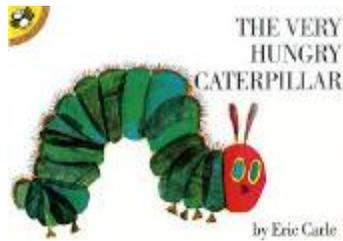


How Do You Know What They Know? Using CROWD Prompts to Support Comprehension in Preschoolers

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After reading The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle (1994), a teacher discusses part of the text with a student.

Teacher: "What do you see on the leaf?"

Child: "I see a egg."

Teacher: "Yes, you are correct. It is an egg. What is going to happen to the egg?"

Child: "A worm is going to come out."

Teacher: "It does look like a worm, but it is a caterpillar. A worm and a caterpillar are both insects. So, what happens to the egg on the leaf?"

Child: "A caterpillar that looks like a worm comes out!"

The teacher in the above vignette engages the child in the PEER questioning sequence used in Dialogic Reading. Dialogic Reading is an interactive reading technique that is used with young children based on the research of Dr. Grover J. Whitehurst and the Stony Brook Reading and Language Project at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. The Dialogic Reading technique encourages adults to prompt children with questions and engage them in discussions while reading to them (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). The adult supports the child in becoming the storyteller by becoming the listener, questioner, and audience. Research has shown that Dialogic Reading supports oral language development more than traditional storybook reading as children

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learn most from books when they are actively involved (Lonigan, Anthony, Bloomfield, Dyer, & Samwel, 1999; Wasik & Bond, 2001). PEER (Prompt, Evaluate, Expand, Repeat) is the acronym that is used to guide the questioning sequence and the CROWD acronym (Completion, Recall, Open-ended, Wh-questions, Distancing) represents the prompts that begin the PEER sequence during Dialogic Reading.

The PEER sequence is a short interaction between the child and the adult. The teacher in the above vignette **prompts** the student with a question that can be answered using contextual picture clues in the text. The teacher then **evaluates** the child's response by affirming the answer is correct, and then proceeds to **expand** on the child's response by asking a follow up question. In this circumstance, the teacher is able to correct a misconception and end the dialog with a **repeat** of the original question. The child is then given the opportunity to incorporate this new information into the answer.

The prompts that are used during Dialogic Reading to begin the PEER sequence are represented by the acronym CROWD. Each letter provides a suggestion of a type of prompt to begin a conversation when reading a story with an individual child or small group of children. These prompts may be answered using a variety of strategies that may include background and prior knowledge, contextual clues in the text, and retrieval of information previously discussed. Table 1 shows sample prompts using the CROWD acronym.

Table 1. Sample CROWD prompts

Completion prompts: Leave a blank at the end of a sentence and have the child fill it in. "On Monday, he ate through one apple, but he was still <hungry>."

Recall prompts: These are questions about what happened in a book a child has already read. "What did the caterpillar eat on Monday?"

Open-ended prompts: These prompts focus on the pictures in books. *“What does the caterpillar eat on Friday? What is your favorite food to eat?”*

Wh- prompts: These prompts usually begin with what, where, when, why, and how questions. *“Why did the caterpillar get a stomach ache?”*

Distancing prompts: These prompts ask children to relate the pictures or words in the book they are reading to experiences outside the book (Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003). *“Do you remember a time when you had a stomach ache?”*

As comprehension is active and purposeful, the CROWD questioning prompts used during Dialogic Reading should be intentional and purposeful to help young children develop an interest in the story and motivate them to become actively involved during the reading. Questions are an essential feature of formative assessment as they enable teachers to identify what children know and are able to do as well as where they may need additional guidance. Questions are used to stimulate the recall of prior knowledge, promote comprehension, and build critical-thinking skills. Questions must leave room for children to build meaning rather than directly pointing them to the answers (McKeown & Beck, 2012).

Dialogic Reading is intended to take place over several days reading the same text at least three times. The use of CROWD questioning prompts begins the PEER sequence and should occur on almost every page in the text. Depending on the setting and age of the child, each interactive reading should last between 10 and 15 minutes per session. Table 2 shows a sample Dialogic Reading planning guide for a 5-day session. This planning guide can be adjusted to meet the needs of individual programs, children and settings (e.g., school and home).

The CROWD prompts used during Dialogic Reading must match the developmental levels and needs of young children. Questions for younger and lower

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ability children should be structured so that most of them will elicit correct responses and should only be presented after material has been read and discussed (e.g., after day 1 or 2). Using predictable books that have rhyming or repetitive word patterns, familiar concepts and simple story lines enable children to anticipate words and phrases.

Predictable and repetitive books support the questions presented in the CROWD prompts, especially completion and recall prompts. The predictable design of many repetitive books also allows children to grasp the content of the story more easily and supports them in following the characters and comprehending the sequence of the story.

Vocabulary is a component of Dialogic Reading and is a key element of oral language comprehension (Hogan, Adlof, & Alonzo, 2014). Since vocabulary development is closely connected to comprehension, when children lack vocabulary to understand content, their comprehension will be lower (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). According to the National Reading Panel (2000), vocabulary can be learned incidentally through storybook reading and should be taught both directly and indirectly. It is important to choose age-appropriate vocabulary words during planning for the Dialogic Reading experience and to introduce the words prior to reading the text.

Table 2. 5-day Dialogic Reading planning guide

Book Title: _____		
Author: _____		
Vocabulary Words	Questions	Page Number
	Day 1: Introduce author, illustrator, title, and vocabulary word(s). Also, assess prior knowledge, provide background knowledge and take a picture walk.	
	Day 2: Ask 'wh' questions using completion and recall prompts.	
	Day 3. Ask 'wh' questions using open-ended and distancing prompts.	
	Day 4: Ask 'wh' question expanding on child's responses.	
	Day 5: Ask 'wh' question that focus on characters, events and sequencing.	

Distancing prompts are text-to-self connections that children make between the story and their own experiences. These prompts are more difficult for younger children than the other CROWD prompts and should be used with older preschoolers and kindergarten-age children. Distancing prompts help children remember what they have read and supports them in asking questions about the text (Tovani, 2000). They can also help teachers assess how children use prior knowledge to comprehend the text.

CROWD prompts support children in answering questions that promote critical thinking. These prompts also enhance children’s listening comprehension and oral language development. Questions that support prediction help children guess what is going to happen next. Questions that support inference encourages children to look at contextual picture clues to help them determine what is or may be occurring in the story. Table 2 provides some sample CROWD prompts that support critical thinking.

Table 3: Sample CROWD prompts that support critical thinking

Language and vocabulary development:

Completion prompt: “On Monday, he ate through one apple, but he was still *hungry*”
 “What does it mean to be hungry?” “Do you know any other words that mean hungry?”
 Vocabulary: *starving, famished*

Prediction using visual clues:

Recall: “What did the caterpillar eat on Monday?”
 Prediction: “What do you think he is going to eat on Tuesday?” “If he ate one apple on Monday, how many plums is he going to eat on Tuesday?”
 Interdisciplinary connection: Mathematics (sequencing, verbal counting, one-to-one correspondence)

Open-ended: “What is your favorite food to eat on Friday?”

Wh-questions: “Why wasn’t the caterpillar little anymore?” “What made the caterpillar grow?”
 Physical development

Distancing prompt: “Do you remember a time when you had a stomach ache?”
 Text-to-self: Children discuss how they felt
 Text-to-text: *Bread and Jam for Frances*.
 Text-to-world: “Who helps us when we are not feeling well?”

Conclusion

Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading (Allington, 2011; Cain & Oakhill, 2008). Specific targeted questioning strategies and comprehension instruction is critical to the development of proficient readers (Pressley & Allington, 2014). Children's experiences with texts and print greatly influence their ability to comprehend what they read (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005).

Questions help children clarify and deepen understanding of the text (Tofade, Elsner, & Haines, 2013; Zimmermann & Hutchins, 2008). The ability to ask the right questions at the appropriate time is not an intuitive skill. It takes time, awareness, and practice to ask children questions in a way that engages them and extends their language as well as their comprehension. The PEER sequence using CROWD prompts offers teachers of young children a framework and guideline to increase children's vocabulary knowledge, expressive fluency, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Table 3 offers additional strategies to support comprehension that are aligned with comprehension expectations throughout the elementary school years.

The ability to construct meaning develops through children's experiences asking and answering questions. Using appropriate and intentional questioning techniques through CROWD prompts is crucial to the development of comprehension and is essential in guiding young children's critical and higher order thinking skills.

Table 4: Additional strategies that support comprehension in preschool

Inference: Support children in reaching a decision on the basis of evidence and prior knowledge (e.g., “If we eat too much candy and sugar what could happen to our teeth?”).

Visualization: Guide children in forming mental images (e.g., “How do you think the caterpillar feels inside the cocoon? Let’s close our eyes and image we are in a cocoon.”).

Synthesis: Guide children in combining elements of the text (e.g., “Where was the egg at the beginning of the story?” “After the caterpillar ate through the leaf, what happened?” “What happened to the caterpillar at the end?”).

Metacognition: Help children become aware of their thought processes and knowledge so they can evaluate their own abilities. (e.g., Use graphic organizers).

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