

Fostering Language Development & Adult/Child Interactions

Time: 3 hour workshop: 5 hour option.

Objectives

In this workshop participants will:

- Gain a deeper understanding of how children develop language and the relationship between language development and thinking
- Learn more ways to promote conversations in the classroom and support children's vocabulary development
- Acquire strategies for developing children's listening and speaking skills throughout the day

This workshop supports participants' understanding of:

Preschool Expectation 1. Child listens with understanding to environmental sounds, directions, and conversations.

Preschool Expectation 2. Child converses effectively in home language, English, or sign language for a variety of purposes relating to real experiences and different audiences.

Kindergarten Standard 4. Child demonstrates expanding vocabulary and concept development.

Kindergarten Standard 7. Child speaks in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.

Kindergarten Standard 8. Child listens actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.

Materials Required

- L1 Overheads #1 - 4 or PowerPoint L1
- Chart pad, markers, tape
- Large post-its (4 x 6 or 5 x 8)
- High/Scope Video Tape: Language and Literacy Learning
- Index cards on tables for writing vignettes in vocabulary activity
- 1 or 2 copies of L1 Handout "Vocabulary Assignment Cards" cut into strips (you'll need an assignment for each group of participants)

For 5 hour option:

- Collections of found materials for participants to sort and classify such as: buttons, shells, keys, bread tabs, plastic bottle caps. Prepare sets of about 20 items in a baggie or bin. Each table group will need one collection. Found items, as contrasted with commercial manipulatives, allow for a wide range of inventive sorting methods, descriptive language, and conversation.
- A read aloud story in which the subject is collecting objects such as: *The Button Box* by Marguerite Reid, *The Puddle Pail* by Elisa Kleven, *Hannah's Collections* by Marthe Jocelyn, *I Like Things* by Margaret Hillert, *Josephina: The Great Collector* by Diana Engel.
- 6 – 10 Read Aloud concept books (see Book List in the Trainer's Manual)
- L1 Overhead 5 and 6 or L1 PowerPoint slide 8 and 9.

Additional Materials

Chapter 3, Owocki, G. *Literacy through play*.

Chapter 3, Schickedanz, J. *Much More than ABC's*.

Handout List

L1 Agenda

The Developmental Stages of Language

Fostering Language Development

Vocabulary Development

Essential Messages

- Language development is a critical first step to literacy, especially reading.
- An important part of early childhood classroom practice is encouraging children's conversations throughout the day.
- Children's language reveals their thinking.
- Language development should be supported in both the child's native language as well as English.

Trainers' Agenda

1. Opening Activity: Tuning Into Children's Language and Thinking (15 - 20 minutes)

Begin by saying:

(Pre-k example) "Young children are always experimenting with language. Their language gives us insight into their thinking. We've all been delighted by the inventive ways children express their ideas. Four-year old Eli needed help screwing the cover on the peanut butter jar. He said, "Mom, spin this top on for me." (Or use an example from your experience.) What does Eli show us he knows and understands based on what he has said? What is the knowledge behind his words?"

Invite a few responses. You might add:

"Eli's parents hadn't described closing the jar as spinning the top on. But Eli might not have known the word "close" or been able to retrieve it in this situation. However, he associated the action of closing with turning or spinning. He got his message across. If we correct him, we limit his curiosity and inventiveness. Instead, we can admire and extend his thinking by saying, "You're right Eli. To close the jar, we spin or turn the lid to get it tight."

(K example) "Young children are always experimenting with language. Their language gives us insight into their thinking. We've all been delighted by the inventive ways children express their ideas. One late fall day on the playground, Brooke comes running over to his teachers and says, "Look Mrs. Rams, the birds are flying fast away home for the winter." What does Brooke show us she knows and understands based on what she has said? What is the knowledge behind her words?"

Invite a few responses. You might add:

“Brooke seems to have picked up the migration of some birds, but doesn’t know the term. She got her message across. If we correct her, we limit her curiosity. Instead, we can admire and extend her thinking by saying, “You’re right Brooke. The birds are migrating south for the winter. As it gets cold in NJ, many birds migrate south before the snow comes.”

Give directions.

“Individually, recall something delightful you’ve heard a child say and jot it down.”

After a minute or two, say:

“Form triads to share. After all have shared, admire the children’s language. Reflect on what they know and understand and what their words reveal about their thinking.”

Provide 5 – 7 minutes for sharing and discussion. Hear 2 – 3 aloud, both what the child said and the thinking behind it. As you make the transition to the formal introduction of the workshop, say:

“Today’s session focuses on the importance of language development.”

2. Welcome and Logistics (5 minutes)

Use Handout L1.1 “Agenda” to review agenda and session objectives.

3. Introducing the Topic (20 - 40 minutes)

Using L1 Overheads 1 - 3 or L1 PowerPoint (slides 1 - 4) to introduce this topic.

1) Show overhead L1.1 and pose the question: “**Let’s think about reasons why children’s language development is important in early childhood classrooms.**” Hear some ideas, adding or extending with the following points:

Learning language is a thinking process. As we observed in the opening activity, listening to children’s language gives us insights into how they are making sense of the rules of language. As children learn language they solve problems, form hypotheses and interact with others who use language. When we admire the thinking children use and build on it, we motivate children to use more language.

Language development is the first step towards literacy. Language development makes reading and writing possible. To read, we use language abilities to decode and comprehend text.¹ We need vocabulary for comprehension. Readers look for familiar patterns and sequences to help them understand text.

¹ Ruddell, R., & Ruddell, M.R. (1995). *Teaching children to read and write: Becoming an influential teacher*. Allyn & Bacon: NY.

2) Show overhead L1.2 **How Children Acquire Language** and explain:

For humans, language learning is innate. Children are “hard wired” to learn and use language. Before children begin to speak, they understand and respond to both verbal and non-verbal language.

Environment and interactions have a significant impact on children’s language development. Children learn the specific variety of language (dialect) that the important people around them speak.² From infancy, adults provide a language model for children and give them encouragement as they begin to make sounds. Adults work at interpreting what the child is saying and coax, reinforce, and expand. For example, the infant says, “ma, ma, ma” and the mother smiles and says, “Yes, you are saying mommy. Say it again.” Or, the toddler says, “ball” and the parent says, “Yes, that is a big red beautiful ball.” When a child’s babbling and talking isn’t encouraged but found annoying, the child stops. The variety of language that children experience, as well as the quantity, matters.³

Children learn by “creating” language. Children are active participants in learning language. Through social interactions, they begin learning the rules of language: phonology (the sounds the language is made up of), syntax (grammar – how words work together in phrases, clauses, and sentences), and semantics (the vocabulary that gives language meaning). In the opening activity many of the stories you shared showed children forming hypotheses about how language works – and what words mean. How many of you have noticed that as children catch on that to make more than one of something or plural - you add the “s” sound. And so we might hear: “peoples” or “childrens” or “fishes”. Or, as they begin to use “ed” for past tense, they are likely to say “broked” or “swimmed.” These errors show children are thinking. Rather than correct them, we can accept and appreciate their hard work and thinking. And to expand their learning, we can respond in natural conversation using the correct way and at some point along the line, they’ll catch on.

Children learn language through play. Children show us their pleasure in language as they play with sounds and rhymes, make up words, and tell jokes and riddles. The more we encourage them and share their delight, the more we foster their language development. Through sociodramatic play, children learn and practice the functions of language: for example, how we use language to accomplish the tasks of daily living, do our jobs, satisfy curiosity, gain and share information, make connections with others, imagine, remember, and bring pleasure to our lives.⁴ A great deal of language learning and thinking occurs during the dialogue children have with each other in dramatic play settings. Often they communicate more easily (and more in quantity) with each other (both verbally and non-verbally) than they do with adults.

3) Distribute handout L1.2 “The Developmental Stages of Language” and provide a few minutes for participants to review. Ask for comments or questions.

² Genishi, Celia. (2002). Research in review. Young English language learners: Resourceful in the classroom. *Young Children*, 57 (4). 66-70.

³ Neuman, S. Copple, C. & S. Bredekamp. (2000). *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. NAEYC: Washington, DC.

⁴ Owocki, G. (2001). *Make way for literacy: Teaching the way young children learn*. NAEYC: Washington, DC.

4) Use Overhead L1.3 “Appreciating Language Differences” to discuss issues related to English Language Learners.

Teachers must encourage children’s language use and development in their native language. All young children need encouragement to continue to develop language. Whatever language or dialect a child is speaking, it is rule governed and systematic and therefore, helping the child develop more language.

Teachers must be sensitive to language differences.

Janet Gonzalez-Mena⁵ offers three guidelines for supporting English Language Learners.

1. **Acceptance:** When children feel accepted (themselves, their families and their language and culture) they are eager to learn English or any other language. Include print in the classroom from children’s first language. (Invite teachers to reflect on additional strategies for valuing children’s first language.)
2. **Integrated Program:** Second language should be taught in the context of an integrated program, not as an isolated activity.
3. **Sensory Learning:** All children learn language through their senses, including their muscles. Children learn words more easily when there is action with objects or by acting something out.

Let’s think together about when and how we promote talk in the classroom.

4. Activity: Talk in the Classroom (15 minutes)

Prepare for this activity by putting large post-its (5 x 8) and markers on each table. Label and post three charts: Whole Group, Small Group, One-on-One. Do not hang the charts yet.

Introduce the activity by saying:

“Children learn language by using it. The classroom is a place to nurture talk and conversation. To foster language development, teachers must provide children with interesting things to talk about and many, many opportunities to talk. Let’s think about all the times during the day when we can encourage children to talk.”

Give directions.

“Picture your classrooms and think about all the different times and situations when children talk during the day. You have 7 minutes to come up with as many ideas as you can. Record each idea on a separate post-it and write large.” Model one or two with the whole group, getting ideas from them and recording them in big font on post-its.

After 7 minutes, call time, and post the 3 previously labeled charts. Say:

⁵ Gonzales-Mena, J. (1976). English as a second language for preschool children. *Young Children*, 32, 14-20.

“Now, let’s reflect on what you have written. Which ones are whole group, small group or one-on-one? During the next two minutes, sort your post-its on your table according to the 3 categories.”

Invite participants to post ideas on the charts. Modify your posting method based on time. You might hear two ideas per table and add to the charts. Alternatively, have three people from each table add their ideas to the appropriate charts, doubling up duplicates.

5. Discussion (10 – 15 minutes)

Ask questions such as the following:

What are your observations about the lists we have created on the chart? (Ideas might include: many are whole group, even distribution among all three categories, not as many one on one, most one-on-one are between adults and children.)

Highlight the importance of one-on-one conversations with children. Point out that numerous studies show that there is limited one-on-one interaction between young children and their teachers. (For your information, some citations for this research include: Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips, 1990; Culkin, 1994, 2000; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Frede, 1995; Barnett, 1998).

“Why is it important to vary the type of settings we provide for children to talk?” Ideas to elicit include children’s comfort, temperament and personal style, culture, and experience.

Refer them to Expectations 1 and 2 (preschool) or Standards 4, 7 and 8 and give them a few minutes to read them. Point out that when we provide many different opportunities for children to talk, they are more likely to do it. Then ask: “What are some ways you gather documentation about these skills during the various “talk” situations we’ve listed?”

Invite them to reflect on their personal strengths and weaknesses in terms of promoting (and documenting) one type of conversational situation over another. This can be a quiet reflection or a table discussion.

6. Activity: Listening to Classroom Conversation (20 minutes)

Use the segment of the High/Scope video labeled “Wedding.” (Be sure to watch the video segment before the workshop.)

Introduce the activity by saying:

“We will watch a video next. It is a dramatic play sequence of a wedding. There are several children playing and the teacher is involved in the play. Before we begin, divide your tables in half. Half of you will focus on observing children and the other half will observe the teacher. Divide your group now and determine who will do what.”

Give them a minute or two. Check to see that they're ready. Now focus them and give directions.

“As we discussed earlier, children learn language through their play. They engage in conversation, they experiment with new vocabulary and they learn about the functions of language. As you watch the segment, let's listen to the language being used. Each table group divide in half. Half will listen carefully to the language of the children. Pay attention to what they are saying and how they use language. The other half observes the teacher. What is she doing? How is she supporting children's language development?”

Following the segment, proceed through 3 steps.

1. Give them a minute or two to jot down what they observed.
2. Tell them to talk with their half of the table group for 3 - 5 minutes to share and compare their observations.
3. Tell the two halves to share their collective observations and respond to the experience.

7. Discussion (10 – 15 minutes)

Invite comments and insights both about children's language and the teacher's role.

What were some ways the teacher fostered language development in this classroom?

Refer them to Expectation 1 or Standard 8. What were some ways children demonstrated listening behaviors? (Encourage them to recall both verbal and non-verbal listening behaviors.)

Give out L1 Handout “Fostering Language Development” and provide a few minutes for participants to review it. You might ask them to circle one strategy they will try or focus on more when they return to the classroom.

Note to Trainer About Listening to Classroom Conversation. The wedding segment of this video comes from a preschool classroom. We think it is valuable to use with kindergarten teachers, highlighting how the teacher “teaches” while actively participating in the play.

8. Activity: Using Interesting Vocabulary Throughout the Day (30 – 40 minutes)

To prepare for this activity, put index cards on tables. Cut L1 Handout “Vocabulary Assignment” into strips. Consider mixing the groups by counting off to fours. If so, do it before giving directions. Each group will need an assignment.

To introduce this activity, say the following:

“Let's think about the words we use with children. (Write the word ‘happy’ on a chart.) Let's see how many other ways we can convey ‘happy.’ Think about synonyms or phrases. (Ideas include: glad, content, pleased, cheerful, in high spirits, ecstatic, delighted, on cloud nine, jovial).

Chart some ideas and then say:

“Vocabulary is an essential part of learning to read fluently as well as learning complex concepts. If we’re going to help children build rich vocabularies, we must use lots of words with them.”

“Hart and Risley did a study in 1999 and found that children from families on welfare know 4,000 words by age 6. Children from professional families know 20,000 words by age 6. Three year olds from professional families had larger recorded vocabularies than did the parents of the families on welfare.”

Let’s spend some time thinking about how to ensure that children leave our classrooms with more than 20,000 words!”

Have each group look at their assignment card. Give directions:

“With your group, brainstorm at least 10 interesting and creative words that you could use when talking with children in the setting on your assignment card. Feel free to make your list as long as 20 words! Record them on your chart.” (Most groups benefit from modeling; use one of the assignments, brainstorm as a whole group, and record ideas on the chart.)

Provide 10 – 15 minutes for them to work in groups. Have them post their charts. Do a gallery walk to read the charts and suggest they write down three words they’ll use with children the next day. If possible, offer to type up and distribute all the charts.

Next, participants will practice using “creative vocabulary” in conversations. Introduce this by saying:

“Research also shows that the quality of adult-child conversation is as important as the quantity or amount of conversation for children’s cognitive and literacy development. Let’s practice using these words in conversations.” (Citations include: Morrow, 1990; National Research Council, 2000; National Reading Panel, 2000; Owocki, 2001; Schickedanz 1999; Snow et al, 1998)

Use L1 Overhead 4 (or PowerPoint slides 5, 6, and 7) to give directions for the role-play. (If using the overhead, uncover each step as you go.) Say:

“Imagine you’re in your classrooms observing children – either at the center or during the routine.”

“Compose a vignette as a group – no more than 2 or 3 sentences. Describe what a child is doing (and possibly saying) at the center or during the routine. For example – let’s use snack. My vignette might be: Rashan is eating celery and peanut butter for snack. He picks up the celery, licks the peanut butter off the top, and then takes a bite of the celery.”

“Record your vignette on an index card. You have three minutes.”

Check to see that they’re ready and show step 2: Exchange vignettes (with your group). Tell them to:

“Pass your vignette to another group. Read aloud the vignette you receive. Review the vocabulary chart that relates to the vignette.” Allow about a minute or two and call time. Then, introduce the role-play. Say:

“Now for step 3: with a partner, you’ll do a role-play of a conversation. One of you plays the teacher, the other the child. The situation for the role-play is the vignette you’ve just read. Decide who will be teacher and who will be a child (with a partner). In your role-play, the teacher should practice using some new vocabulary words.” After a few minutes, call time and tell them to switch roles.

9. Discussion (3 – 5 minutes)

Invite comments and questions. Distribute L1 Handout Vocabulary Development.

10. Closure (Skip to next activity if using 5 hour option.)

Give these directions.

“Reflect on the expectations or standards we focused on in today’s workshop (for Preschool, 1 and 2 and for K, 4, 7, and 8). What new ideas do you have as a result of today’s workshop to help you foster children’s learning in these areas? Jot down one idea for each (expectation or standard).”

Provide some time for them to think and write. Hear some aloud. Leave them with a closing message such as:

“Use lots of expressive vocabulary, invite lots of conversations, and make language an exciting part of your classroom!”

Additional Activity for 5 Hour Session

11. Activity: Collections (60 minutes)

Introduce the activity by summarizing what they’ve done today:

“Today we’ve talked about how tuning into children’s language enables us to observe their thinking. We’ve considered all the different times during the day we can promote talk – in whole groups, small groups, and one-on-one. We’ve listened to children talking in dramatic play and examined how a teacher engages with children to facilitate their language and literacy learning. We’ve brainstormed elaborate lists of fanciful words to use with children and practiced using them in conversations. In the next activity, we’ll explore some additional ways to support children’s language learning.”

“How many of you had collections when you were a child?”

Invite volunteers to share. If the group doesn't respond, offer ideas and invite show of hands. (For example, dolls, stamps, buttons, shells, coins.)

“Share with others at your table collections you had as a child. How did your collection begin? How long did it last? You might also want to share collections your children have or had.”

Provide 5 – 10 minutes for table talk.

Do a read aloud, choosing one of the books about collections from the materials list. Model effective read aloud strategies. At the end of the story, use L1 Overhead 5 and say,

“In groups of three, respond to the book. Respond to some of the questions on the overhead.”

Allow 10 – 15 minutes for triad discussions.

Debrief by asking each table to share one idea from question #4.

Combine triads so that new groups are formed, comprised of about six people. Ask a volunteer from each group to raise her/his hand. Then say:

“The person whose hand is raised, place your left hand on the shoulder of the person sitting next you. That person will be the teacher in the next part of the activity.”

Place a collection box or bag on each group's table. Provide directions.

“With your group, find many different ways to sort the collection you have. Talk to each other. Teacher: your role is to observe, spark conversation, and practice using rich vocabulary. You can extend but not direct the play. Make some notes of the vocabulary being used.

“The rest of you – play with the collection. Find many different ways to your collection.”

Provide about ten minutes to work for sorting before stopping the play. If time permits and they're going strong allow more time. When you call time, use L1 Overhead 6, and say,

“Take 5 – 7 minutes to talk about the experience with your table group. Address the questions on the overhead.

12. Discussion (30 minutes)

Begin the debrief discussion by making these points:

“Research shows that children who are read to frequently and exposed to a wide range of books develop more sophisticated language structures and increased vocabulary. The book we read is a narrative but it also deals with math concepts that can be used in small group follow up activities like the one you just did.”

Some questions for discussion include:

- Who would like to share some observations your group had during the discussion.
- What did you talk about while sorting? What were some of the sorting categories used? (Highlight the value of inviting children to make their own categories as contrasted with telling them to sort by color or shape.) What would children talk about?
- Let's list the math vocabulary used during this activity. (Create chart.)
- What are some "fanciful" math words teachers used today or could use? (Chart.)
- What collections do you have in your classrooms? How have you gotten your collections? (buttons from dollar store, flea markets, www.orientaltradingcompany.com; keys from locksmiths, bottle caps from a note home and parent contributions)

Summarize by asking:

"What are some insights they are taking away from this activity?" Hear a few ideas.

Activity Extensions:

Provide a few minutes for participants to share with their table groups books they have used as the basis for small group math experiences. Tell them to recall some vocabulary words used or that could be used.

Distribute one or two concept books to each table. Provide time for them to read them aloud, identify interesting vocabulary, and discuss small group extension activities that can lead to rich conversation.

13. Closure

Use closure description above.