



Designing an oracy-based reading curriculum for hospital education

Raedwald Trust's "Readers for Life" Curriculum

Delivered by Alice Crozier-Green

Oracy – giving children a voice for life



Hospital education is unique—our learners’ journeys are often brief, disrupted, disjointed and deeply affected by health, wellbeing, and medical treatment. Teaching time is often restricted, our learners’ needs complex, and our data limited. A high-quality reading curriculum should offer structure, consistency, challenge, connection and joy in reading, even within the obstacles of hospital education.

“What do you find most challenging about supporting reading progress for children with short or disrupted hospital stays?”

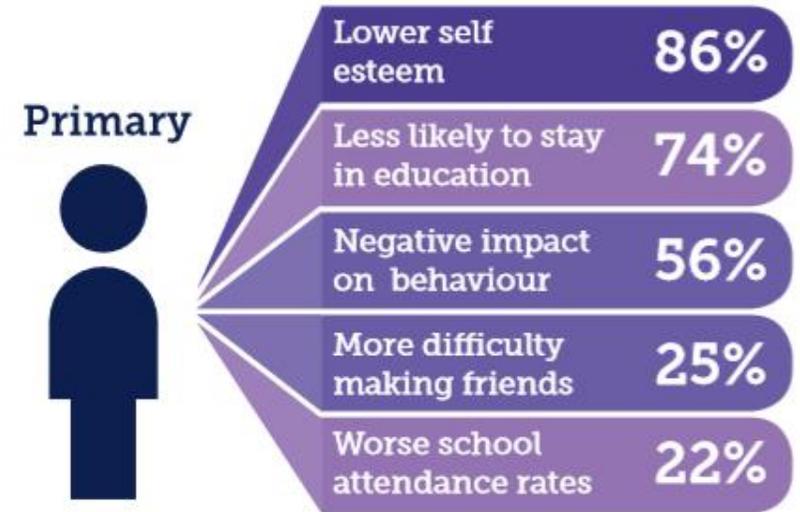


The Importance of Oracy: Giving Children a Voice for Life

Oracy—the ability to communicate effectively through spoken language—is a cornerstone of life-long-learning. For children in hospital education, developing oracy is not only an academic goal but also a vital means of connection, expression, and confidence-building.

The Early Catastrophe – exposure to words...

Imagine starting life 30 million words behind the starting line...





Why Oracy Matters

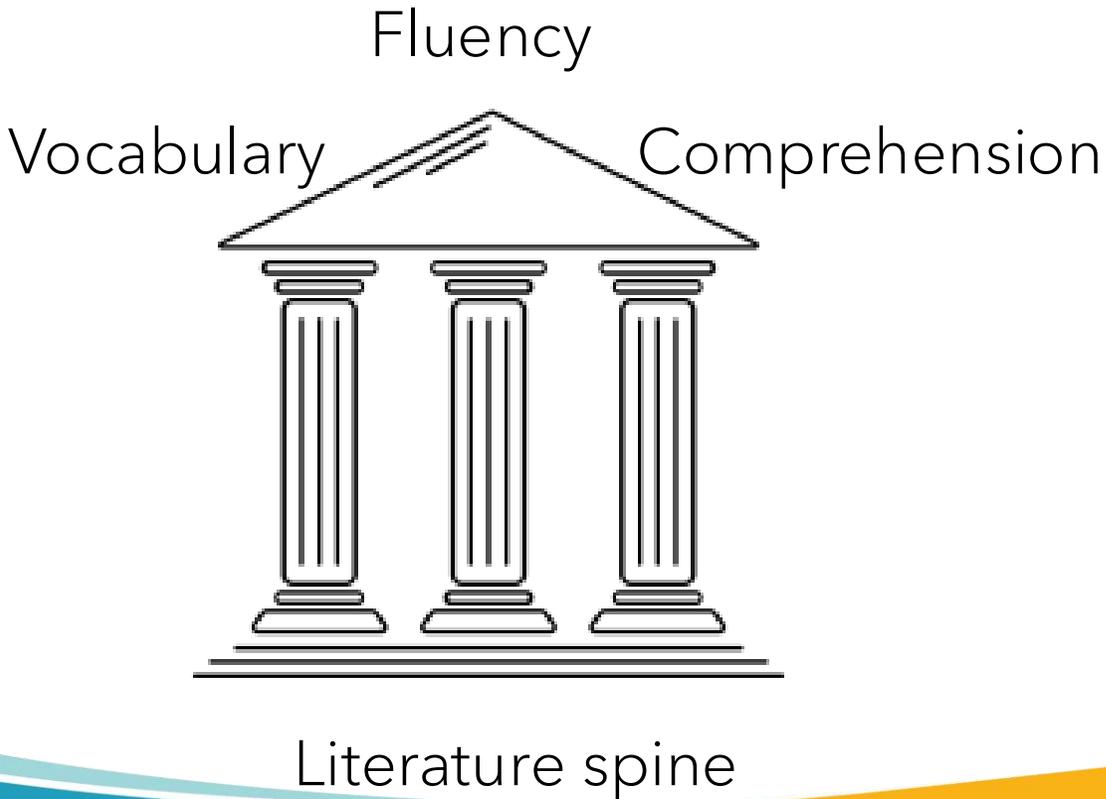
- **Communication and Connection:** Many hospitalised children experience isolation from peers and school life. Structured opportunities for talk—reading discussions, retelling, reflection—help them reconnect with others and express their experiences.
- **Cognitive Development:** Speaking and listening deepen understanding. When children talk about a text, they are rehearsing thinking: organising ideas, reasoning, and making meaning aloud.
- **Emotional Regulation and Wellbeing:** Talking about stories, characters, and feelings gives children safe ways to explore emotions, fears, and hopes, which can be especially powerful in medical settings.
- **Language for Learning:** Strong oracy underpins reading and writing. Through discussion, children encounter new vocabulary, practise sentence structures, and gain confidence using language purposefully.
- **Preparation for Life Beyond School:** Oracy equips young people with the confidence to express themselves clearly, collaborate, advocate for their needs, and participate fully in society—skills that matter far beyond the classroom.



In Hospital Education Contexts

- Short or fragmented teaching time means every conversation counts.
- Encouraging talk—however brief—can turn a passive lesson into an active, empowering experience.
- For some pupils, oral responses may be their main form of engagement when writing or reading independently is not possible.
- Reading aloud and dialogic discussion allow teachers to gauge understanding when written assessment isn't feasible.

"Readers for Life" curriculum



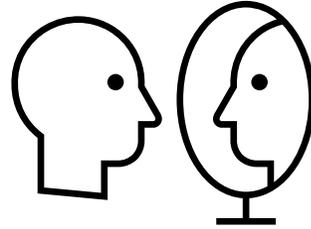
- **Three pillars:** Vocabulary • Fluency • Comprehension
- **Key idea:** Each pillar can stand alone—making the programme adaptable for short-term or intermittent teaching.
- What do our pupils need from a literature spine?
- **Discussion:**
“Which aspect—vocabulary, fluency, or comprehension—do you find hardest to sustain when contact time is limited?”

Literature Spine – what do our pupils need?

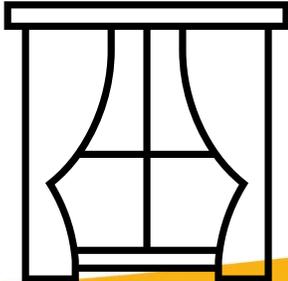
Diversity

Relevance

Evocative



Connection



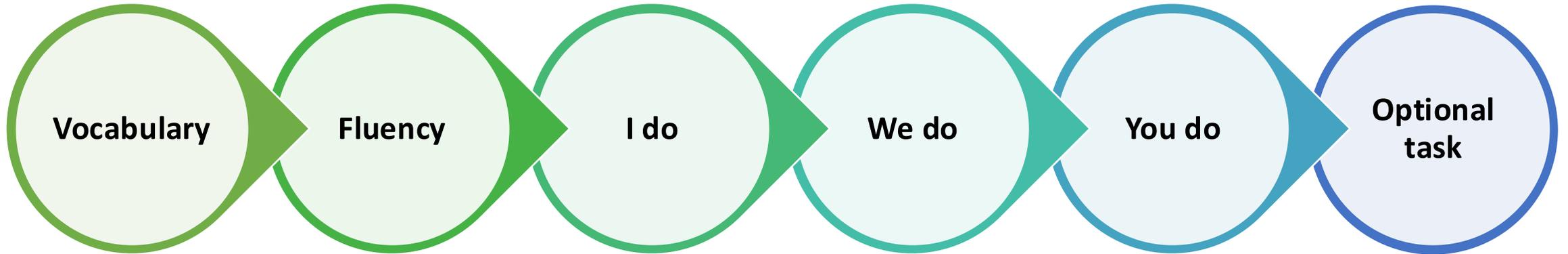
Window to the
world

Challenge

Formative

Joy

Structure of a unit – why is this so important in the context of hospital education?





"Things The Eye Can't See" by Penny Joelson

Libby's guide dog, Samson, stopped suddenly, his ears pricked and his body tense. She felt the familiar pressure of his lead in her hand and knew he had sensed something unusual. Around her, the quiet street seemed heavier, as if holding its breath. Libby adjusted the strap of her camera and listened intently. Even though she couldn't see clearly, she could feel the movement of shadows and the faint sound of someone approaching. Her heart quickened—something wasn't right.

She remembered what Charlie had said earlier, warning her to be careful. Libby took a slow, measured step forward, Samson by her side. Her camera swung lightly against her chest, ready to capture whatever clues she could sense. The air was thick with tension, but Libby refused to let fear take over. Her instincts were sharp, and she trusted them to guide her through the unknown.



Fluency

- Read the passage aloud three times:
 - First for accuracy.
 - Second for expression (showing tension and suspense).
 - Third in pairs: one reads, the other mimics tone and pace.
- Practice emphasizing key words: **tense, unusual, shadows, approaching, tension, instincts.**

Comprehension

- Answer the following questions:
 - What signals to Libby that something unusual is happening?
 - How does Samson help Libby in this situation?
 - Why is Libby careful even though she cannot see well?
 - How does the author create a sense of tension in the passage?
 - What role does the camera play for Libby in this scene?

Vocabulary

- Discuss the meaning of these words/phrases and use them in sentences:
 - Pricked (as in ears)
 - Measured step
 - Swing lightly
 - Thick with tension
 - Instincts



Challenges	"Readers for Life"
Liaison with school	Readers for Life is delivered alongside mainstream school curriculum
Time incl. medical practitioners and treatment	25-minute sessions/ Independent access to texts
Relationship building – parents and young person	Opportunities to involve parents and quickly assess starting points
Natural regression due to hospital stay	Agile literature spine
Classroom and bedside delivery	Oracy based curriculum delivered in groups or 1:1
Access to a high-quality and diverse literature spine	11 purposefully chosen texts
Over reliance of ICT and access to the internet	Reading curriculum is based on high-quality oracy interaction and relationships
Stamina and fatigue	25-minute lessons that can be easily chunked Audio-books – sense of purpose
Confidence and experience of teachers in delivery of Reading across key stages	Highly structured with pedagogy built within lesson plan and resources Identical structure irrelevant of the key stage
Unpredictability of hospital school attendance	Readers for Life becomes a familiar model that is appropriate for short-term or long-term admissions



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