

# **INTIMATE SHARED COGNITION: WHAT COMES BEFORE GUIDED READING? A Monograph by Ann Christensen and Kim Kelly**

## ***What does it look like when children are ready?***

In preschool and kindergarten, teachers provide literacy experiences for young children. These activities, in combination with home literacy experiences, are the materials with which the child is building Foundation Level Literacy. Many of these experiences are random and often rely on the child's ability to integrate ideas. Yet, each child requires a firm foundation upon which to build reading and writing. This foundation is sometimes referred to as reading readiness, and children are labeled as "ready" or "not ready." The question we have struggled to answer is "How do children get ready? What does it look like when they are ready? What happens to children who are not ready?" Preschool and kindergarten teachers often assume that shared reading is all that's necessary to prepare children for early reading instruction. We would say shared reading is necessary, but not sufficient to help children get ready to profit from classroom reading instruction.

## ***Why shared reading is necessary***

Shared reading was developed by Holdaway (1979) as a way to support children during repeated readings of enjoyable text. Shared reading text often has rhythm and rhyme to support fluency, expression, and phonemic awareness. The words are large enough for children to see to support print awareness and concepts about print. As the children and teacher share the reading and meaning making, the children develop a positive relationship with the teacher, the class, and the activity of reading itself.

## ***Why shared reading is not enough***

The large group setting in which most shared reading occurs does not provide the interaction between teacher and child needed for all children to construct comprehension and develop language. It is in using their own language to explain what they know and how it connects, that children construct knowledge. But 79% of shared reading time is in whole group, using recitation-type talk structures (Neuman, S. & Fischer, R., 1995). During shared reading, the most naive learners in the group can lose the primary task of constructing comprehension. When the teacher draws the child's attention to the visual information—the letters, words, spaces, directionality, capitals, periods—none of which makes meaning more accessible, the inexperienced child becomes confused about the goal of reading. In "Task and Participation Structures in Kindergarten Using a Holistic Literacy Perspective," Neuman and Fischer analyzed shared reading time in kindergarten. They identified the cognitive processes used by children during shared reading and found that 59% of the time was given to memory or procedural tasks that did not require inventive or integrative responses. Thus the cognitive demand was relatively low. During shared reading, teachers seemed to read to have students memorize the story rather than to establish meaning and extend thinking. Although the children often were able to recite the text, there is no empirical evidence that such reliance on memorization is a key factor in learning to read. One is always reminded of reciting Latin Mass as a child with no idea of what the words meant. When recitation is used while children read a shared reading text, they are memorizing and enjoying the text, but not necessarily creating the schema that will support their emerging reading.

Looking at children who are "ready," schema development with expansive vocabulary repeatedly occurs as the necessary component. Teachers do not have time to establish language and cognition in the casual manner parents do. They must be intentional and systematic. Before school and reading age, there are already vast differences between

American children in language experience. The average child has 45 million words of receptive and expressive vocabulary together. The children of talkative families have 70 million words. Children of taciturn families have 18 million words of receptive and expressive vocabulary together (Hart, B. & Risley, T.R., 1995). The difference between the children with the broadest vocabulary and those with the least is 52,000,000 words. This difference affects reading, writing, and opportunities as the child moves through school into adulthood. The children with the least language grow up to be the taciturn parents of the future. But words alone do not change this fact. Words that are taught as separate items are difficult to retrieve. The structure created to give children access to the words is also necessary. The cognitive structures built during vocabulary development create a network for words and thought. If you think of each word as an earring, they are easiest to keep track of in a jewelry box. To have dozens of single earrings left around the house would make it difficult to retrieve a pair you specifically wanted, which is how words learned as single items are for children. They may be safely stored but to find them when you need them is difficult. Most vocabulary lessons are not conversations, thus words, when learned, are separate items.

### ***Creating conversation***

Most new words are added to a child's vocabulary through conversation with a caring adult. Organizing the classroom for conversation, however, is challenging for teachers of young children. "To talk a lot, children need topics to talk about. Preschoolers tend to talk about whatever is at hand—literally. They need toys, flexible figures, blocks, building sets, books, art supplies, puppets, make-believe and dress-up clothes, and child-sized kitchen items, for example, to hold, touch, play with, and manipulate. Their talk focuses on the here and now of what they are doing with their hands or about relatively recent events...And most preschoolers cannot chat or make small talk about the weather or abstract concepts; they need tangible—and interesting—'props' to talk about" (*Speaking and Listening for Preschool through Third Grade*, 2001, page 10). Moving from conversation to comprehension is a cognitive journey that can add difficulty for naïve learners. In *Beginning Literacy with Language*, Dickinson and Tabors note that "Book reading has special potential for fostering the type of language development that is linked to literacy. It is one of the few times during the preschool day when language comes to the forefront and words are central to the activity. Children must attend to the language of the book, integrating it with information from pictures as they construct an understanding of the world of the story." In *Intimate Shared Cognition*, we provide the "props to talk about" in direct connection to a book, making explicit the connection between the conversation and the developing comprehension.

The NCEE *Speaking and Listening for Preschool through Third Grade* (2001) provides teachers with criteria for conversing. ISC provides teachers with a procedure to assist students in gaining conversational fluency and competence.

### ***Describing systematic instruction***

Intimate Shared Cognition (ISC) is a language lesson format that supports construction of schema through language and cognitive structure development for children from two to seven years old. Unlike many oral language or vocabulary development lessons for young language learners, ISC lessons are designed to initiate and support high-level extended conversations around the ideas in a book. The adult leads the children forward in their language development by keeping the language connected to the text, the child, and the larger world while carefully increasing the complexity. Although the adult needs to take every capricious opportunity to engage the young child in conversation, planned, systematic language instruction must also occur. The teachable moment is not sufficient to develop oral language.

ISC—why such an odd name? In defining the tone of safety and support the teacher develops in this small group format, we chose *Intimate* as the descriptor. Because the lesson format uses a shared reading text to develop language and to share meaning making, we included *Shared*. And to move teacher thinking away from language programs that focus on words rather than the thought and language bond, we chose *Cognition*. Dozens of new (and even some better) terms for this lesson format have been introduced, but ISC has been the most durable.

**Intimate**

Small groups of children, close to the teacher, in an emotionally and intellectually supported, intimate setting.

**Shared**

Teachers and children share the meaning making and create new understandings together.

**Cognition**

Language and cognition are inextricably linked, the development of each leading and enhancing the development of the other.

When kindergarten teachers have children that are not “ready” for guided reading, they need to know how to assist the child to get ready. ISC is the small group language and literacy format that leads children to guided reading. Shared reading books and props, used in small group, offer a rich source of ideas for conversation, an opportunity to interact with text, and a means to build background knowledge with vocabulary to support its use. Each subsequent reading then provides the child the opportunity to use the newly built schema for the task of meaning making. During the ISC lesson, the adult and child build a firm foundation in oral language and concept development that will support comprehension long term. Adults assist children in building cognitive structures.

Weekly structure for lessons all using the same text allows children the opportunity to increase comprehension. At the Wednesday morning whole group shared reading, the children in Group A have an enhanced level of understanding and participation due to their two ISC lessons. They can use what they learned in small group to profit from instruction in whole group.

<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
Whole Group Shared Reading	Whole Group Shared Reading	Whole Group Shared Reading	Whole Group Shared Reading	Whole Group Shared Reading
Group A—ISC Lesson 1	Group C—ISC Lesson 1	Group B—ISC Lesson 2	Group A—ISC Lesson 3	Group C—ISC Lesson 3
Group B—ISC Lesson 1	Group A—ISC Lesson 2	Group C—ISC Lesson 2	Group B—ISC Lesson 3	

***Cognitive Structures***

A cognitive structure is a means of organizing information into manageable and accessible sets.

An adult can provide a cognitive structure: “Here are farm animals...Farm animals live on farms.” Then the adult introduces various farm animals, both familiar and unfamiliar. A cognitive structure can also be constructed through experience and conversation with a more capable other. Father and child walk to school each morning, and Father names the vehicles they see: “Look at that SUV.” Over time, they see everything from scooters to moving vans, and the child knows that each is a thing that goes (a vehicle) and each has a name. When a street sweeper comes out of the alley, the child can ask, “What is that called,

what does it do, how fast can it go?" to fit the new information into the structure that has been casually established. In either case, by fitting into a cognitive structure, information can be moved to long-term memory and retrieved from long-term memory.

The idea of a cognitive structure is closely connected to schema theory, the idea that background knowledge is essential in making meaning from text. Schema is stored as language and thought and must be structurally connected to be accessed. For example, a child may walk to school every day for a week during a mid-winter thaw, seeing ice and snow turn to rivulets, but that experience will not necessarily help her make meaning from a text about melting ice cream. If she does not have the linguistic and cognitive connections between the two, she does not have reason to access that schema. If, on the other hand, she and her father had talked about the melting snow turning to liquid as they walked, the story of melting ice cream could become understandable. The words and ideas for "melting" can be accessed and can increase comprehension. During the ISC lesson, the adult is building the linguistic and cognitive connections to create accessible schema.

### ***Home language***

It is always the child's first language that is the most efficient tool for building cognitive structures or schema. The language of the home must be embraced and the parent encouraged to talk about everything he is doing, to teach his child everything he knows. If, in the above example, the parent had discussed the melting snow and ice in Spanish, that cognitive connection between the melting of snow and ice cream would still be accessible to the child, and the second language could be added after the child is literate in the first. But to learn both a new concept and the second-language words for it is a much more difficult task and, for our youngest learners, can interrupt both cognitive and linguistic development. We recognize that first-language instruction may not be available, in which case the use of props becomes a technique for sheltering English. Still, follow-up pictures or props to stimulate conversation between parent and child, in the home language, are important to full schema development. For example, photocopied pictures of farm animals are enough for a parent to have a conversation with his child (in his home language) thus reinforcing the meaning making.

Spanish-speaking children receiving native language instruction are often grouped as though each child's language development were the same. We know this to be false. Some children come to school with extensive Spanish-language vocabularies and others with impoverished vocabularies. Every child depends on an extensive vocabulary when approaching reading. Thus Spanish speakers should receive ISC in Spanish to support Spanish literacy. The higher the level of Spanish literacy, the smoother the transition to English oral language and finally English literacy will be for the child.

Pre-emergent or prior to the emergence of literacy are several years of Foundation Level Literacy. This stage, much like the stage prior to oral language when receptive language is growing, is the time when children build conceptual understandings and the language to connect understandings. One could think of this time as receptive literacy upon which expressive literacy (reading and writing) will be built.

# THE ISC LESSON FORMAT

## ***Assessment***

Who needs ISC lessons?

- Low-language children
- Limited English proficient children
- Second-language learners (ELLs)
- Headstart children
- Preschool and kindergarten learners

## ***Purpose of ISC***

Increase the development of meaning and structure systems used to comprehend the text

- Build knowledge and language base and fill in content gaps
- Build and connect cognitive structures
- Build language flexibility
- Build story sense for predicting
- Connect this text to other texts
- Activate (create access) and connect prior knowledge related to the text
- Learn “book language”
- Learn specific language structures of this text
- Build a language foundation upon which visual information can be added

## ***Materials***

- Shared reading text
- Interesting props to help with meaning and to support talk
- Related pictures and books
- Paper and markers

## ***Choosing a Text***

ISC Text Selection Guide

Books appropriate for Foundation Level readers have some of these characteristics.

- Simple story with beginnings, middles, and endings to build story structure
- Nonfiction texts to help children build vocabulary meaning
- Rhyme, rhythm, repetition, and oral language structures to build language structure
- Stories that contain sequences and hierarchies to build structure systems
- Illustrations that show objects and actions to add meaning to the story
- Use of descriptors (adjectives and adverbs) to add/clarify meaning

## ***Procedure***

1. ISC begins during the shared reading of a text. In a whole class setting, the shared reading text is read together daily. Afterward, children receive instruction in small groups.
2. The teacher considers students' language needs to create small instructional groups. Small groups in preschool and kindergarten should meet two to three times during the week. Some groups may be ready for guided reading and will use guided reading texts and procedures. They may still participate in daily whole group shared reading.
3. The teacher rereads the text, dropping her voice as much as possible but providing

enough support to keep reading on track. She observes each child in the small group carefully to see what ideas or language causes him to struggle or confuses him and to notice where the child is competent and confident. During this reading, she may stop and initiate conversation or stop when the children initiate conversation. (Remember, children have many opportunities in large group to read the text as a whole.)

4. Students and teacher will then use props and pictures in the story to strengthen meaning making through talk. Props could include real objects, toys that represent book characters, or other pictures that show similar ideas and actions. These props create the immediacy that young children need to converse, as well as provide the concrete representation that supports understanding. Support for the teacher to facilitate the talk can be found in the Foundation Meaning and Structure Guide on the next page. These questions help guide the conversation, but the teacher must share the meaning making, share her vocabulary, model talk, extend talk, and provide ample wait time for group members. New information is offered by the teacher within the conversation (for example, the names of creatures, along with where they live and what they eat).
5. Throughout the lesson, the teacher assesses each student's understandings and assists the child to build a deeper, clearer understanding, to construct cognitive structures, and to expand connections. The teacher assists the child to move beyond what he can do independently, while working to maintain a conversational and playful tone. She is interacting individually with each child in the group.
6. Planning the next lesson depends on how far along on the Foundation Meaning and Structure Guide hierarchy the children in this group can converse. The lessons are differentiated by group need. During the next day's whole group shared reading, the teacher may make connections to the ISC lessons.
7. Photocopies of objects or characters in the text can be sent home to create home conversation.

# FOUNDATION MEANING AND STRUCTURE GUIDE

## MEANING CUES—Using pictures and props to stimulate children’s talk

### Labeling objects and actions

- What is this object or character?
- What is it doing or what is it for?
- What sound does it make or what does it say?

### Language elaboration

- How does it look? Describe it.
- How do we modify the object (adjective, adverb)?
- What else looks like it?

### Language flexibility

- What else is it called?
- How else can we say it?

### Parts to whole and/or classification

- Name the parts of the object.
- What else has those parts?
- Name the class of objects or actions.
- What else is in that class? (both pictured and not pictured)

### Comparisons

- How are the objects (characters, actions) the same?
- How are they different?

## STRUCTURE CUES—Assisting children to uncover and connect the structures to their lives

### Text structure

- What structures appear in the text? Which may be most obvious to the child?
  - relationships
  - sequences
  - classifications or lists

### Story structure (predicting)

- What is happening on this page?
- What will happen next?
- How do you know or why do you think that? What hints did you use?
- How does the (text structure) help you to know?

### Language structure

- Can we learn the part (words or phrases) that repeats?
- Does it sound like talk (natural language)?
- Can we use the rhyming patterns to tell what will be next?
- Can we learn actions or songs (to support memory and structure)?

## INTIMATE SHARED COGNITION PLANNING FORM

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Shared Reading Text \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Story Introduction</b> This story is about:	
<b>Small Groups</b> (six or fewer grouped by experience and/or teaching points) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher points to words and reads with students using oral cloze and dialog.</li> <li>• Teacher assesses children’s understandings.</li> <li>• Teacher uses props and pictures to convey and extend meaning.</li> <li>• Extended talk based on Foundation Meaning and Structure Guide.</li> </ul>	
<b>Differentiated Teaching Points and Extensions</b>	
<b>Group A</b> (list children)	
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>
<b>Group B</b> (list children)	
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>
<b>Group C</b> (list children)	
<b>Day 1</b>	<b>Day 2</b>

## WHAT TEACHERS HAVE FOUND

As teachers across DPS classrooms work to implement ISC, some common struggles have arisen. From this work, we can share several key points.

Remember the goal is creating language and structure, not teaching reading. The language and structure knowledge will be important in later reading, but attending to the visual information (which feels like teaching reading) actually confuses the work.

The language and structure you build in the child's first language will transfer to the second language when the time comes.

Conversation involves both asking the child about his understanding and offering your understanding. The idea of shared meaning is to participate mutually in building comprehension. Teachers are more commonly in the role of "asker" or "teller." This role is "converser," dancing with words.

In a small group conversation, hand raising interrupts the flow of language and causes the children to become passive. Parallel talk may occur with the children, but each child is talking with the teacher and actively using language. A child cannot develop language without talking. Watching others talk, like watching TV, is not language rich.

Listening grows as understandings expand and vice versa. Turn taking and conversational behaviors will become more appropriate as the child controls more language.

Both experiences and props move book ideas from abstract to concrete. Moving comfortably between the abstract and concrete is necessary to becoming literate.

### ***Conclusion***

Building a strong foundation is not a notable task. As a matter of fact, only the absence of a good foundation attracts attention. The Leaning Tower of Pisa is famous for just that reason, and despite the height and beauty of the tower, it cannot be righted. Teachers of young children do the hard work of building a foundation that must support all literacy learning to come. ISC recognizes the essential nature of this work and provides a lesson format to support teachers. ISC can create a difference in emergent literacy and can cause you to look more closely at the foundation of a building you have admired.

## INTIMATE SHARED COGNITION PLANNING FORM

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Shared Reading Text *The Desert Is My Mother/El Desierto es mi madre* by Pat Mora

<p><b>Story Introduction</b>                  This story is about:                  “a little girl who loves all the things she finds in the desert. She loves the weather in the desert...the wind and rain and sun. She thinks the desert loves her back. Let’s look at the things she likes about the desert and her mom.”</p>	
<p><b>Small Groups</b> (six or fewer grouped by experience and/or teaching points)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher points to words and reads with students using oral cloze and dialog.</li> <li>• Teacher assesses children’s understandings.</li> <li>• Teacher uses props and pictures to convey and extend meaning.</li> <li>• Extended talk based on Foundation Meaning and Structure Guide.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Differentiated Teaching Points and Extensions</b></p>	
<p><b>Group A</b> (least experienced) (list children)</p>	
<p><b>Day 1</b>                  Look at the pictures and <u>name the objects</u> in the picture. Bring prickly pear fruit, chamomile for tea, sand, and small cactus.                  Photocopy pictures to go home.</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b>                  Read together. Label and talk about category: things in a desert. Objects in text plus camels, lizards, roadrunners, coyotes, spiders (pictures).</p>
<p><b>Group B</b> (list children)</p>	
<p><b>Day 1</b>                  Look at the pictures and name the objects in the picture. Bring prickly pear fruit, chamomile for tea, sand, and small cactus.                  Offer <u>category</u>: camels, lizards, roadrunners, coyotes, spiders (pictures).                  Photocopy pictures to go home.</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b>                  Converse about what makes the girl think the desert is so nice, like a mother (comparison).                  Look at the structure of “I say...she does...” “What would your mother do if you said, ‘Feed me, tease me, frighten me.’”</p>
<p><b>Group C</b> (most experienced) (list children)</p>	
<p><b>Day 1</b>                  Read together. Label and talk about category: things in a desert. Objects in text plus camels, lizards, roadrunners, coyotes, spiders (pictures).</p>	<p><b>Day 2</b>                  Look at the structure of “I say...she does...” “What would your mother do if you said, ‘Feed me, tease me, frighten me.’”                  “What else might the girl say? What might the desert do?”</p>

**Sample Points**

In the sample lesson form, the book is written in two languages. An ELA-S teacher would provide the shared readings and ISC in Spanish. An ELA-E teacher would provide the shared readings and ISC in English.

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