

Promoting English Language Learning in the Early Years: The Role of Families and Schools

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Outline

- ▶ Context underlying English language teaching and learning in Hong Kong
- ▶ Studies on English language teaching and learning in the early years
- ▶ Implications for practice for parents and teachers

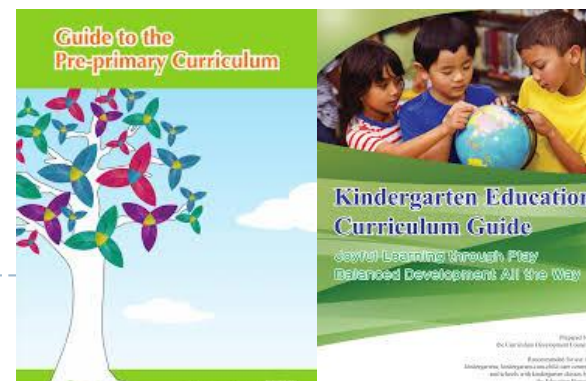
Context underlying English language teaching and learning

- ▶ British colony from 1842 to 1997
- ▶ English as the sole official language until 1974, when Chinese became a co-official language in Hong Kong
- ▶ Medium of instruction (MOI) policy
 - ▶ Compulsory Chinese MOI policy (Education Department, 1997)
 - ▶ Fine-tuning of MOI policy (Education Bureau, 2010)
- ▶ Biliterate (Chinese and English) and Trilingual (Cantonese, Putonghua, and English) language policy since 1997
 - English viewed as instrumental in facilitating upward social mobility
 - Promotion of English on the government's agenda

Context underlying English language teaching and learning

What about within kindergarten education in Hong Kong?

Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum (2006)	Kindergarten Education Curriculum Guide (2017)
<p>Children are enabled to “develop interest in learning English, listen to and understand simple conversations in everyday life and sing or recite nursery rhymes and employ simple words” (CDC, 2006, p. 30).</p>	<p>Learning objectives are to “build an interest in English, develop the attitude and confidence in using simple English and gradually develop basic concepts of English” (CDC, 2017, p.42)</p>
<p>Teachers should “let children learn through pleasurable activities, provide opportunities to listen to and speak in English through conversations, reading stories and play. “Rote-learning or dictation should not be adopted.”</p>	<p>Teachers should “use authentic materials, listening and speaking activities, shared reading and different sessions to enrich English language experiences”. “Mechanical copying, recitation or memorization does not benefit children”.</p>



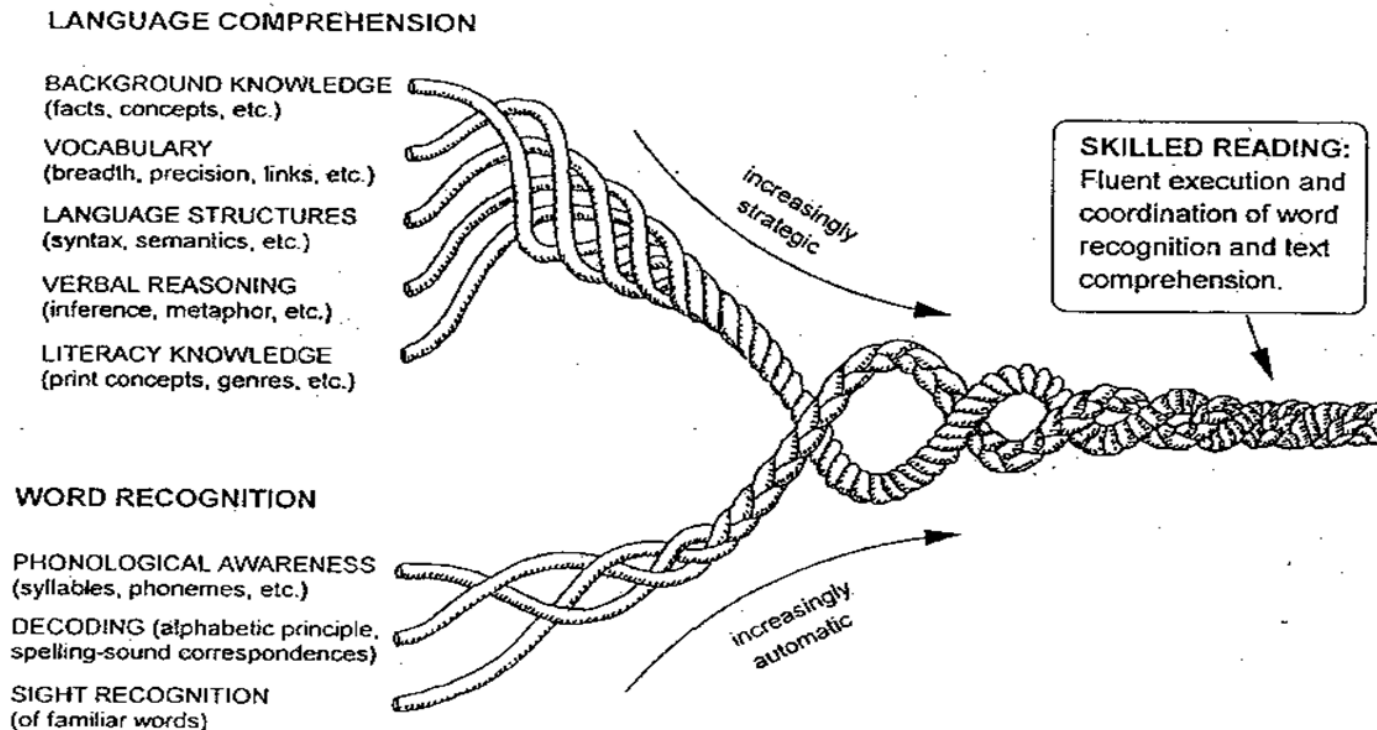
Context underlying English language teaching and learning

- ▶ Cantonese is predominantly used as the spoken language in both workplace and non-workplace settings (Bacon-Shone, Bolton & Luke, 2015; Census & Statistics, 2016)
 - ▶ Differential exposure to English outside of school settings (e.g., home learning environment)
 - ▶ Variations in structure and implementation of English language teaching
 - ▶ Duration of English language teaching can range from 15 to 536 minutes and from 2 to 5 teaching sessions per week in some local kindergartens (Ng & Rao, 2013)
 - ▶ Native English-speaking teachers and local English teachers
- The need to examine both home and school contexts**

Components of the English language

Taking reading as an example...

The Many Strands that are Woven into Skilled Reading (Scarborough, 2001)



Studies on English language teaching and learning

1. Home learning environment and children's English language and literacy development
2. English vocabulary teaching and learning in preschool classrooms
3. Classroom quality in English language teaching

Defining home learning environment

- ▶ Amount of learning materials/resources (e.g., books and toys)
- ▶ Frequency of parent-child activities (e.g., shared book reading, storytelling, singing, teaching print-related skills)
- ▶ Quality of parent-child interactions (e.g., cognitive stimulation, responsiveness)
- ▶ Parental beliefs on language learning and literacy behaviours

(Kalia & Reese, 2009; Sénéchal, 2006; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998)

Home learning environment and children's English vocabulary development

▶ Participants

- ▶ 65 5- to 6- year old children (40 girls) from four non-profit making kindergartens and their parents

▶ Measures

▶ Self-developed parent questionnaire

- ▶ Frequency of parent-child literacy activities at home(e.g., reading books; teaching letter sounds, letter names)
- ▶ Number of English books

▶ Child assessments

- ▶ Nonverbal Intelligence
- ▶ Receptive vocabulary
- ▶ Expressive vocabulary

(Lau, 2014)

Home learning environment and children's English vocabulary development

	Mdn	Range
Number of children's books ^a	1	1-5
Mother reading to child ^b	1	0-4
Father reading to child ^b	0	0-3
Teaching the alphabet ^c	3	0-4
Teaching letter sounds ^c	2	0-4
Teaching how to read words ^c	4	0-4
Teaching how to write words ^c	4	0-4
Helping with homework ^c	4	0-4

^a 1 (0 to 10), 2 (11-50), 3 (51-100), 4 (101-150), 5 (150 or above)

^b 0 (none), 1 (1-2 times), 2 (3-4 times), 3 (5-6 times), 4 (7 times or more)

^c 0 (none), 1 (once a month), 2 (once every two weeks), 3(once a week), 4 (more than once a week)

(Lau, 2014)



Home learning environment and children's English vocabulary development

- ▶ The two parameters of the home learning environment—**parental teaching and book reading practices**—significantly contributed to the prediction of children's **receptive and expressive vocabulary** after controlling for age, nonverbal IQ and maternal education.

(Lau, 2014)

Home learning environment and children's English language and literacy skills

▶ Participants

- ▶ 162 children (85 girls; $M_{age} = 58.4$ months) from 11 non-profit making kindergartens and their parents

▶ Measures

- ▶ Self-developed parent questionnaire
 - ▶ Storytelling and Storybook Reading
 - ▶ Teaching of Print-related skills
 - ▶ Play and Educational Activities

▶ Measures

- ▶ Child assessments
 - ▶ Nonverbal Intelligence
 - ▶ Receptive vocabulary
 - ▶ Expressive vocabulary
 - ▶ Letter knowledge
 - ▶ Phonological awareness
 - ▶ Word reading skills

(Lau & Richards, in preparation)

Home learning environment and children's English language and literacy skills

- ▶ **After controlling for age, gender, nonverbal intelligence, socioeconomic status and type of preschool participation:**
 - ▶ Both Storytelling and Storybook Reading and Play and Educational Activities were positively and significantly associated with English vocabulary skills.
 - ▶ Teaching of Print-related Skills and Play and Educational activities predicted letter knowledge.
 - ▶ Storytelling and Storybook Reading predicted word reading skills.

(Lau & Richards, in preparation)

Examining English vocabulary teaching and learning

▶ Incidental learning

- ▶ Fast mapping
- ▶ Learning of words from contexts, such as exposure to storybook reading, television and conversations with others

▶ Explicit instruction

- ▶ Word-meaning information deliberately made available and discussed
 - ▶ Provide both definitional and contextual information
 - ▶ Enable repeated exposures in multiple contexts
 - ▶ Create associations among words

(Beck & McKeown, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013 ;
Carey, 1978; Coyne, McCoach & Kapp, 2007 Sternberg, 1987)

English vocabulary teaching

▶ Participants

- ▶ Eight teachers from six kindergartens (3 K2 and 3 K3 classrooms) from three non-profit making kindergartens

▶ Procedures

- ▶ Classrooms were observed for one week, yielding a total of 23 sessions and 535 minutes of data
- ▶ Coding:
 - ▶ Structure (a) vocabulary taught in isolation; (b) within phonics instruction; (c) within storybook reading; and (d) within theme-based learning;
 - ▶ Strategy (a) word recognition; (b) word memorization; and (c) word understanding and application

(Lau & Rao, 2013)

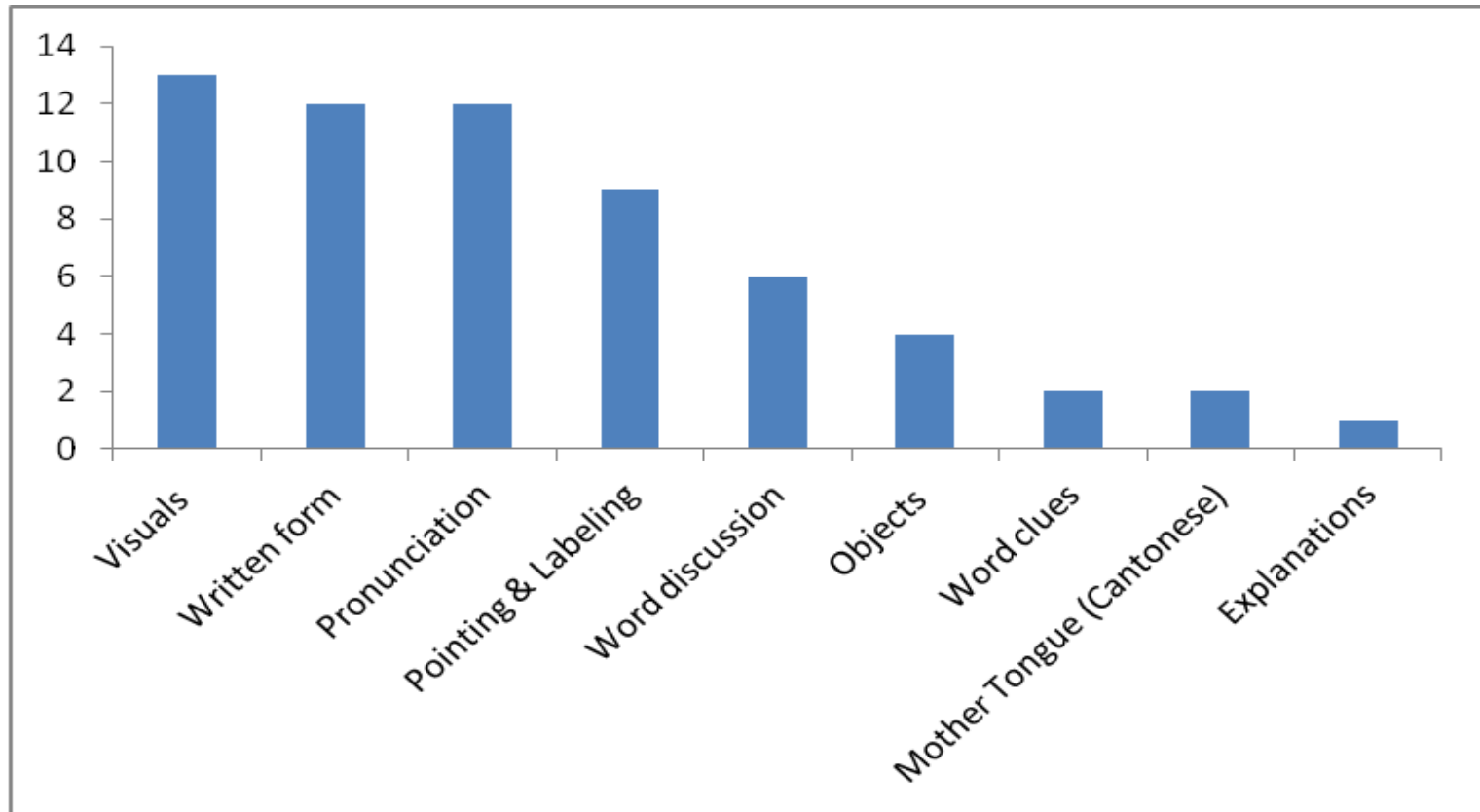
English vocabulary teaching

- ▶ **Contexts of explicit vocabulary instruction**
 - ▶ 12 out of 23 sessions
 - ▶ Words taught in the context of:
 - ▶ Theme-based learning
 - ▶ Systematic phonics instruction
 - ▶ Storybook read-aloud
 - ▶ The majority spent on vocabulary teaching was in the context of storybook read-aloud.

(Lau & Rao, 2013)

English vocabulary teaching

► Strategies used in teaching vocabulary



(Lau & Rao, 2013)

Defining classroom quality

▶ Structural Quality

- ▶ Class size
- ▶ Adult-child ratio
- ▶ Education and training of staff

▶ Process Quality

- ▶ Teacher-student relationship
- ▶ Types of activities
- ▶ Materials
- ▶ Health and safety provisions
- ▶ Relationships with parents

Classroom quality in English language teaching

▶ Participants

- ▶ 13 kindergartens (one K2 classroom from each kindergarten; 6 non-profit making and 7 private-independent kindergartens)

▶ Measures

▶ Classroom quality

- ▶ Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- Revised (ECERS-R) –Language-reasoning sub-scale on a 7-point scale: 1 (inadequate), 3 (minimal), 5 (good) and 7 (excellent).
- ▶ Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Extension (ECERS-E) –Literacy sub-scale on a 7-point scale: 1 (inadequate), 3 (minimal), 5 (good) and 7 (excellent).

▶ Child assessments

- ▶ Nonverbal Intelligence
- ▶ Receptive vocabulary
- ▶ Expressive vocabulary
- ▶ Letter knowledge
- ▶ Phonological awareness
- ▶ Word reading skills

(Lau, in preparation)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

- ▶ **Strengthening the home learning environment**
 - ▶ Amount of books and materials at home
 - ▶ Quantity and quality of reading with and to your child
 - ▶ Frequency of parent-child activities

(Kalia & Reese, 2009; Sénéchal, 2006; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002; Sénéchal, LeFevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

▶ Interactive book reading

▶ Non-immediate talk

- ▶ Beyond the “here and now”
- ▶ Talk that includes making predictions, making connections to past experiences and to the world, drawing inferences, analyzing information

(De Temple & Snow, 2003)

▶ Dialogic reading

- ▶ Parents as active listeners and children as storytellers
- ▶ Parents prompting the child, posing questions and elaborating on children’s responses

(Zevenbergen & Whitehurst, 2003)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

▶ **Dialogic Reading**

▶ **CROWD** questions

▶ **C**ompletion prompts

- “Brown bear, brown bear, what did you see? I see a red bird looking at ____.”

▶ **R**ecall prompts

- “Do you remember what happened to Sally when she shared her goodies with her friends?”

▶ **O**pen-ended prompts

- “Tell me what is going on in this picture.”

▶ **W**h-prompts

- What, where, why, when questions

▶ **D**istancing prompts

- “Do you remember taking the plane together? How did it feel?”



Implications on practice for parents and teachers

- ▶ Interactive book reading

- ▶ Print referencing

- ▶ Direct children's attention to the form and functions of written language (e.g., ask questions about print, point to/trace print while reading, discuss about cover/title/author, text directionality)

(Justice & Ezell, 2004)

Yet, the enjoyment of the process of reading must not be forgotten!

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

▶ Adult-child conversations

- ▶ Sheer amount of talk
- ▶ Responsiveness to your child's interest; joint attention
- ▶ Diversity and richness of words (e.g., sophisticated vocabulary; different word types; complexity of utterances)
- ▶ Tone of speech (e.g., commands and directives vs. encouragements)
- ▶ Extended discourse (e.g., explanations, narratives about past and future events, pretend play utterances)

(Hoff, 2006; Huttenlocher, Haight, Bryk, Seltzer & Lyons, 1991; Tamis-LeMonda, Bornstein, Kahana-Kalman, Baumwell, & Cyphers, 1998; Snow, 1990; Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001; Weizman & Snow, 2001)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

- ▶ Multiple domains of quality in English language teaching
 - ▶ Language-rich classroom learning environment
 - ▶ Print displays
 - ▶ Classroom space (e.g., writing, book reading)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

Taking book reading area as an example...

- ▶ Well-defined area and sufficient space
- ▶ Comfortable and cozy
- ▶ Organized materials (e.g., open-faced book shelves, coding of books)
- ▶ Materials that extend activities e.g., writing materials, puppets

(Morrow & Weinstein, 1986)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

- ▶ **Explicit instruction in language and literacy skills**
 - ▶ Taking vocabulary as an example...
 - ▶ Frequent encounters of words in multiple contexts
 - ▶ Definitional and contextual information about the word
 - ▶ Active processing in thinking about and interacting with words
 - ▶ Analytical, interactive and phonological aspects of a word
 - ▶ Interactive follow-up activities or discussion that compares, analyzes and uses words

(Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Coyne, McCoach, & Kapp, 2007)

Implications on practice for parents and teachers

- ▶ **Teacher-child verbal interactions**
 - ▶ Exposure
 - ▶ High quality linguistic input actively and passively
 - ▶ Opportunities for children to use the language
 - ▶ Deliberateness
 - ▶ Intentionality in the language adults use with children e.g., words, grammar
 - ▶ Recurrence
 - ▶ Repetition (e.g., vocabulary words in storybook reading)
 - ▶ Multiple opportunities to experience words in diverse contexts
 - ▶ High-quality input
 - ▶ Diverse *content, form and use* of language
 - ▶ Adult responsiveness
 - ▶ Frequent and consistent response to children

(Justice, 2004)

Thank You
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