



Beth is a language and literacy expert with an M.A. from Northwestern University. She has had an exciting career as a speech-language pathologist, working with children of all ages in public and private settings for 25 years. In 2013, with Deena Siefert, Beth co-founded InferCabulary a web-based language and literacy company. In 2016, she co-authored the Test of Semantic Reasoning when prominent literacy and learning experts encouraged her that the process embedded in InferCabulary was a new cognitive-educational construct that needed to be explored. Beth is a national presenter on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension. She is constantly learning from her students, in fact, two of her past students were the muses for InferCabulary.

# BETH LAWRENCE

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## What does your company do?

As I shared in a recent TEDx talk, an 8th grade girl named Peninah was the muse for our company. Peninah struggled to comprehend *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, in large part, due to her shallow understanding of nuanced vocabulary. Despite using state-of-the-art vocabulary instruction, nothing worked. Because Peninah lacked years of word encounters by not being an avid reader, she became trapped in the all-too-common vicious cycle of failing to read, failing to learn vocabulary, and failing to comprehend. I had two epiphanies: 1) why are we educators relying on language to teach language to students who struggle with language?; 2) I could provide her with years of word encounters/contexts (that she was not getting

from reading) by providing her multiple images, tapping into her good reasoning skills. Well, five years ago we discovered many other students benefited from this approach. Then prominent academics encouraged us, and we were on our way!

## How and why does InferCabulary work?

InferCabulary is a K12, web-based, research-backed language, literacy, and critical thinking tool that improves reading, writing, and oral communication for all students (including those in Gifted & Talented, Special education, Response to Intervention, and those learning English.) Students engage in a brand-new educational construct we discovered called Semantic Reasoning (i.e., using inductive and deductive reasoning to infer and define for themselves deep meanings of nuanced tier two and academic vocabulary through analysis of multiple photographs). InferCabulary has an ESSA level 3 status (therefore approved for Title I purchase) due to the publication of a [recent \(extremely positive\) research study](#) by Dr. Michael Kennedy at the University of Virginia

## Tell us why Pre-K-12 educators should be aware of what you are doing regarding Educational Equity and Accessibility.

Much is being done in the areas of decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategy instruction. However, if students do not understand the meaning of 98% of the words they are reading, they will not comprehend (Hu & Nation, 2000). Many students who enter Kindergarten with low vocabulary never catch up. The solutions proposed to help decrease this "Matthew Effect" have, among other things, encouraged decreasing the number of words during instruction, and increasing the intensity and depth of instruction. This tends to result in more talking, more reading... more words being used to teach words! Even with multisensory lessons, vocabulary growth is time consuming, and peers continue to accelerate. Finally, there is an approach that

does not over-tax language skills, and depth of knowledge is achieved in a fraction of the time.

## What are you most proud of about your company in today's educational world?

The "business as usual" approach, such as rote memorization or language-dense activities and drill-work, is what can be found in almost all language/literacy materials. We are so proud to have introduced a brand new cognitive-educational construct for learning that students find extremely engaging and fun, and gets data-driven results! Deena and I smile each time we see or hear about the "aha moment" people of all ages and abilities experience when playing a "Climb" activity in InferCabulary for the first time. Other things that make us proud include all the times we hear, "this just makes so much sense!" Oh yeah...the TEDx talk and the amazing UVA research study results were pretty proud moments, as well!

## How does your company approach the needs of ESL/ELL students if at all?

InferCabulary takes one of the largest hurdles—the requirement of already being a master of the English Language—out of the equation by asking students to engage in critical thinking in the visual domain. Because it is highly visual, and allows students to critically think in the non-language domain, it is often described as a "no brainer" by ESL instructors. We have testimonials of children going home, and teaching their parents sophisticated, nuanced English vocabulary as well as using these words in their writing assignments.