Assessing Language-Based Contributions Underlying Poor Reading Achievement in Young Adolescents

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Advanced Oral Language

Advanced oral language (e.g., lexical ambiguity and inferencing) refers to the numerous forms of language that develop during young adolescence through adulthood that are required for successful listening, speaking, reading, and writing in middle and high school (Paul, 2007).

Attitudes towards Reading

An individual's expression of a system of feelings, represented along a continuum from positive to negative, towards reading and associated activities. Also referred to as reading attitudes.

Oral Language

Oral language is a collection of expressive and receptive abilities involving the five primary domains of language including phonology, semantics, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics (Catts & Kamhi, 2005).

Poor Comprehenders

Students with low levels of reading comprehension despite possessing adequate decoding ability (Cain & Oakhill, 2007).

Problem Solving

Problem solving in text comprehension involves the recognition of an obstacle to comprehension and the subsequent application of strategies such as planning, reviewing, and adjusting to reach the goal of comprehension.

Silent Reading Comprehension

Silent reading comprehension, a complex mental interplay between a reader and a writer, requires a reader to integrate background knowledge, various language and cognitive skills, and affective influences to successfully form a cohesive, text-based understanding (Nellenbach, 2010).

Struggling Readers/Readers with Difficulties

Students who for one or more reasons fail to achieve expected or proficient levels of reading.

Whole-to-Part Model

The Whole-to-Part model of silent reading comprehension asserts that success with silent reading comprehension requires the integrated processing of three primary, ability components or parts: (a) word identification; (b) language comprehension; and (c) whole-text print processing (Cunningham, 1993).

Young Adolescent

Generally, a child between the ages of 10-15 years old or who is in the 4th-8th grades (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; McCombs, Kirby, Barney, Darilek, & Magee, 2005; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2005).

Example Assessment Protocol

Identification: Student identified as struggling with silent reading comprehension (e.g. poor end-end-of-grade scores, Teacher/EC/Principal/Parent referral).

Request: SLP consult/assessment

1. Start with a quick assessment of basic decoding using a tool such as the TOWRE.

   ➢ **If** the student reads words below a 2nd grade level, then you have identified that decoding is a major source of the problem with reading comprehension.
   Suspend the assessment and intervene through consult and identification of the faculty who can address/support the development of decoding.
   Continue the assessment process once plans and supports are put into place.

2. Next, briefly assess the student's reading attitudes with a tool such as the Elementary Reading Attitudes Scale.

   ➢ **If** the student demonstrates negative attitudes towards recreational and/or academic forms of reading, then you have identified an area that can be contributing to poor reading comprehension outcomes.
   Continue with the assessment process, but consult and identify faculty who can best address/support the development of positive reading attitudes once the assessment has been completed.

3. Then, begin the assessment of oral language based on the following:

   ➢ **If** the student identified words between a 2nd and 4th grade level on the decoding measure, start with morphological awareness.
   Continue on with the rest of the assessment in order (i.e., syntax, semantics, and pragmatics).

   ➢ **If** the student can read words at a 5th grade level or higher, then this suggests that other areas within oral language or problem solving are currently the greatest source of the poor reading comprehension and you can start at syntactic awareness.
   Continue with the rest of the assessment in order (i.e., syntax, semantics, pragmatics).

   ➢ **If** the student has difficulty in one or more areas within oral language, then you have identified a primary source of the struggles with silent reading comprehension.
   Suspend the assessment and address/support the students' development of oral language (a) working in a sequential order (i.e., morphological awareness, syntax, semantics, pragmatics) and following your facilities' RTI framework. Once plans and supports are in place, continue with the assessment.

4. Conclude the assessment process by examining problem solving abilities.

   ➢ **If** the student struggles on tasks of problem solving this can significantly impact their ability to read with comprehension.
   Suspend the assessment and address/support the students' development of problem solving knowledge and skills following your facilities RTI framework. In addition, consult and identify additional personnel who can collaborate.

   ➢ **If** the student does not show any difficulty on tasks of problem solving, then a primary and current source of their struggles with reading comprehension may be at the macro level (text structures) and indicates the need for a different assessment process.
   End of this Assessment

Example Measures

Decoding
   Test Test of Word Reading Efficiency (Torgesen, Wanger, & Rashotte, 1999).

Reading Attitudes
   Elementary Reading Attitudes Survey (McKenna & Kear,1990) http://www.jstor.org/stable/20200500

Oral Language

   Morphology
   Test of Morphological Structure (Carlisle, 2000).
   Derivation & **Decomposition** subtests.
   http://www.springerlink.com/index/l7150x54lt833157.pdf

   Syntax
   Recalling Sentences subtest from the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals®-Fourth Edition (Semel, Wiig, & Secord, 2003).

   Semantics
   Ambiguous Sentences subtest from the Test of Language Competence-Expanded Edition-Level 2 (Wigg & Secord, 1989).
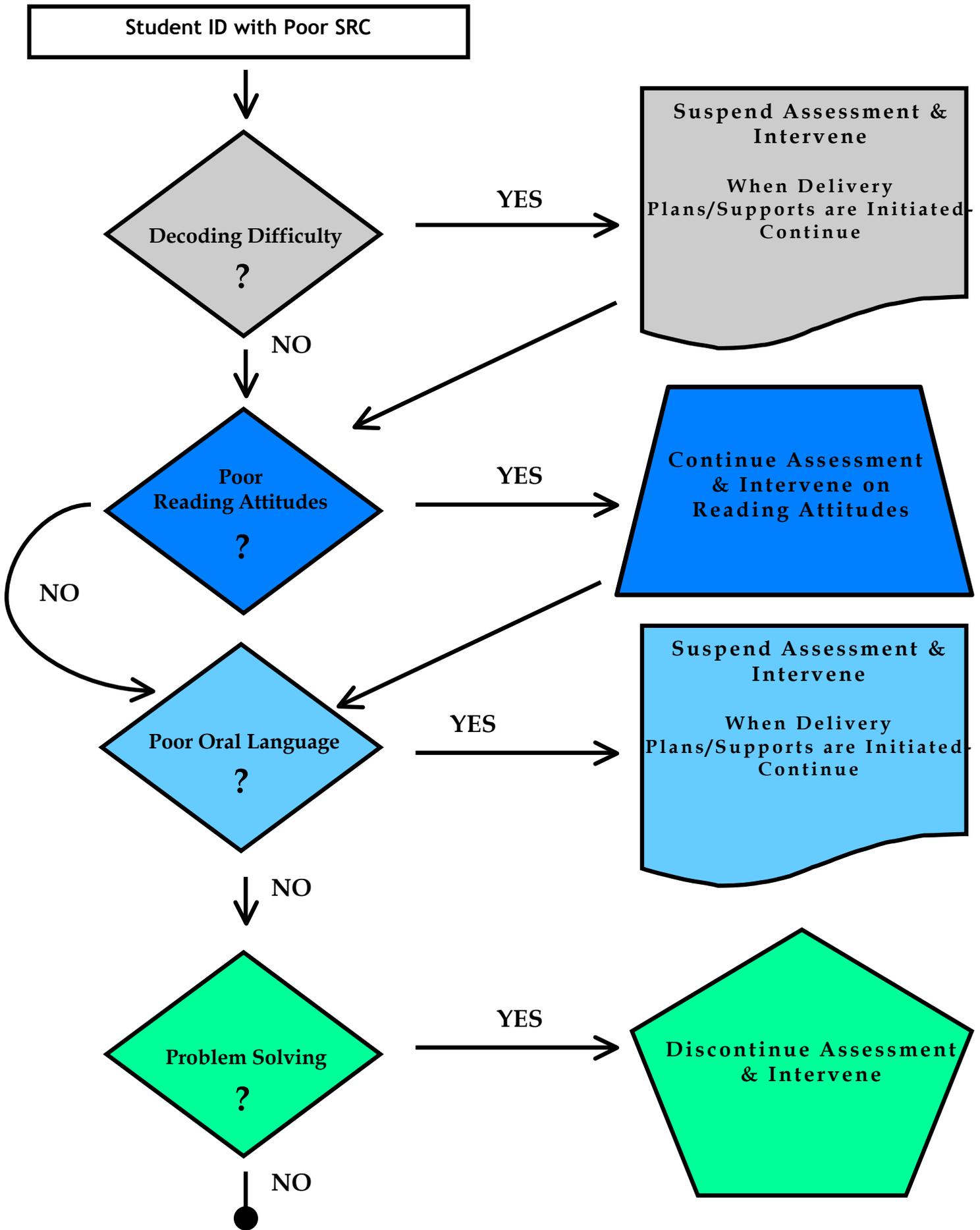
   Pragmatics
   Listening Comprehension: Making Inferences subtest from the Test of Language Competence-Expanded Edition-Level 2 (Wigg & Secord, 1989).

Problem Solving
   Planning
   Tower subtest from Delis-Kaplan Executive Function System (Delis, Kaplan, & Kramer, 2001).

Student ID with Poor SRC

Decoding Difficulty?

YES → **Suspend Assessment & Intervene**

When Delivery Plans/Supports are Initiated- Continue

NO ↓

Poor Reading Attitudes?

YES → **Continue Assessment & Intervene on Reading Attitudes**

NO ↓

Poor Oral Language?

YES → **Suspend Assessment & Intervene**

When Delivery Plans/Supports are Initiated- Continue

NO ↓

Problem Solving?

YES → **Discontinue Assessment & Intervene**

NO ●

Suggested Interventions

Keyword Decoding or Decoding by Analogy
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Identifying Key Words
Identify a single word for each of the high frequency spelling patterns on the list (attached). Try to identify words that the student can already read and words that are meaningful to the student. You should eventually have 37 keywords, but you can start teaching the strategy as soon as you have identified 6-8 that the student can read.

Known Words to Use in Teaching the Using Words You Know Strategy
While the student is learning to read the keywords, he should be learning to use keywords he does know to read novel words.

The goal is to have only a single keyword representing each of the common spelling patterns. The adults who work with the student should become familiar with keyword list so that they can refer to it when he is struggling to read or spell a word. The first cue any adult provides when supporting him with reading and spelling should be, "Would one of your keywords help you?" Don't just point to or say the keyword he should use. Make sure the student is given time to search for the word that will help him. If he can't find it, show him the word, but the adult should give him time to read it before saying the word out loud. The student needs to be able to see the word, say the word, and use the spelling and sound to help him read or spell the unfamiliar word he is struggling with. If the adult says the word, the student doesn't have the opportunity to develop the strategy himself.

Two of the specific strategies I would use to help the student learn the analogy based approach include:

Word Sorts. Once you have two or more keywords identified, work with him to sort other words that share the same spelling pattern as each keyword. Beginning with two or three keywords as column headers, the teacher then orally introduces less familiar words, and the student points to indicate in which column the word belongs. Whether the student's response is correct or incorrect, the teacher should write the new word under the keyword and guide the student in comparing and contrasting the spelling pattern with the keyword. If the new word belongs in a different column, the student should be asked to find the keyword that has the same spelling pattern as the new word. After the student understands the process in these auditory word sorts, spelling should be introduced and the student should be asked to use the keyword to help spell the new word the teacher has provided verbally. After the student attempts to spell the new word, the teacher should offer a model of the correct spelling and the student should compare and contrast his/her attempt with the model and correct it as needed.

Compare-Contrast. Select two or three keywords the student has been learning. Write those keywords on index cards or on top of a piece of paper or white board. As you display the words, read them aloud to the student prompting the student to read them as well. Then write a sentence including a word that shares the word-ending spelling pattern with one of the keywords. Underline the target word in the sentence. Read the sentence aloud without saying the underlined word. Ask the student to point to the keyword that would

Suggested Interventions

"help you read the underlined word." After the student has made a selection, ask the student to compare and contrast the letters in the underlined word with the selected keyword and use the keyword to help read the underlined word. If correct, go on. If there is a better choice, tell the student, to "find the keyword that shares the whole spelling pattern. It will be even more helpful."

Compare-Contrast can also be used as a spelling activity. Set up the activity the same way, but when writing the sentence, do not write the target word. When you read the sentence, say the word that is missing. Then tell the student, "Show me which of your keywords would help you spell the word ____." After the student has selected the correct keyword, ask the student to use the keyword to spell the missing word.

Most importantly…
The keyword list must be available to the student during all reading and writing activities and adults should direct the student to refer to the keyword list whenever the student is trying to decode an unfamiliar or unknown word. The first prompt should always be, "Do you have a keyword that would help you?"

Key Words Planning Form
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(Word Ending list from Wylie & Durrell, 1970)

Word Ending	Personal Keyword	Word Ending	Personal Keyword	Word Ending	Personal Keyword
1. –ack		13. –aw		26. -ink	
2. -ail		14. –ay		20. -ide	
3. -ain		15. –eat		27. -ip	
4. -ake		16. –ell		28. -ir	
5. -ale		17. -est		29. -ock	
6. -ame		18. -ice		30. -oke	
7. -an		19. –ick		31. -op	
8. -ank		20. -ide		32. -or	
9. -ap		21. -ight		33. -ore	
10. -ash		22. -ill		34. -uck	
11. -at		23. -in		35. -ug	
12. –ate		24. -ine		36. -ump	
		25. -ing		37. -unk	

Suggested Interventions

<u>Nifty Fifty Thrifty</u>
From Patricia Cunningham (2008)

composer	transportation	swimming	international
discovery	unfinished	unpleasant	invasion
encouragement	beautiful	valuable	prehistoric
hopeless	classify	dishonest	signature
impossible	community	illegal	antifreeze
musician	communities	irresponsible	forecast
richest	electricity	misunderstood	midnight
unfriendly	happiness	performance	overpower
expensive	prettier	rearrange	semifinal
governor	continuous	replacement	supermarket
impression	conversation	deodorize	underweight
independence	forgotten	different	
submarine	nonliving	employee	

Modified Readers Theater

The goal of this approach is to motivate students to engage in sustained silent reading while consciously thinking about the prosody that each character in the play would project based on the overall meaning.

1. Select a Readers Theater script that is at an independent reading level of the students involved.

2. Read the entire script as a group stopping to talk about the intonation that each character would have as the script unfolds.

3. After reading the entire script as a group, direct students to spend time reading the entire script independently. Remind them to think about the way that each character would say each of the lines based on the meaning.

4. When students have had enough time to practice the script more than once, randomly assign or draw parts out of a hat (students can have more than one part) and perform the script one time aloud reading the assigned parts.

5. If students choose, read it one additional time with students selecting their own parts.

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