

Florida Center for Reading Research

Text Talk

What is Text Talk?

Text Talk is an oral language instruction program intended for all students in grades K-3. It is designed to supplement a school's core reading program with 20 minutes of daily whole or small group instruction delivered by the teacher. The goal of the program is to develop the student's ability to construct meaning of sophisticated vocabulary words within the context of read-alouds and explicit vocabulary instruction. These vocabulary words and ideas are contextualized with explicit descriptions of how the words are used in the story and through interactive discussions.

The *Text Talk* instructional approach was developed by Drs. Isabel L. Beck and Margaret G. McKeown based on findings from their many years of research. These findings are depicted in their book, *Bringing Words to Life* which describes the rationale and methods for teaching children rich, robust vocabulary words. These words are not ordinarily found in their speaking vocabulary but would most likely be in their conceptual lexicon and appear in a variety of texts. Described as Tier 2 words in their book, Beck and McKeown underscore the importance of providing students repeated opportunities to hear and use these new vocabulary words in different contexts. The instructional strategies discussed in *Bringing Words to Life* are applied in the *Text Talk* program.

The design of the program is consistent and well-organized through out the grade level sequence. Each lesson contains five sessions. The instructional sequence for the first and second sessions begin with the teacher reading aloud from one of the 20 grade level trade books included in the program. Teachers are prompted to ask comprehension questions and clarify new vocabulary at specific points in the story with the *Text Talk* Sticky Notes. The questioning techniques presented on the sticky notes are designed to engage and challenge student responses. The open ended questions encourage high level responses, discouraging simple retelling of story details. These questions also challenge students to interpret meaning from the linguistic content of the story rather than relying on the pictures to construct an understanding of the story. Comprehension and language development are built through the use of these questions and the dialogue that ensues. The third session consists of several activities to explicitly teach three of the six new vocabulary words in the lesson. The first activity uses the content-rich story to contextualize the meaning of the word. Then, the word's definition is explained in student-friendly terms followed by examples and non-examples of the word used in contexts that are familiar to children. During the fourth session, students interact with the target words by responding to and creating their own examples of how to use the words in addition to learning three new words. The class is expected to demonstrate their understanding of the story by relating all six vocabulary words (four from the text and two about the text) to the events and characters in the book. For the final session, the teacher writes the new words on the Word Winner Chart and tally marks are used to record the students' use of the words throughout the week. A shared writing activity, a weekly assessment, and a review of previously taught words in context of the current story are also included in session five. Teachers monitor student progress using observational data and a simple (happy/sad face or yes/no) form that asks the student to determine if the vocabulary word in the sentence makes sense.



The program materials for *Text Talk* are organized in a tote box for every level: A (grades K-1), B (grades 1-2), and C (grades 2-3). Each kit contains: the Teacher's Guide which includes 20 lessons, assessment materials, and take-home letters; the Read-Aloud Library with two copies of 20 trade books; the *Text Talk* Notes with open-ended questions to guide the text discussions; the Word Winner Chart used as a visual incentive to record each use of the new vocabulary words; and the Implementation Video for professional development. A scope and sequence for every level provides details regarding the book title, author, genre, comprehension skill, and vocabulary words taught in each lesson.

How is Text Talk aligned with Reading First?

The importance of providing effective vocabulary instruction was emphasized in the Report of the National Reading Panel (2000). In addition, research by Hart and Risley, (1995) and Baumann and Kame'enui, (2004) has demonstrated profound differences in the vocabulary and comprehension skills among students. Based on the need to accelerate vocabulary acquisition, *Text Talk* offers explicit instruction in listening and speaking vocabulary, experiences using words orally in a variety of context, and comprehension practice using conceptually challenging text during the teacher read-aloud experience. A possible concern for 2nd and 3rd grade students is that while the oral vocabulary instruction is important it is not a replacement for vocabulary instruction that includes the use of reference materials and word parts linked to their reading.

Text Talk has a systematic format for oral vocabulary instruction. During the teacher read-aloud session, the students listen to the new words being introduced in the context of the story. After the story reading, the lesson is focused on three of these words with an explanation and discussion to summarize their meaning. Children are then asked to say each word creating a phonological representation in their brain. Instruction is extended through multiple opportunities to actively engage the students with the words in other contexts. According to a developmental study on *Text Talk* and a similar instructional technique, the teacher spends approximately 6.6 minutes of instruction per word in the *Text Talk* program (Beck & McKeown, 2004). With the exception of one writing activity where the teacher records student responses, all repeated exposure to the vocabulary words occur through oral discussions. The words in the program were chosen because they are likely to appear in a variety of texts and in more mature oral and written language usage. Sophisticated vocabulary words such as tremendous, congenial, determined, clumsy, and expect are taught in playful but thought-provoking ways. Students respond to or use the vocabulary in various contexts in order to gain facility with the new words.

Text Talk utilizes effective read-aloud strategies by focusing discussions on major concepts with opportunities to analyze and reflect upon these ideas as they occur during the story. The questions on the *Text Talk* Notes incorporate aspects of comprehension instruction (summarizing, establishing prior knowledge, clarifying story ideas, making inferences, identifying character traits) that are designed to elicit greater language production. When students learn to construct meaning from language they are developing the skills they need to build reading comprehension. This talk about the story from high-quality literature has a strong research base.

Professional development for *Text Talk* is offered on several levels. The teacher's manual integrates research quotes from Drs. Beck and McKeown into each lesson to help develop the teacher's knowledge base. An implementation DVD comes with the program and demonstrates strategies teachers use during a lesson. There are

videotaped classroom demonstration lessons and commentary that provide tips for effective implementation. Additional professional development can be purchased with large district implementations of *Text Talk*. This can involve a half-day workshop by a Scholastic representative or Scholastic's Red Course (Building Vocabulary for Reading Success: Grades K-3), a separate professional development course for on-going training.

Research Support for *Text Talk*



Text Talk by Scholastic became available in 2005, and is based on the recommendations for effective vocabulary instruction as cited by the National Reading Panel (2000), the research findings of Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002) and questioning techniques from *Questioning the author: An approach for enhancing student engagement with text* (1997). The program emphasizes the importance of selecting conceptually challenging read-aloud books to introduce vocabulary and promote listening comprehension, teaching sophisticated vocabulary explicitly, providing ample oral practice through multiple contexts, as well as ongoing review and assessment. Thus, the content and design of the program are derived from a solid research base.

During the 2001-2002 school year, Beck and McKeown compared the extent of learning that occurred when the experimental group of kindergarten and first grade children received instruction on a specific set of sophisticated words and the control group did not receive instruction. The study took place over a 10-week period in a lower-SES school population with four classrooms (two experimental and two controls) from each grade for a total of 98 children. A quasi-experimental pre and posttest design was used to measure the impact of the *Text Talk* program on participating students. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III) (1997) and a test of the target words also used for posttest determined that the experimental and control groups did not differ significantly on vocabulary knowledge at pretest. Posttest results indicated that within each grade level, the treatment group showed a significantly higher gain in learning the target words. This study provides preliminary evidence of effectiveness for the *Text Talk* method of direct vocabulary instruction. The control group participated in high-quality daily read-alouds as part of their school curriculum, thus exposing them to similar sophisticated vocabulary as the experimental (*Text Talk*) group. However, since the control group was not exposed to all the same books as the experimental group, the significant and educationally meaningful results from *Text Talk* cannot be solely attributed to the *Text Talk* instructional approach.

In sum, although this study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Text Talk* program, several shortcomings must be taken into account when interpreting the results. There is a need for independent evaluations using a more analytic, controlled research design in order to gain information about the efficacy of *Text Talk*.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Text Talk*:

- The program is designed to build deep word knowledge through direct and interactive vocabulary instruction in multiple contexts.
- Teachers learn the skills underlying the *Text Talk* process to apply to other read-aloud experiences.
- The design and content of this program are derived from research.

Weaknesses of *Text Talk*:

- If the program is implemented during the whole class format, there may be limited opportunities for all students to respond.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Text Talk?

Broward	754-321-2600	Lake	352-253-6510
Charlotte	941/255-0808	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Clay	904-284-6510	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Duval	904-390-2115	Putnam	386-329-0510
Hernando	352-797-7001	Walton	850-892-1100

For More Information

www.scholastic.com/texttalk

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Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test. (1997) PPVT-III. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service, Inc.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR. The programs for which reports are available do not constitute an "approved" or "required" list, since many potentially useful programs have not yet been reviewed. For an overview of the conditions under which these reports were prepared, please read the information found here: <http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/index.htm>

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