

# Fall Family Literacy Learning Series: Recap of Session 2

On Wednesday October 4, we held our second session with a focus on “**Comprehension and Writing: Where do they fit into the science of reading?**” ([video](#), [slides](#)) We were joined by special guest Natalie Wexler, author of [The Knowledge Gap](#) and [The Writing Revolution](#).

## Discussion Highlights

### Reading Comprehension

- Literacy (and the science of reading) is not just about phonics. Comprehension is essential too.
- Reading comprehension is NOT best taught through assigning random, unconnected texts or focusing primarily on skills (e.g., find the main idea) and strategies (e.g., visualizing).
- Reading comprehension is built through developing background knowledge and vocabulary that allows one to access and understand the context of a text.
- Knowledge acts as “mental velcro”-- the more knowledge you have, the more new knowledge that can “stick.”
- Teaching students to comprehend complex texts with complicated syntax is important. If students only work with leveled texts or free choice texts they may not get this practice.

### Writing

- Writing is not just important in itself, but can also be an important lever for building (and remembering) knowledge.
- Writing instruction shouldn't be done in isolation from content. Embed writing activities in the content of the curriculum.
- Start at the sentence level and teach grammar in the context of students' own writing.

### English Learners

- English Language Development pairs very well with knowledge building curricula because English is best learned in the context of actual content, not in isolation.
- Explicit writing instruction is important for all students, but especially English Learners.
- Parents of ELs can build knowledge and vocabulary with children using their home language. This does not need to be in English.

### What should teachers do?

- Organize read-alouds and units by topic and not by “skill of the week.” Spend at least 2-3 weeks on a topic, so students have an opportunity to learn deeply about it.
- Ask questions that put content in the foreground.
- Organize classroom libraries by topic and not by “level.”
- Spend lots of time on meaty social studies and science topics.
- Utilize complex texts that give students practice with complicated syntax.
- Have students *write* about what they're learning. Integrate writing instruction into all content areas.

### What can families do?

- Read complex, engaging books aloud.
- Have back-and-forth conversations.
- Follow your child's interests
- Have your child write about things they're interested in.
- Talk to your child's school about the curriculum you're using and advocate for knowledge-building.

### What should schools and districts do?

- Adopt a [knowledge-building ELA curriculum](#), that goes deeply into science, social studies, and arts topics, integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing, working with complex texts.
- Provide professional learning and coaching for teachers on the why, what, and how of knowledge building and the materials to implement this.

## Resources

- [Literacy Beyond Phonics: The importance of background knowledge](#)
- [Knowledge Matters: Podcast, Curriculum Guide](#)
- [How Parents and Families Support Building Background Knowledge](#)

