

REFLECTION

How did designing a family-friendly flyer help you better understand the role of home language and oral language development in early literacy?

Designing the "Oral Language" brochure fundamentally shifted my understanding of early literacy development from a school-centered model to a holistic, family-centered approach. As I researched and synthesized information from Tompkins et al. (2021), I came to deeply appreciate that phonological awareness—the foundation for spelling and reading—develops primarily through oral language experiences that happen naturally in homes, not primarily through formal instruction. The text emphasizes that phonological awareness is an umbrella term that refers to an awareness of the different units of sound in oral language" (Tompkins et al., 2021, p. 108), which helped me recognize that every conversation, song, and story shared in a family's home language builds these critical pre-literacy skills.

Creating the brochure forced me to think carefully about accessibility and asset-based perspectives. Rather than positioning families as needing to "help" with school literacy in English, I learned to frame home language practices as the actual foundation of literacy development. The research showing that children who develop strong oral language skills have significant advantages when learning to spell directly informed my decision to emphasize activities like storytelling and rhyming in any language. I realized that when a Spanish-speaking family plays rhyming games in Spanish, the child develops sensitivity to rhymes that will transfer directly to English spelling patterns. This understanding moved me away from deficit thinking about multilingual learners toward recognizing their linguistic repertoires as cognitive advantages.

Furthermore, translating complex research concepts into practical, jargon-free activities helped me internalize the developmental progression of phonological awareness. I had to truly understand how syllables, onset-rimes, and phonemes build upon each other before I could explain why clapping syllables and singing songs matter for spelling development. As Tompkins et al. (2021) explain, "the largest units of sound within words are syllables" (p. 108), and

designing activities that progress from larger to smaller sound units clarified for me why oral language games must be developmentally sequenced. The process of creating family-friendly explanations deepened my own pedagogical content knowledge significantly.

In planning your phonics-based lesson with a home support activity, how did you ensure that learning extends meaningfully beyond the classroom?

To ensure learning extended beyond the classroom, I designed the home connection activity to directly mirror the instructional practices students experienced during the lesson while remaining flexible enough to work in any family context. The "I Spy" sound game from the brochure became both the formative assessment practice in class and the home reinforcement activity, creating continuity between school and home learning environments. This consistency is crucial because, as Tompkins et al. (2021) note, Mrs. Firpo "invites the students to turn to pages 60-61 of their reading textbooks" (p. 106), demonstrating how effective teachers create bridges between different learning contexts. Similarly, my lesson creates a bridge between classroom phonological awareness instruction and home oral language practices.

The recording sheet sent home with the brochure serves multiple purposes beyond simple homework. First, it provides structure for families who may not know how to support literacy development, giving them a specific, achievable task. Second, it validates family linguistic practices by explicitly stating "You can play in any language," which honors diverse home language environments. Third, it creates a feedback loop where I can see which students are practicing at home and which families might need additional support or translated materials. The requirement to return the sheet with three words allows me to assess not just student learning but also the effectiveness of my home-school communication.

I also ensured the learning extends meaningfully by designing activities that are genuinely playful and integrated into family life rather than feeling like additional schoolwork. The brochure activities—narrating routines, singing songs, telling stories—are things families naturally do anyway. By helping families recognize these activities as literacy instruction, I empower them to become intentional about practices they're already engaging in. As the research indicates, "developing phonological awareness, particularly an awareness of phonemes, is considered an essential, foundational to developing an understanding that letters represent

sounds in language and, vice-versa, that sounds are represented by letters" (Tompkins et al., 2021, p. 109). When families understand this connection, their everyday conversations become purposeful literacy instruction.

Finally, I built in accountability and celebration structures. Students will share their home practice during our next lesson's opening, allowing them to be experts about their home experiences. This positions families as co-educators rather than homework monitors and creates a culturally responsive classroom where home knowledge is valued and celebrated.

How did your Brochure or Flyer (Part 3a) inform the design of this lesson?

The brochure directly shaped every component of this lesson plan, from the learning objectives through the home connection activity. Activity 2 from the brochure (Play Oral Sound Games) became the conceptual framework for the entire lesson. The brochure's emphasis on "I Spy" using beginning sounds, clapping syllables, and rhyming games translated directly into the pre-assessment, guided practice, and partner work activities. This wasn't coincidental—I deliberately designed the brochure and lesson as complementary pieces of a comprehensive approach to phonological awareness instruction.

The brochure's research foundation informed my pedagogical decisions throughout the lesson. Because the brochure explains that "the largest units of sound within words are syllables" (Tompkins et al., 2021, p. 108) and that phonological awareness develops from larger to smaller units, I structured my lesson to begin with whole words, move to phoneme segmentation, and finally to letter-sound matching for spelling. This developmental progression mirrors the natural sequence of phonological awareness development described in the research and explained in the family brochure.

Most significantly, the brochure's section on "Home Language as a Strength" fundamentally shaped how I designed differentiation and support within the lesson. The brochure emphasizes that children should "talk through their ideas in whichever language feels most comfortable" (Oral Language brochure, 2026), which informed my decision to explicitly encourage English Language Learners to say words in their home language first during partner practice. I realized that if I'm telling families that home language builds literacy, I must create classroom spaces where home language is genuinely welcomed and used as a learning tool, not just tolerated.

The brochure's emphasis on no-cost, accessible activities also shaped my materials choices. I selected magnetic letters and picture cards—simple, reusable materials that mirror the accessible nature of the home activities. I avoided worksheets or consumable materials that might send an implicit message that literacy learning requires expensive resources, contradicting the brochure's empowering message that "every conversation, every song, and every story builds the oral language foundation" (Oral Language brochure, 2026).

Finally, creating the brochure first forced me to articulate the "why" behind phonological awareness instruction in clear, compelling language. This clarity of purpose translated into stronger lesson design. When I wrote in the brochure that oral language "provides the mental framework for literacy" (Oral Language brochure, 2026), I had to ensure my lesson actually demonstrated this connection explicitly for students. The lesson's structure—moving from oral sound games to physical letter manipulation to spelling—makes visible the exact process the brochure describes: sounds in speech become letters in print. By designing these two components together, I created a coherent, research-informed approach to early literacy that positions families as essential partners in their children's learning journey.

References

- Michigan Department of Education. (n.d.). *Michigan K-12 Standards English Language Arts*. https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/Literacy/Content-Standards/ELA_Standards.pdf?rev=0f76588bc2bd48f89165484fa35d2b31
- Tompkins, G. E., Campbell, R., Green, D., & Smith, C. (2021). *Literacy for the 21st century: A balanced approach* (3rd Canadian ed.). Pearson.