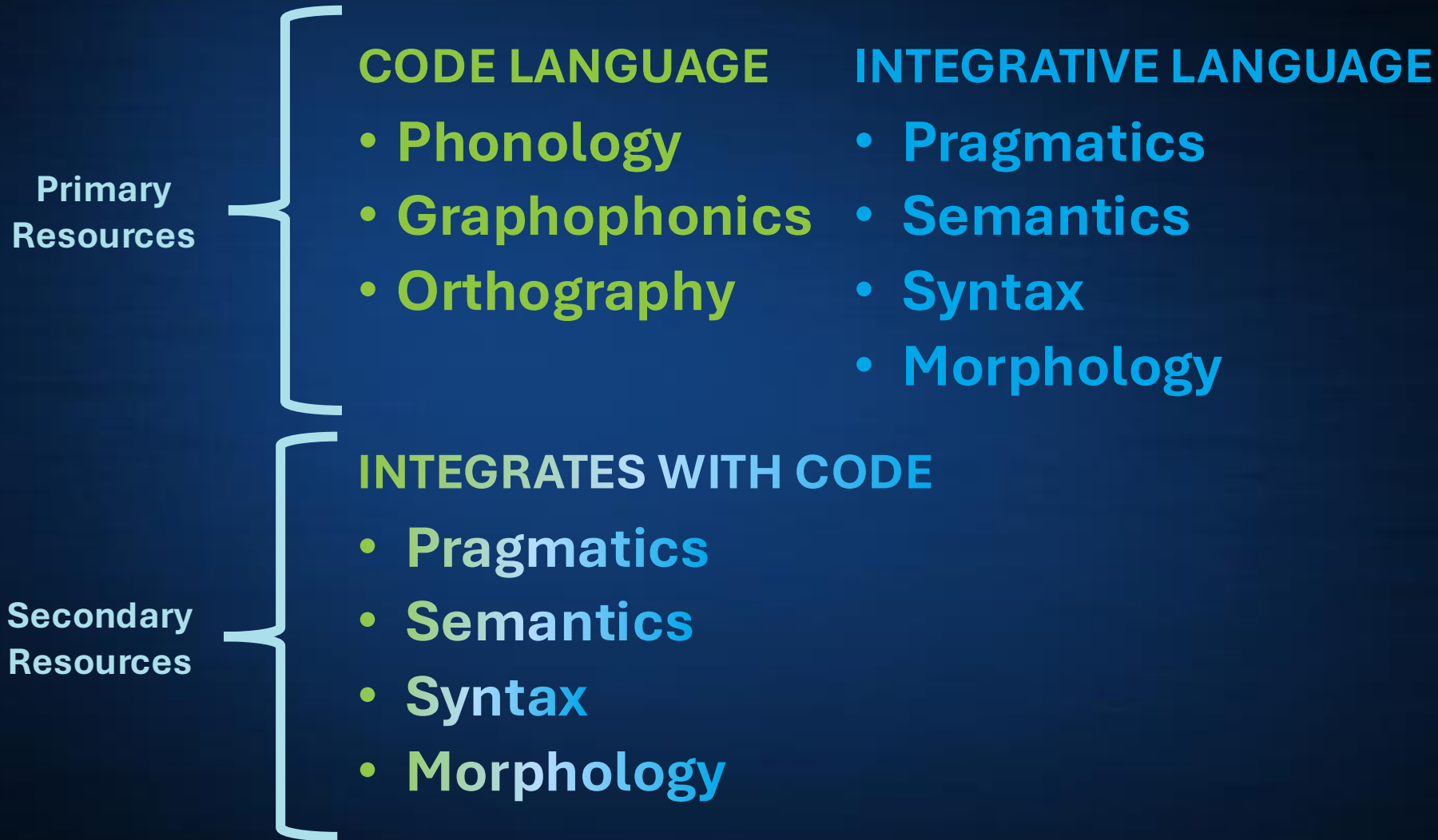
Morphology helps students chunk multisyllabic words for **decoding** and encoding.

Orthographic mapping will not happen unless the meaning (**semantics**) of a printed (**orthography**) and spoken (**phonology**) word is also known.

Without **semantics**, **syntax**, and **pragmatics**, fast reading does not sound like spoken language (**fluency**).



Language Resources



TRUTH 4

Promoting oral language is NOT the same thing as whole language

The more intentionally and effectively educators build a solid oral language foundation for all students, especially those with risk factors, the more efficient systematic phonics instruction becomes, and the better prepared students are for higher-order comprehension and writing tasks. However, for the battery to power anything, the right wires have to be connected to both terminals: word recognition and language comprehension.

Do This! *Be sensitive and validating when working with educators who are very committed to BL/WL. Rather than de-implementing everything, just give the battery a little tune up.*

SUMMARY

Truths that promote effective practice

Language is no longer a mystery; busted myths and clarified the mechanics

1

Spoken language is THE essential foundation for learning to decode, write, and comprehend

2

Spoken language can be as complex as written language IF monologic narrative and expository discourse are used for instruction

3

Academic language is specialized and all students benefit from explicit, systematic, cumulative, and diagnostic instruction

4

Promoting oral language is not the same thing as whole language, balanced literacy, or three cueing

**Weighing a pig
doesn't make it
grow, but what
gets tested,
gets taught!**

MTSS decisions require
specialized assessment
tools built for universal
screening and progress
monitoring.



ASSESSMENT

If Oral Language is Foundational to all Literacy and Learning, we Must Test it Properly

Let's start by getting some terms straight.

Universal Screening

Two things called “**screening**” that answer different questions

	MTSS Screening	Disability Screening
Primary Goal	Identify students who may need extra help within general education tiers.	Identify students who may need a special education evaluation.
Scope	Assess all students multiple times per year — fall, winter, and spring.	Flag students with a possible disability for further diagnostic evaluation.
Tools	Typically short, efficient, low-cost criterion-referenced measures.	Instruments designed to detect risk against developmental norms, with sensitivity and specificity data.
Follow Up	Leads to “ diagnostic assessment ”, tiered intervention and ongoing progress monitoring.	Leads to referral for a “ diagnostic assessment ” and possible eligibility determination.
Stakes	Low-stakes; instructional planning.	Higher-stakes; potential change in classification and services.

Diagnostic Assessment

One word; two very different purposes

Instructional Diagnostic Assessment in Literacy

PURPOSE

To identify specific instructional needs after a screener shows a child is at risk, so teachers can target intervention.

CHARACTERISTICS

- Often informal or curriculum-based
- Narrow focus on particular skills
- Limited or no psychometric validation — built for teaching guidance, not high-stakes decisions

EXAMPLES

CORE Phonics Survey, Acadience Reading Survey, Quick Phonics Screener, teacher-made tools

Formal Diagnostic Assessment for Disability Identification

PURPOSE

To determine whether a child meets criteria for a specific disability such as dyslexia, language disorder, or learning disability.

CHARACTERISTICS

- Administered by trained specialists
- Standardized and norm-referenced with strong psychometric properties
- Used for eligibility decisions and formal documentation such as IEPs

EXAMPLES

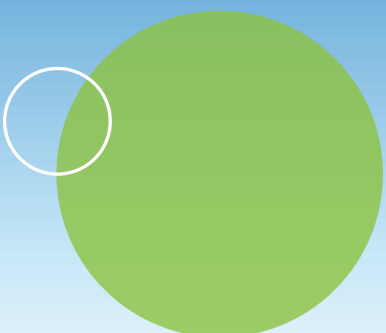
CTOPP-2, Woodcock-Johnson, WIAT-4, CELF-5



TASK TYPES

Measurement Tasks Matter a lot for Oral Language

Let's decompose the ways in which language can (and should) be measured.



Word- and sentence-level tasks

This is where almost every language assessment stops



SUB-CONSTRUCT

TYPICAL TASK FORMAT

WHAT IT GIVES YOU — AND WHAT IT MISSES

Receptive vocabulary

Point to one of four pictures that matches a spoken word

- + Quick, reliable, easy to score
- Single words only — never connected language

Expressive vocabulary and word retrieval

Name pictures; or name as many pictures as possible in one minute

- + Sensitive to word-finding difficulty
- Confounds knowing a word with retrieving it quickly

Morphosyntax

Repeat sentences of increasing length and grammatical complexity

- + Strong marker for language disorder
- Tells you that something is wrong, not what to teach



Discourse-level tasks

These measure classroom-relevant comprehension

SUB-CONSTRUCT	TYPICAL TASK FORMAT	WHAT IT GIVES YOU — AND WHAT IT MISSES
Listening comprehension	Hear a short story, then answer literal and inferential questions	+ Closest to real classroom listening demands – Questions alone can be passed on partial understanding
Language production	Generate a personal or fictional story/paragraph; scored for discourse elements, sentence complexity, and vocabulary	+ Closest to spontaneous spoken language – Difficult to score in real-time, impacting reliability and feasibility
Language Comprehension & Production	Retell a story/paragraph, scored for discourse elements, sentence complexity, and vocabulary	+ Directly instructional — names the teaching target – Requires parallel forms to repeat across the year



Characteristics of Assessment Tools Needed for MTSS Universal Screening and Progress Monitoring

1

Discourse-level language

Measures instructionally relevant discourse-level language including sentences & words

2

Multiple parallel forms

Enough equivalent forms to sample repeatedly without reusing the same test

3

Sensitive to growth

Detects change over time related to instruction and intervention

4

Standardized procedures

Standardized administration and scoring procedures

5

Reliable & valid

Decisions rest on accurate, unbiased data

6

Brief & feasible

Simple enough for non-specialists to administer regularly

7

Grade-level benchmarks

Benchmark scores by grade to identify who needs supplemental support

8

Links to instruction

Results inform instructional targets and modifications

Criterion 1 (Babayigit et al., 2021; Kim, 2016; Klem et al., 2015; LARRC, 2015; Suggate et al., 2018); Criteria 2-8 (Deno, 2003)



UNIVERSAL SCREENERS WITH AN ORAL LANGUAGE COMPONENT

Widely purchased literacy batteries that include something labeled oral language or vocabulary.

- ✓ Meets the characteristic
- ⚠ Partial or unverified
- ✗ Does not meet

- **FastBridge – Oral Repetition**
- **mClass with DIBELS 8 Oral Language + Vocabulary**
- **AimswebPlus Auditory Vocabulary**
- **Virginia Language and Literacy Screening System**



FastBridge — Oral Repetition

Renaissance / Illuminate Education · Early Reading subtest

THE TASK

The examiner reads 20 sentences of increasing length aloud, one at a time. The student repeats each one back word for word. Scored 0, 1, or 2 per sentence for 40 points.

FORMAT

1:1, examiner-administered, about 3 minutes, no student materials

GRADES

K–1 (English and Spanish)

PURPOSE

Optional screening subtest for students showing oral language difficulty

Not part of the recommended four-subtest composite so it does not contribute to the risk decision.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Sentence level only; no connected discourse |
| ? | 2. Multiple parallel forms | Limited forms; not built for repeated sampling |
| ✗ | 3. Sensitive to growth | Not designed to detect short-interval growth |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Scripted 20 sentences, 0/1/2 scoring |
| ? | 5. Reliable & valid | Subtest data reported, but excluded from composite |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | About three minutes, no materials to prepare |
| ? | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Optional subtest that does not drive the risk score |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Flags risk; offers no instructional target |

mCLASS Oral Language + Vocabulary

Amplify Education · optional add-on measures

THE TASK

Separate Oral Language and Vocabulary measures offered alongside the DIBELS 8 battery, positioned as additional dyslexia-risk information.

FORMAT

1:1 or device-assisted, brief

GRADES

K–2 (English; Spanish equivalents available)

PURPOSE

Screening only

Both language measures are optional and sit outside the mClass DIBELS 8 composite score.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Word and sentence level; no discourse measure |
| ✗ | 2. Multiple parallel forms | One benchmark form per screening window |
| ✗ | 3. Sensitive to growth | No progress monitoring available for oral language |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Standardized within the mCLASS platform |
| ? | 5. Reliable & valid | Confirm subtest-level evidence in the technical manual |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | Brief; folds into an existing screening routine |
| ? | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Optional add-on, outside the composite |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Framed as risk information, not instruction |

AimswebPlus Auditory Vocabulary

Pearson · Early Literacy measure

THE TASK

The student points to one of four pictures that matches an orally presented word. 25 items.

FORMAT

1:1 or device-administered, 2–4 minutes

GRADES

Pre-K–1

PURPOSE

Benchmark screening only

The one oral language measure in the battery is the one you are not permitted to use for progress monitoring.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

✗	1. Discourse-level language	Receptive vocabulary only
✗	2. Multiple parallel forms	Benchmark forms only
✗	3. Sensitive to growth	Explicitly unavailable for progress monitoring
✓	4. Standardized procedures	Fully scripted, 25 fixed items
✓	5. Reliable & valid	Norms updated for the 2025–26 school year
✓	6. Brief & feasible	Two to four minutes
✓	7. Grade-level benchmarks	National norms and risk tiers by grade
✗	8. Links to instruction	No instructional information returned

Virginia Language & Literacy Screening

University of Virginia / Virginia Literacy Partnerships · VALLSS

THE TASK

Nonsense Sentences (repeat sentences varying in length and grammatical complexity), Vocabulary Fluency (name as many pictures as possible in one minute), Passage Retell, and Expressive Comprehension Questions.

FORMAT

1:1, teacher-administered, three times per year

GRADES

K–3, plus VALLSS 4–8

PURPOSE

Screening and early warning

Strongest language architecture of any state screener but risk bands are calculated from the code-based subtests.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| ? | 1. Discourse-level language | Passage Retell is discourse level, but not given every window |
| × | 2. Multiple parallel forms | Three benchmark windows, not parallel PM forms |
| × | 3. Sensitive to growth | Not designed to track response to intervention |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Scripted administration and scoring |
| ✓ | 5. Reliable & valid | Publicly posted technical manual |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | Built for classroom teachers to administer |
| ✓ | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Risk bands reported by grade |
| ? | 8. Links to instruction | Instructional indicators provided |



EARLY CHILDHOOD ONLY

Tools built for preschool language assessment.



- ✓ Meets the characteristic
- ⊕ Partial or unverified
- ✗ Does not meet

- **Acadience Reading Pre-K: PELI**
- **Virginia Pre-K Language and Literacy Screener**
- **Quick Interactive Language Screener**
- **myIGDIs / Preschool IGDIs**





Acadience Reading Pre-K: PELI

Acadience Learning / Voyager Sopris · storybook-embedded

THE TASK

Vocabulary–Oral Language (picture naming plus “tell about”) and Comprehension (listening questions and shared retell), embedded in a storybook. Reports a PELI Language Index.

FORMAT

1:1, storybook-based, untimed

GRADES

Ages 3–5 only

PURPOSE

Screening three times per year, progress monitoring, and outcome evaluation

Ages 3–5 only. Nothing carries forward into kindergarten and beyond.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

 1. Discourse-level language	Story context, but responses stay at question level
 2. Multiple parallel forms	Five books; quick checks are mostly PA and alphabet
 3. Sensitive to growth	Growth evidence is strongest for the code subtests
 4. Standardized procedures	Scripted administration with discontinue rules
 5. Reliable & valid	Validated against CELF subtests and Acadience composites
 6. Brief & feasible	Designed for preschool teachers to administer
 7. Grade-level benchmarks	Benchmark goals for each screening window
 8. Links to instruction	Language Index names a domain, not a target

VA Pre-K Language & Literacy Screener

Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program / UVA

THE TASK

Nonsense Sentences — the child repeats silly sentences varying in length and grammatical complexity — administered alongside code-based subtests.

FORMAT

1:1, teacher-administered

GRADES

Pre-K

PURPOSE

Screening

Added in 2022 specifically because PALS-PreK measured no language at all. The correction was real, but partial.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Sentence repetition only |
| ✗ | 2. Multiple parallel forms | Benchmark forms only |
| ✗ | 3. Sensitive to growth | Not designed for progress monitoring |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Scripted; developed with SLP input |
| ? | 5. Reliable & valid | Development ongoing; evidence still accruing |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | Built for preschool teachers |
| ✓ | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Benchmarks by screening window |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Marker task; no instructional target |

Quick Interactive Language Screener

Brookes Publishing · child self-administered

THE TASK

48 items across three separately reported domains — Vocabulary, Syntax, and Process, which measures how the child learns new language rather than what they already know.

FORMAT

Touchscreen; child self-administers with minimal supervision; auto-scored; 15–20 minutes

GRADES

Ages 3;0–6;11 (QUILS:ES for Spanish–English)

PURPOSE

Screening only

The Process domain measures language learning, which means it is more suitable for identifying disability.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Word and sentence level |
| ✗ | 2. Multiple parallel forms | A single form |
| ✗ | 3. Sensitive to growth | No repeated-sampling design |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Automated delivery removes examiner drift |
| ✓ | 5. Reliable & valid | Normed on 898 children; dialect-neutral item design |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | No examiner training required |
| ? | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Cut scores by age rather than grade benchmarks |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Returns a profile, not a teaching target |

myIGDIs / Preschool IGDIs

Individual Growth and Development Indicators

THE TASK

Brief repeated probes of expressive and receptive vocabulary — Picture Naming and Which One Doesn't Belong.

FORMAT

1:1, brief probes, minutes each

GRADES

Pre-K

PURPOSE

Screening and progress monitoring

The design logic is right (University of Minnesota – Deno), but the construct is only vocabulary.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Vocabulary only |
| ✓ | 2. Multiple parallel forms | Built on a repeated-probe design |
| ✓ | 3. Sensitive to growth | Designed to show growth across the year |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Standardized brief probes |
| ✓ | 5. Reliable & valid | Adequate evidence of reliability & validity |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | Minutes per probe |
| ✓ | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Benchmarks available |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Tells you vocabulary is low, not which words to teach |



LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC TOOLS

Instruments built to measure language rather than to bolt language onto an established reading battery.



- ✓ Meets the characteristic
- ? Partial or unverified
- ✗ Does not meet

- **OxEd LanguageScreen**
- **LDG's CUBED-3 Narrative Language Measures**



LanguageScreen

App-delivered language screener

THE TASK

Four automated tasks — expressive vocabulary, receptive vocabulary, listening comprehension, and sentence repetition.

FORMAT

Tablet app, automated scoring, roughly 10 minutes

GRADES

Ages 3.5–11 (really it is 6)

PURPOSE

Screening

Reliability and validity data are very difficult to find; yet they claim it exists.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|--|
| ✗ | 1. Discourse-level language | Vocabulary and sentence level; listening is question-based |
| ✗ | 2. Multiple parallel forms | Not built for repeated parallel sampling |
| ? | 3. Sensitive to growth | Growth sensitivity not established for this use |
| ✓ | 4. Standardized procedures | Automated, consistent delivery |
| ? | 5. Reliable & valid | Confirm evidence for your student population |
| ✓ | 6. Brief & feasible | Non-specialists can administer |
| ? | 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Confirm grade-level benchmark availability |
| ✗ | 8. Links to instruction | Flags risk; no instructional target |

CUBED-3 Narrative Language Measures

Language Dynamics Group · NLM Listening and NLM Reading

THE TASK

The child hears (or reads) a short story and retells it, then answers factual, inferential vocabulary, and inferential reasoning questions, plus a personal story generation task.

FORMAT

1:1, scored in real time, about five minutes

GRADES

PreK–8 (grades 9–12 in research and development)

PURPOSE

Benchmark screening AND progress monitoring

The only tool in this review designed from the start to meet general outcome measurement requirements for language with broad grade ranges.

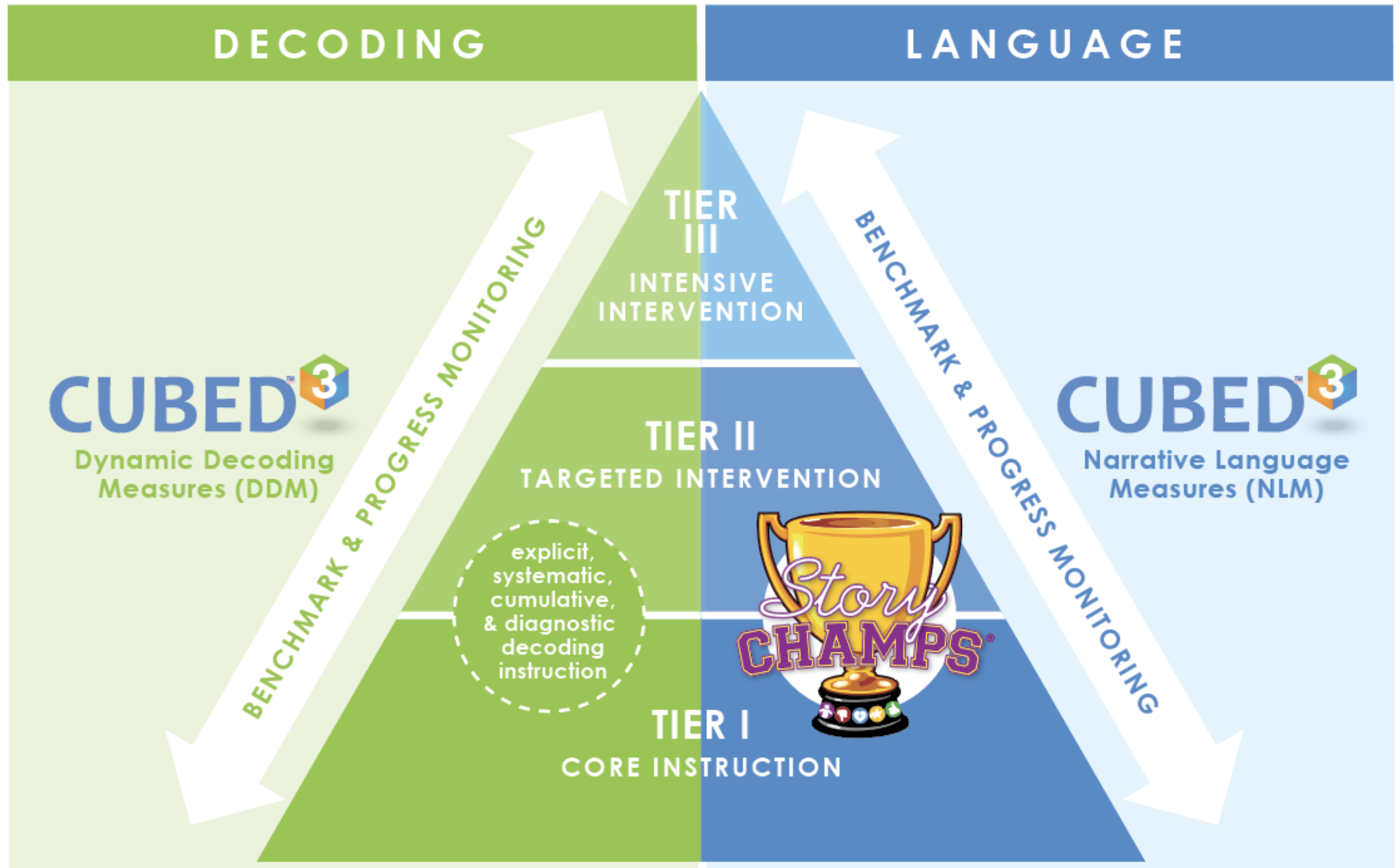
CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS NEEDED FOR MTSS SCREENING & PROGRESS MONITORING

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| ✓ 1. Discourse-level language | Retell plus inference at the discourse level |
| ✓ 2. Multiple parallel forms | 25 preschool forms; about 16 per grade level |
| ✓ 3. Sensitive to growth | Built as a general outcome measure for growth |
| ✓ 4. Standardized procedures | Scripted administration, real-time scoring |
| ✓ 5. Reliable & valid | Inter-rater agreement above 90%; validated with several standardized instruments |
| ✓ 6. Brief & feasible | About five minutes, teacher-administered |
| ✓ 7. Grade-level benchmarks | Benchmark standards at every grade |
| ✓ 8. Links to instruction | Story grammar, sentence complexity, and vocabulary scores name the teaching target |

Research Article

Using Parallel, Narrative-Based Measures to Examine the Relationship Between Listening and Reading Comprehension: A Pilot Study

Douglas B. Petersen,^a  Trina D. Spencer,^b Alisa Konishi,^c Tiffany P. Sellars,^d
Matthew E. Foster,^b and Dana Robertson^e



The PDF version is FREE. Digital CUBED-3 uses AI Intelliscore. Sign up for a free trial at LDGinsight.com/sign-up

Recurring issues

Patterns that show up again and again across the tools we just reviewed



1 Label-task mismatch

“Oral Language” on a report usually means one sentence repetition task. The label names a domain; the task samples a sliver of it.

2 Comprehension measured through print

If the child has to decode first, a low score cannot separate weak decoding from weak language. The Simple View collapses into one number.

3 Not included in the composite

Where a language subtest exists, it is usually optional and excluded from the risk score. If it does not move the decision, it does not exist.

4 Over-reliance on vocabulary

Knowing words is not the same as understanding connected language. Vocabulary is the easiest thing to measure, not the most important thing to know.

Recurring issues, continued

The three that matter most for MTSS decisions



5

Phonological awareness is not oral language

PA sits in the word recognition strands. A phonological awareness screener tells you nothing about language comprehension — and tools like PADDI and PALS are frequently listed as though it does.

6

Narrow age ranges

Most language-specific tools stop at kindergarten. Nothing follows a child into grades three and four, which is exactly where language comprehension difficulties surface as reading comprehension difficulties. CUBED-3 is the exception.

7

Not sufficient for progress monitoring

Without many parallel forms and demonstrated sensitivity to growth, a screener cannot answer whether an intervention is working. Every tool reviewed here fails this except CUBED-3.



Where does that leave us?

The state of language screening and progress monitoring, in five lines

- A screener that samples one task cannot describe a construct with seven parts.
- Sentence repetition answers whether. It does not answer what.
- If the subtest does not enter the composite, it does not enter the decision.
- Measuring comprehension through print measures decoding first and comprehension second.
- There are excellent measures for the bottom of the reading rope and almost none for the top.

CUBED-3 is the standout, and it is worth saying why.

It was designed for MTSS universal screening and progress monitoring from the beginning. Development started from valid language sampling using a retell format. It aligns with the upper (and lower) strands of the reading rope, and it covers every grade, with high school under study this fall.



**LANGUAGE
& JUSTICE
FOR ALL**

THANK YOU

Questions...If there is time.



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