

# Teacher talk

## *Making Sense of our Senses*

Read about evidence-based theories that underpin best teaching practices. By learning more about the theory behind teaching strategies you will develop a deeper understanding of what 'works best' for the learners in your classroom.

**Teacher talk** will help you to understand the pedagogic practices surrounding the '[Big Six](#)' focus areas. You will discover a range of instructional strategies that integrate these core elements of reading development.

Inclusive teaching and learning opportunities that build on the Big Six as well as students' needs, strengths and interests are vital for building student capacity in learning English. This can be a complex and challenging task. Teacher talk offers instructional strategies aimed at scaffolding the learning of a diverse range of students, including English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) students and students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Try these strategies as you share *Making Sense of our Senses* with your class, and use them in other aspects of your reading program. Discuss with your colleagues the instructional practices that resonate with you, and those that have been effective in your classroom.

## Scaffolding meaning, vocabulary and oral language

### Rich discussions

Many of your students will have some prior knowledge about the five senses. But they may not be familiar with how our five sense organs work, or with many of the words used to explain how we see, hear, taste, smell and touch.

Use rich discussions to enhance your students' understanding and to clarify information about how the five senses work. Provide an environment rich in high-quality talk about this text, including 'teacher to student' and 'student to student' talk to support student understanding (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

### Text structure

Highlight for your students the purpose of an explanation, which is to explain how something works or why something happens. In this case, the text explains how our five senses work.

*Making Sense of our Senses* begins with questions that engage students and challenge them to think about the senses: 'what are the sense organs?' and 'how do the sense organs work?' The 'what' and 'how' questions are then answered in the remainder of the text.

As you read the text aloud, support and extend your students and their understanding of the topic. Also support their understanding of how an explanation text works. Allow time for discussion surrounding each explanation: how we see, how we hear, how we taste, and so on. During the discussion draw students' attention to the illustrations and diagrams. Use these visuals to help support students in understanding how each sense organ functions.

Your students may be familiar with other texts of this genre. Share these explanation texts with your class and discuss the question/s being explained in each one.

## Vocabulary building

Before reading the text to your students, sort out their prior knowledge. What vocabulary and conceptual understandings do your students have about the topic?

Knowing the vocabulary your students already understand is important as this guides the level of scaffolding you need to give them. Understanding this topic-specific vocabulary will help your students understand the concepts in the text.

According to the needs of your students you can help them access the text by:

- choosing words from the text that might be challenging or new to them and explaining what they mean
- clarifying contextual meanings of scientific language used in the explanations as you read the text
- facilitating in-depth discussion of topic-specific vocabulary and how it is used in the text
- providing opportunities for repeated exposures to vocabulary that is introduced in the text.

Supporting students' understanding of topic-specific vocabulary will help them to understand the processes involved in how each of the senses work.

## Comprehension and new learning

As specified by Harvey and Goudvis (2007) we need to understand that comprehension is not only about constructing meaning but also about new learning - how the children build on the stored knowledge they already have to enhance understanding.

Helping students understand *Making Sense of our Senses* requires teachers to think about how the content can be accessed by all students. This specialised scientific discourse must be given attention by the teacher in order to meet the diverse needs of particular students (Gee, 2004). Take time to read and learn about each sense organ. Introduce, discuss and revisit the text in parts to allow more time for meaning-making opportunities.

## Vocabulary and comprehension

Attention to acquiring word knowledge is vital for comprehension (Nagy, Anderson & Herman, 1987). Continual reinforcement of this word knowledge by providing multiple encounters with the words will assist your students when they are consolidating their understanding of new and challenging vocabulary.

There are different levels of knowing and understanding a word, and acquiring ownership of words is essential for reading comprehension (Lehr, Osborne, Hiebert, 2004). There will be many technical words that students will grow to understand as they are immersed in *Making Sense of our Senses*.

Here are some thoughts about vocabulary building to consider:

- Developing understandings of word meanings is a process that takes time.
- Students will need many encounters with both spoken and written words in varying contexts.
- Continual reinforcement and consolidation can occur through hearing, using and seeing new vocabulary.
- With multiple encounters students pick up more information about words, particularly topic-specific words.

## Scaffolded instruction

Some students may need extra support to help them make meaning of the text. Here are some things to consider when supporting these students.

- Discussion surrounding *Making Sense of Our Senses* should clarify the contextual meaning of the words 'sense' and 'senses'. You could also use these words to incorporate work on homophones. For more ideas on homophone activities see the vocabulary section of the [Teaching and learning sequence for Making Sense of our Senses](#).
- Use the questions on page 2 of the text to find out what your students know about the topic. Discussion could also include information about what a question is and that a question (except of the Yes/No type) requires information to answer it. In this text the information provided is written as an explanation.
- Read aloud the information on each sense allowing time for discussion of the vocabulary and concepts, particularly those that your students do not understand. Encourage your students to actively ask questions in order to clarify information. Encourage your students to interact with you and their peers, and provide time for them to share their personal connections with the topic.
- During and after the read aloud, think about language structures, vocabulary (content-specific nouns and verbs) and concepts that may be new to your students such as 'light enters your eyes', 'your brain receives these', 'these vibrations', 'these signals', and 'these sensors'.
- Through viewing and discussing the images you can help students to understand the contextual meaning of specific vocabulary such as signals, vibrations, sensors, particles, sensitive and instantly.
- Use guided conversation with your students to carefully explore each diagram. This will further support their understanding of the processes involved in how each sense organ works.
- Revisit the language and vocabulary many times and ensure that there are multiple exposures to new vocabulary (Sinatra, Zygoris-Coe, Dasinger, 2011).
- Due to the scientific and technical context of understanding the topic, consider using videos as a further way of developing understanding and engagement. Search online for videos and other resources for young learners that explain how the senses work.

### Australian Curriculum links

**Year 1:** [AC9E1LA09](#), [AC9E1LY05](#), [AC9E1LA03](#), [AC9E1LA05](#), [AC9E1LA08](#)

**Year 2:** [AC9E2LE02](#), [AC9E2LA03](#), [AC9E2LA09](#)

## References

Duke, Nell K. & Pearson, P. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A.E. Farstrup & S. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction*. Newark: International Reading Association.

Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated language and learning: A critique of traditional schooling*. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2007). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement*. Portland, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.

Lehr, F., Osborn, J., Hiebert, E. H. (2004). A focus on vocabulary. *Research-Based Practices in Early Reading Series (2)*. Illinois: Pacific Resources for Education learning. Retrieved from ERIC database (ED483190).

Nagy, W. E., Anderson, R. C., & Herman, P. A. (1987). Learning word meanings from context during normal reading. *American Educational Research Journal*, (24)2, 237-270.

Sinatra, R., Zygouris-Coe, V., & Dasinger, S. (2011). Preventing a vocabulary lag: What lessons are learned from research. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 28(4), 333-334.



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