# Project REEL
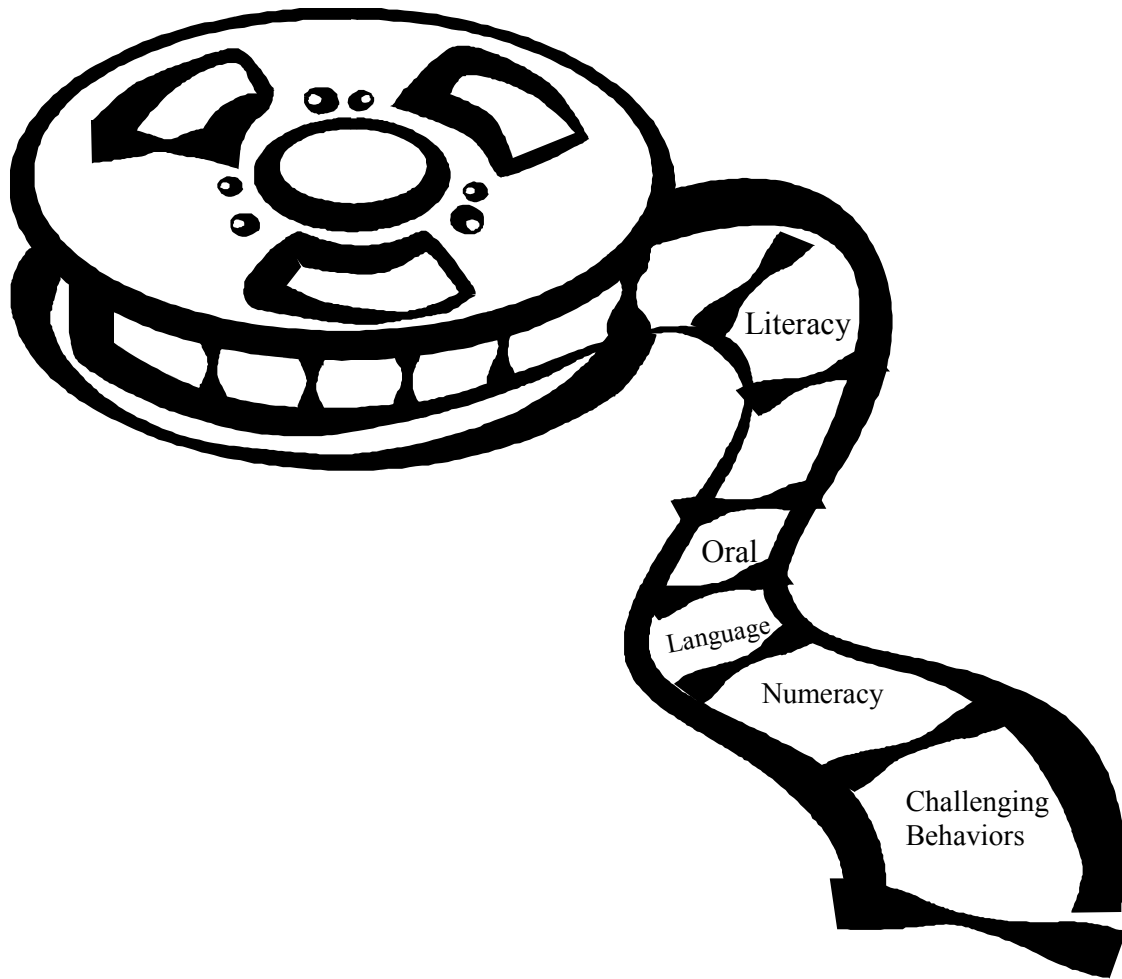
Literacy

Oral

Language

Numeracy

Challenging
Behaviors

# Resources for Early Educator Learning

# FIVE BIG, FAT IDEAS

## to remember about young children's learning:

1. Children learn best in a social setting.

    **Therefore,** avoid independent seat work.

2. Children learn best through play.

    **Therefore,** immerse them in a richly active play
    and avoid worksheets.

3. Children learn best when they are allowed to approximate adult
    behaviors.

    **Therefore,** demonstrate adult practices and accept
    children's attempts at those adult practices **as if** they were already
    conventional efforts.

4. Children learn best in an atmosphere of respect where their dignity is protected.

    **Therefore,** establish appropriately high expectations for children, focusing
    on positive guidance instead of punishment.

5. Children learn best when they have daily opportunities to use diverse social, lan
    guage, literacy, and numeracy practices and receive extensive feedback from
    the caring adults in their classroom.

    **Therefore,** offer children time to use new ideas and
    respond to them in ways that enriches their understandings.
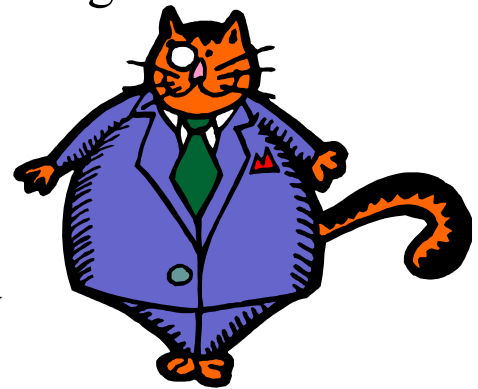
# Project REEL:  Workshop 2
# A FOCUS ON ORAL LANGUAGE

*"The quality of [a] child's life is dependent, to a great extent, on her ability to communicate.  Language permeates all aspects of her experience; it's an essential part of her being, how she connects with others, expresses herself, and gets the care she needs."*
*(Apel & Masterson, 2001, p.2)*

*"...the most important aspect to evaluate in child care settings for very young children is the amount of talk actually going on, moment by moment, between children and their caregivers". (Hart & Risley, 2002, p. xxi)*
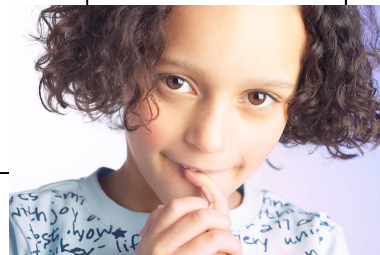
**Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards for Oral Language:**

*Receptive Language, Expressive Language, Speech, Verbal Expression and Communication, Listening and Understanding*

| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (Birth to Age Three)** |
| --- |
| **SECTION 1: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**<br>**Component: Receptive Language**<br>**Component: Expressive Language**<br>**Component: Speech** |
| **LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:** |
| Responds to sights and sounds (0-4 mos.) |
| Uses sounds and body movements to communicate (0-4 mos.) |
| Responds to frequently heard sounds and words (5-8 mos.) |
| Uses a variety of sounds and motions to communicate (5-8 mos.) |
| Shows understanding of gestures and words (9-12 mos.) |
| Uses consistent sounds, verbal expressions, and gestures to communicate (9-12 mos.) |
| Develops and makes sounds with intentionality (9-12 mos.) |
| Shows increased understanding of words and gestures (13-18 mos.) |
| Uses consistent sounds, gestures, and some words to communicate (13-18 mos.) |
| Follows simple directions and suggestions consistently (19-24 mos.) |
| Uses a growing vocabulary and puts several words together (19-24 mos.) |
| Language is used to communicate needs (19-24 mos.) |
| Understands questions, simple directions, beginning concepts, and the ideas and sequence of stories (2 - 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Participates in conversation (2 - 2 1/2 years) |
| Uses words and some conventions of speech to express thoughts and ideas (2 - 2 1/2 yrs.) |
| Understands questions, some abstract concepts, and simple directions (2 1/2 - 3 yrs.) |
| Participates in conversations (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Uses some conventions of speech when expressing thoughts and ideas, and may comment on observations (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |
| Speech is understood by most familiar adults (2 1/2 – 3 yrs.) |

| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum®Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**SECTION 1: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT**<br>**Component: Receptive Language**<br>**Component: Expressive Language**<br>**Component: Speech** | **The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** |
| **LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:** | |
| Listens with understanding and interest to conversations, directions, music, and a variety of reading materials | See #s 40 & 43 |
| Demonstrates understanding of conversations through own actions and responses to directions and questions | See #s 40 & 41 |
| Uses language for a variety of purposes | See #s 39 & 42 |
| Participates in conversations | See #43 |
| Uses conventions of speech while expressing ideas | See #39 |
| Speech is clear enough to be understood by most people | See #39 |

| Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5) Aligned with The Creative Curriculum®  Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5 | |
|---|---|
| **Tennessee Early Learning Developmental Standards (ages 3-5)**<br><br>**SECTION 2:  EARLY LITERACY**<br>**Component:  Verbal Expression and Communication**<br>**Component:  Listening and Understanding** | **The Creative Curriculum® Developmental Continuum for Ages 3-5** |
| **LEARNING EXPECTATIONS:** | |
| Engages verbally with stories in books and movies (ages 3-4) | See #s 44 & 48 |
| Uses more advanced sentence structure and varied vocabulary in verbal expression (ages 3-4) | See #39 |
| Listens attentively to stories, conversations, and explanations and demonstrates understanding (ages 3-4) | See #48 |
| Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary for objects, attributes, actions, and events (ages 3-4) | See #s 26, 27, & 28 |
| Engages in dialogue (conversation with others) (ages 4-5) | See #43 |
| Organizes major steps of an event or story in sequential order (ages 4-5) | See #s 29 & 48 |
| Uses an increasingly complex and varied spoken vocabulary and sentence structure (ages 4-5) | See #39 |
| Asks many types of questions and responds correctly to many types of questions (ages 4-5) | See #s 41 & 42 |
| Understands story events and overall theme, and conversations (ages 4-5) | See #s 43 & 48 |
| Relates plot of story to self and own experiences (ages 4-5) | See #48 |
| Can organize more events and more complex events in sequential order (ages 4-5) | See #s 29 & 48 |

# Training Objectives:

**Early Childhood Educators will:**

✓ Appreciate the importance of oral language for later school success.

✓ Know the foundational concepts of language.

✓ Know the typical sequence/ milestones of language development from birth to 5.

✓ Relate the sequence of typical language development to the Tennessee Early Learning and Development Standards and Creative Curriculum Developmental Continuum.

✓ Value children's language efforts and progress.

✓ Appreciate the importance of talking with and listening to children as well as allowing children to talk with each other.

✓ Identify specific strategies for promoting language development.

✓ Apply many different strategies every day to promote language development.

> **List of training materials:**
> - **Manual**
> - **List of Questions for Question Sorting Activity**
> - **Copies of Appendix from Wasik & Bond (2001).**

# Supporting Research for Trainers:

Apel, K. & Masterson,J. (2001). *Beyond baby talk: From sounds to sentences.* Roseville, CA: Prima.

Berko Gleason, J. (1997). *The development of language* (4th edition). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Dickinson, D.K., & Tabors, P.O. (Eds., (2001). *Beginning literacy with language.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Golinkoff, R.M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2000). *How babies talk: The magic and mystery of language in the first three years of life.* New York: Plume.

Hart, B., & Risley, T.R. (1995/2002). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R.M. (2003). *Einstein never used flash cards: How our children really learn – and why they need to play more and memorize less.* Rodale, Inc.

Owens, R.E. (2005). Language development: An introduction (6th edition). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn &Bacon.

Roskos, K.A., Tabors, P.O., & Lenhart, L.A. (2004). *Oral language and early literacy in preschool: Talking, reading, and writing.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Wasik, B.A. & Bond, M.A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93,* 243-250.

## The Importance of Language

Why is language important?

As the quote from Apel and Masterson (2001) expressed so nicely, a child's life *depends* on her ability to communicate. First, a baby must find a way to communicate her most basic needs to her caregivers. *Feed me! Hold me!* Crying will have to suffice in the early days, but she will find more specific and effective ways to "get things done". Now she will point, or say "dah!". As she grows, she'll get more refined and sophisticated, "Milk!" "My tummy hurts!" And she will increasingly depend more on "talking" than on "doing". She will learn about the world and about other people from what they *tell* her, and they will learn about what she knows and wants from what she *tells* them. And as she heads to school, language will become a critical survival skill.
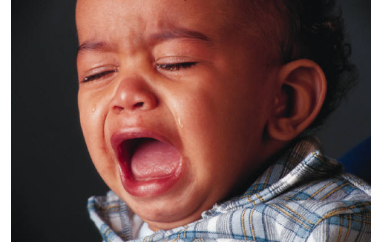
Boyer (1991, cited in Rice, 1995) surveyed kindergarten teachers about school readiness, asking what problem most prevents children from being ready for school. The top response was "deficiency in language"; it was cited more often than emotional maturity, general knowledge, and social confidence.

Rice (1995) gives several reasons for the importance of language in school.

1. Children need to understand the (mostly verbal) instructions given by adults
2. Much of classroom teaching is verbal description and direction
3. Most ways to demonstrate knowledge and explain reasoning are verbal
4. Language is used to communicate rules for classroom behavior
5. Language is critical for establishing friendships with other children
6. Oral language is the precursor to literacy

We will focus on #6 for the majority of this workshop: Oral language is the precursor to literacy. We will review research on the connections between oral language and literacy, and document how and why children from low-income families need support to develop adequate oral language skills before kindergarten.

But first, we must explore the basic concepts of language and how language develops during the years before kindergarten. Then we will examine many research-based ways to facilitate language development.

# Typical Language Development

◆ **Receptive language** Receptive language is comprehension, what children can understand. This includes sounds they recognize and can tell apart, and words and sentences they recognize the meaning of and/or respond to appropriately.

◆ **Productive language** (or expressive language) refers to what children can actually say or express. This includes sounds they child can make, words they can say, and grammatical forms they can use. Usually a child's receptive language is far ahead of their productive language, meaning that they can understand much more than they can tell us. For example, it appears that sometime after 6 months of age, babies begin to understand a few words, even though they are another several months from being able to say even one word.

Both receptive and productive language develop very quickly during the preschool years. That rapid development may lead us to mistakenly believe that acquiring language is an easy task, which is all done by the time children get to school. As we examine the complex task of language development, you will see how much kindergartners have accomplished, but also how far they still have to go.

There are four different subsystems of language that children must acquire to be competent communicators.

➤ **Phonology**: the sound system of the language. This involves not only learning to produce the sounds of language the child is hearing, but also learning which sounds can be combined in which orders.

➤ **Semantics**: the meaning system of the language. Semantics includes vocabulary or the **lexicon**, as well as rules for changing words (for example, adding suffixes) to signify important shifts in their meanings (for example, pig to pigs, talk to talked or talking).

➤ **Syntax/Grammar**. Syntax and grammar involve the rules for combining words to make acceptable sentences (for example, subject-verb-object word order).

➤ **Pragmatics**: rules for use of language in social settings; communication. This includes rules for conversations (taking turns, saying relevant things, being polite, and adapting your speech to your listener) as well as understanding of what speech has to say about the speaker – Where is he from? What does she do for a living?

**An overview of typical language development**

| Age | Productive & Receptive Skills |
|---|---|
| Newborn | Cries<br>Turns head to look in direction of sounds<br>Calmed by sound of a voice<br>Prefers mother's voice to stranger's<br>Can tell many speech sounds apart |
| 1-3 months | Cooing<br>Laughing<br>Different cries for hunger, pain, anger<br>Responds to speech with speech-like sounds<br>Smiles when spoken to<br>Makes eye contact with caregiver during interactions |
| 4-6 months | Sound play, usually single syllables like "ba";<br>Growls, squeals, "raspberries"<br>Responds differently to different intonations (friendly, angry)<br>Take turns in "conversations" |
| 6-8 months | Babbles with repetitive sounds ("bababa")<br>Tries to mimic some sounds |
| 8-12 months | Babbles with different sounds (badaga, babu)<br>Typical sounds are p,b,t,d,k,g,m,n,w,s,h,y<br>Babbles with expressive intonation<br>Produces "protowords"<br>Intentional communication emerges (gestures, points at objects, vocalizes, & looks at adult)<br>Responds to name and to "no"<br>Recognizes phrases from games ("Peekaboo", "How big?")<br>Recognizes words from routines (waves bye-bye)<br>Recognizes some other words |
| 12-18 months | First "real" words emerge<br>Vocabulary slowly increases to 50 words<br>One-word stage (words used only one per "sentence")<br>Uses words or jargon speech with questioning, command, and statement intonations |
| 18-24 months | Two-word combinations begin<br>Vocabulary growth spurt (increase to 200 words) |

Refers to self by name
Says "no" to protest
Uses "hi" and "bye-bye" greetings

| | |
|---|---|
| 24 – 36 months | Telegraphic speech (More than 2 words per sentence, omitting words such as articles, conjunctions, prepositions)<br>Grammatical morphemes begin to appear (plural, past tense, prepositions, possession)<br>Continued rapid vocabulary growth<br>Accurate pronunciation of vowel sounds and most consonants<br>Uses "please" and "thank you" |
| 3 ½ to 6 years | Overuse of grammatical rules (breaked for broke)<br>Mastery of question form, negatives, embedded sentences (I know he took it) and indirect objects (She showed me her dress)<br>Increase vocabulary to 10,000 words or more<br>Mastery of pronunciation of difficult sounds "th", "r", "l", and some consonant clusters (**spr**ing, he**lps**)<br>Develops more advanced polite speech (May I please have…)<br>Speech becomes more adapted to listeners' needs and perspectives |
| 6 to 12 years | Metalinguistic awareness develops<br>Understanding of humor (puns), sarcasm<br>Develop ability to "code-switch" between dialects or styles, and appreciate what speech style "says" about a speaker<br>Mastery of passive form (Was he hit by the rock?)<br>Mastery of pronoun reference links (Bob was…He)<br>Narrative (story telling) skills continue to develop |

_____

(Adapted from Berk, 1996; Berko-Gleason, 1997; Kephart, 2003; Klass, 1999)

*The previous table shows AVERAGE accomplishments at each age, but there is enormous variability, well within the normal range.  So how do you know if language development is lagging behind enough to worry?*

You may worry if a child cannot:
- By 15 months – use at least 1 word (90% of children say their first word by this age)
- By 18 months – use at least 3 words, or point to desired objects
- By 21 months – point to one body part when asked
- By 24 months – use at least 6 words, or identify 2 items in a picture by pointing
- By 2 ½ years – use 50 words or use two-word combinations
- By age 3 – be understood by strangers at least half the time, use longer than two-word phrases; use
  prepositions (in, on); or carry on a 2 or 3 sentence conversation
- By age 4 – use any grammatical endings like "ing" or "ed", or speak in short sentences
- By age 5 – tell a short story, talk about the past and future, and ask questions

(Eisenberg, Murkoff, & Hathaway, 1996; Whitehouse, 1999)
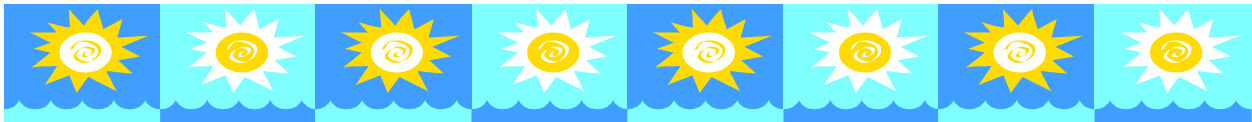
# Phonological development

As you saw in the table of developmental milestones, the baby's vocal productions are limited to crying.  From there we move to cooing (vowel sounds) and then to babbling (consonant sounds), as well as growls, "raspberries", and more.  But controlling the coordination of the tongue, lips, palate, and the rest of the "vocal apparatus" is pretty tricky business and takes time and lots of practice to master.

Most children over age 3 or 4 can make all the basic speech sounds clearly enough for you to understand them.  However, children make predictable errors, which include:

**Substitutions:**  substituting one sound for another (if one is easier for them to say, especially in the context of the rest of the word).   Ledo for Yellow, Free for Three, Berry for Very, Yook for Look, Wuv for Love, Wabbit for Rabbit.  Gug for Bug (assimilation error), Boon for Moon, Titty for Kitty.

**Simplifying consonant clusters:**  dropping out one or more consonants or substituting one.  Ting for String, Pasketti for Spaghetti, Nake for Snake, Heps for Helps, Bwoo for Blue.

**Deletions:**  Deleting a sound.  Dow for down, Boo for Book, Boon for Balloon.

**Additions:**  Adding a sound.  Giraffez for Giraffes.

**Duplications**:  Repeating a sound/syllable.  Baba for Bottle, Wahwah for Water.

Some of these errors are made by children who can say the same sounds perfectly well in other words.  For example, my son could say *vacuum* but not *very* (he said *berry*), and *yell* but not *yellow* (*ledo*).  In addition, some children are very cautious, and won't say a word until they can say all the sounds well, whereas other children are adventurous and attempt all kinds of words.  My son made lots of errors because he tried every word, including *absorbent*, *usually*, *apparently*, *otherwise*, *San Francisco*, and even (on a dare from his dad), *Vladivostok*.  At age 5, he said "the, this, that" correctly, but still frequently said "fumb, fink, fanks, and fing".  And he was within the normal range, believe it or not, for the "th" sounds, and so are other 5-year-olds who still have trouble with "r's".
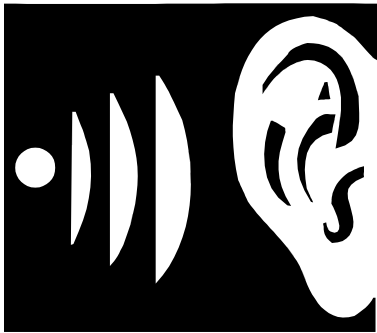
What should we do about these typical mistakes?  When a child consistently mispronounces a word, it may be tempting to either correct them every time, or to break down and just use the child's pronunciation yourself.   However, children usually know (hear) the correct pronunciation, they just can't reproduce it themselves. They can become frustrated with continued correction or if adults don't use the appropriate pronunciation (and only mimick them).

*Training activity:  Ask ECEs to give you examples of these kinds of pronunciation errors.*

## Semantic Development – Learning What Words Mean

Around the age of one year, babies finally produce their first "real" words.  A "real" word does not necessarily sound like an adult word, but it has a true symbolic function – in other words, it stands for something else.  So the baby that babbles "dada" over and over, whether daddy is there or not, is not producing a "real" word, whereas the baby that says "Ga! " whenever it sees a dog, and only when it sees a dog, is producing a "real" word.

Those first words represent a critical "breakthrough" in language development.  In the early days of word use, children seem to learn slowly, but then somewhere between 18 and 24 months, vocabulary development often hits a growth spurt we often call "the naming explosion".  Toddlers now know that everything has a name, and may constantly demand that you tell them what those names are!  "Dat" they demand, or "Wasdah?" they question.

11

> "For children growing up in English-speaking families, rapid English vocabulary acquisition is the rule: According to George Miller (1976; 1987), between ages 1 and 17 children add 13 words per day to their growing vocabulary, adding up to around 80,000 words by the time they are 17, and very little of this is achieved with the help of teachers or dictionaries. Vocabulary acquisition happens most easily in context and related to topics that children care about. The teacher's responsibility lies mainly in setting up exposure to language in a vivid way and encouraging reading of material that children care about." (Lilly Wong Fillmore & Catherine E. Snow, 2000)

Vocabulary is closely tied to cognitive development – children's understanding of the concepts that words stand for. When we talk with children, we should know that they don't necessarily use or understand words in the same way we do. In their productive vocabulary, children often make errors, such as:

❖ **Overextensions** – when they use a word to apply to more objects than it should – like calling a cow a dog.

❖ **Underextensions**, when they don't use a word in as many contexts as they should – they don't understand the full range of meaning – calling only their own dog "doggie", but not other dogs.

❖ **Literal interpretations,** instead of figural meanings**.** Asking, "Why don't you hop off the bed and get your cup?" caused my son to literally bunny-hop off his bed and across the room, and when I told him to "Chill out" one day, he responded angrily, "I am already warm. You're the one who is not warm". And when I told him I had bought him some new Fall shoes, he tried them on and proudly told me, "I don't fall!"

❖ **Phonological errors** – interpreting a word to mean something that it sounds somewhat like, e.g., "jury" becomes "jewelry".

❖ **Mismatches -** when the child's definition doesn't really capture the adult meaning, although it may have one similar feature. For example, one child said he wanted "the old cookies" instead of the "new cookies" (his mother had told him she wanted him to hold a new blankie while she washed his old one – therefore new became unwanted and old became wanted). And my son told me that some dressy, lace-up shoes I had gotten him were "too wise" (they made him look too grown up?).

❖ **Invented words** – If a child does not have a word to specifically describe something, they will combine or change words they do know; e.g., *plant man* for gardener, *yesternight* for last night, *unheavy* for lightweight, or *brooming* for sweeping (Pan & Berko Gleason, 1997).

Some words that might seem easy to understand can be problematic for preschool children. Children have difficulty with certain prepositions (e.g., "in front of/behind"), adjectives (e.g., "more/less"), adverbs (e.g. "before/after", "-ly" forms), pronouns (e.g., "this/that") verbs ("ask/tell"; "know/think/guess"), and nouns (distinctions between "lie" and "mistake"). Then there are words that children may use fairly appropriately ("yesterday"), but they don't fully understand the concepts behind them (the one day just before today, rather than any random day in the past). Children's understanding and use of words expressing kinship relations (uncle, niece), relative terms (big/little, older/younger), time and number terms (tomorrow, many, few, several) and abstract terms (truth, responsibility) develop into the school years (Walker, 1994).

Vocabulary learning happens so fast that children often "fast map" a word meaning from hearing it only once in context, but this quick definition is primitive and will need to be refined. Hearing the word more often, and in more contexts, will accomplish this. For example, my son and I were reading a picture book about two coyote friends, and it said on one page "Frank and Melanie had a lot in common". Later in the book, he said to me, "Frank is in common!". I couldn't understand what he meant until I looked back at the earlier page, and realized the two pages had the same illustration background – with pictograph symbols on the canyon walls. When he heard "in common", he must have thought that common was the name of the place. And my when my nephew said that he went and played in "backtierland", we realized that he thought "Frontierland" was the "front" playground – so the other playground behind the school must be on the "Backtier".

> *Training activity: Ask ECEs for examples of word errors that children make and words that children have invented. If they don't provide many, use your own examples. Point out to them the kinds of creative thinking that children are doing when making some of these mistakes, and how their role is to praise those efforts while gently nudging children toward more sophisticated, adult-like conceptions.*

## Syntactic and grammatical development: Putting words together

As soon as children start putting two words together, they use "grammar". They usually use correct word order, saying things like "More cookie", instead of "cookie more", and "Mommy go" instead of "Go mommy" (when trying to say that mommy is going or has gone somewhere). When they start combining more than two words, we call it **telegraphic speech**, because they include only the most informative words and leave out the words with less meaning, almost as if they were being charged by the word (like you were in the days of telegrams). So "Mommy has gone to work" becomes "Mommy go work"; and "The dog jumped on the bed" becomes "Dog jump bed". Children gradually add in those less informative words, like prepositions and articles, over their third and fourth years (Tager-Flusberg, 1997).

Two grammatical forms that emerge during preschool, and develop in predictable sequences, are the QUESTION and the NEGATIVE.

**Questions**: It takes a while before children learn to ask questions in an adult-like way Step 1 of this process is to simply use questioning intonation: Mommy is tired? Later, children omit the helping verbs and ask things like "Where daddy go?". Next, they may include the helping verb but not switch it around correctly, as in "Where daddy is going?" Finally, they can invert the subject and helping verb, asking questions such as "Where is daddy going? Young children usually find questions with what, where, and who easier to ask and easier to answer than questions with how, why, and when (Tager-Flusberg, 1997).

**Negatives**: Negatives also develop in predictable stages. Children usually start by just putting no in front of the sentence: "No mommy do it". Later, they will move the negative word inside the sentence, as in "I no like it", and finally they will use negatives in adult-like ways, "I don't like it". Negatives are also more difficult to understand than affirmatives, even when they are fairly simple (e.g., Didn't I ask you to pick up the blocks? vs. Did I ask you to pick up the blocks?), and when you add another negative in the same question, it can become downright impossible to answer (e.g., Didn't I tell you not to do that?). Children at certain ages appear to ignore the negative, and the louder the command is yelled, the more likely they are to do exactly what you are asking them not to – the louder you get, the less able they are to inhibit their actions. e.g., "don't run into the street!!" becomes "run into the street, now, as fast as you can!" (Berk, 1996). So it is better to use an affirmative, when possible – "Stop!" "Come back" "Turn around!"

**Children's Grammatical Errors**. Some grammatical errors, known as over-regularizations or creative errors, not only show us what children have problems with, but also show us how much they have learned about grammar! "He teached us how to fly a kite". "We singed". "She letted us paint", "I beed good". "Three mouses". When children take an irregular verb or noun and make it conform to the regular rule – add ed for past tense, add s for plural, it shows they have learned the rule, and is very common in children from age 3 through 6! And it won't easily go away with correction, "It's not beed, it's was!". Instead, research shows that children develop grammar more quickly if their ungrammatical statements are responded to with a modeling of the correct form, such as "We singed today". "Oh, you sang today? What did you sing?".

(From Tager-Flusberg, 1997)

*Training activity:  Ask teachers to come up with examples of grammatical errors or primitive "sentences" that they have heard from their children.  Then ask them how they can respond without explicit correction/negative feedback.*

## Pragmatic development – Using language with others

Every utterance has three components, the **illocutionary force** (the speaker's intent – what was meant), the **locutionary act** (what was actually said), and the **perlocutionary effect** (how it causes the listener to respond).   If I say to you, "Give me that pencil", it will probably have a different effect than "Would you mind handing me that pencil" or "I don't seem to have anything to write with" even though my intent in all cases was the same (Warren & McCloskey, 1997).

When adults have conversations, we follow several "unspoken" rules.  For example, we try to be polite, we try to take turns, we try to be informative (we give them enough information to understand what we are saying, but not too much extraneous detail), and we try to be relevant, making our comments relate to what the other person has said.  But all this is not easy, even for many adults! Being informative means adjusting to our "conversational partner's" knowledge and point of view.  What do they already know?  Were they there when the event happened?  Can they see what we see?  Being relevant means that you need to stay on topic, or warn your listener if you are going to switch.
Children don't know all these unspoken rules, and it takes pretty sophisticated cognitive, social, and language skills to follow them, especially because adults don't know or teach them directly!  So it helps to understand a few of these pragmatic principles and concepts.

### What you ask is what you get
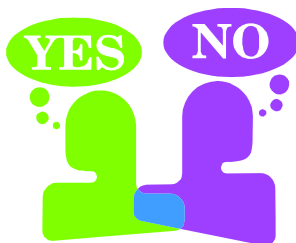
**➤ Yes/No** questions usually get yes or no answers from children, regardless of the questioner's intent.  Children often fail to appreciate the underlying intentions of those who ask indirect questions such as "**Can you** show me what happened?", or "**Do you know** what that is called?"  For example, one child who was answering by just shaking and nodding her head was told, "We need you to answer our questions nice and loud.  Say 'yes' or 'no'", to which she responded by saying, loudly, "Yes or no!"  Yes/No questions are sometimes inefficient because they must be followed up by many more yes/no questions or by a more open-ended question or request to obtain desired information.  They also limit the child's responses to one-word, which does not encourage nice narrative descriptions.

❥ **Wh-questions** (questions including forms of the words Who, What, Where, When, Why, Which, and How) are somewhat more open-ended than yes/no questions. Although Wh-questions call for a broader range of responses, not all Wh-questions would be considered open-ended. For example, many of the Wh-questions asked, especially of younger children, call for one word answers (e.g., "What do you call that part of your body?" What color is this?).
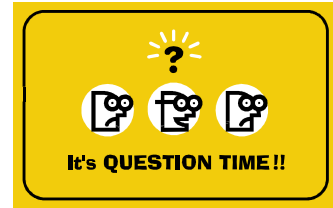
❥ **Open-ended questions** (questions such as "What did it look like?"). It is important to try to ask open-ended questions that ask for children's narratives – their own words about what they know or what they remember. Even though young children don't give very detailed answers in response to open-ended questions, they do give longer answers to open-ended questions than to closed-ended questions. Furthermore, we, as parents and teachers, ask many questions that may appear silly to some children- because it is clear that we already know the answers. Some call these "test questions" (What color is it? What is that called? What day did that happen? Who ate that cookie?). Because of this, children may assume we ALWAYS know the answers, so rather than divulging information they know, they try to guess what we want to hear. To avoid this, we can ask questions or make statements such as, "I'd like to know as much as you can tell me about what happened at school today". I know, I know – you ask a child "What did you do at school today?" or even "What did you eat for lunch?" and you are likely to get "nothing" as a response. One strategy for dealing with the "I don't know" response is to make your question a bit more specific: "What was the BEST thing that you did today at school?" and then follow up with "tell me more about that" or "what else happened" or "then what happened?"

**Timing and Turn-Taking**

Children are usually skilled turn-takers when it comes to conversations (if not with toys or games). Even infants engage in "dialogues" with their parents, taking turns vocalizing, babbling, then being quiet while mom says something, back and forth. However, because children have limited productive language skills, they may take longer to form a response to your question than you might expect. Thus, adults often end up dominating conversations with children, asking "rapid fire" questions and assuming any pause of greater than 1 second means the child is being unresponsive to the question. Adults are generally uncomfortable with silence, and attempt to fill it. But if you are trying to get a child to tell you what they know, you must sometimes wait and simply endure the silence. As an example – I went to pick up my son one day. His little friend, Kate, was climbing on the castle, and I asked her "How are you doing today?" Simple question, but I got no response, and after a few seconds, I assumed I would never get one. But after she had climbed back around to where I was, she said, enunciating very clearly, "I am doing fine". Even adults when describing a story or event need time to organize their thoughts.
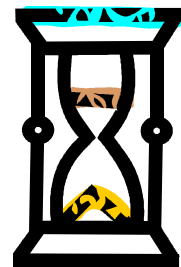
**Speech styles and Dialects** – Why we talk the way we do, and why we change how we talk in different situations.

- ▣ **Dialect** - a version of a language that is (pretty much) understandable by all speakers of that language, even though it differs in certain features (pronunciation, some vocabulary items, some grammatical rules). The dialect has its own, valid rules to follow, they just aren't necessarily the same ones followed by speakers of the "standard" dialect (or what we might call the mainstream or "school" dialect). For example, in "Southern American English", the word "pen" is pronounced more like "pin", whereas in other dialects it can sound more like "pan". And of course we have in Standard American English "isn't", and in Southern "ain't", and "You" (plural) versus "Y'all". Although we can (mostly) understand speakers from other regions (I do have big trouble in Boston), these differences in speech style say something about who we are (men or women), what we do (lawyer or farmer), and where we are from. Unfortunately, these differences are also used to make other kinds of unwarranted judgments about people – like how smart they are. These differences can wind up being important when it comes to school performance. That's why we can't ignore the Ebonics controversy.

- ▣ **African-American English or Vernacular** (AAE), Black English (BE), or Ebonics - even though all these terms are a bit misleading – BE shares many features of "Southern" dialect, so many non-Blacks speak it, and not all Blacks do. The reason BE has caused such a controversy is that many people think it is just a sloppy, incorrect version of Standard English (SE) – that BE speakers are just violating the rules of SE. Instead, BE has its own rules for pronunciation and grammar. These rules are equally complex and valid as the rules of SE. For example, take the negative. In SE, a child might protest, "I haven't done anything!", marking the negative only on the verb. In BE, the negative is marked twice, "I ain't done nothing!". Although the BE version is not "correct" in SE, it is actually a more complicated rule to follow than the SE rule, and so does not show a lack of ability to learn rules of grammar. The problem comes when speakers of a vernacular dialect come up against teachers who speak SE or a different dialect, as in the following example from Smitherman (1977, pp. 217-218).

> **Student** (excitedly): Miz Jones, you remember that show you tole us about? Well me and my momma' nem-
>
> **Teacher** (interrupting with a "warm" smile): Bernadette, start again. I'm sorry, but I can't understand you.
>
> **Student** (confused): Well, it was that show, me and my momma-
>
> **Teacher** (interrupting again, still with that "warm" smile): Sorry, I still can't understand you.
>
> (Student, now silent, even more confused than ever, looks at floor, says nothing.)

**Teacher**: Now Bernadette, first of all, it's *Mrs.* Jones, not *Miz* Jones. And you know it was an *exhibit*, not a *show*. Now, haven't I explained to the class over and over again that you always put yourself last when you are talking about a group of people and yourself doing something? So, therefore, you should say what?

**Student**: My momma and me-

**Teacher** (exasperated): No! My mother and I. Now start again, this time right.

**Student**: Aw, that's okay, it wasn't nothin.

In an ideal world, teachers would understand and appreciate different languages and dialects. But in the real world, the speech patterns valued in school are often very different from the speech patterns that children use at home and in their communities (Fillmore & Snow, 2000).

▣ **Code-switching.** Children who typically speak in one dialect or one style can and do use different styles in different situations. Even very young children talk differently to babies and adults than they do to each other. As adults we talk differently to our bosses and our friends. A similar kind of code-switching can occur when BE speaking children start seeing the differences between their own speech and that used in the classroom. However, it takes a few years to become skilled at code-switching. In the meantime, children's language and academic development is better served by supporting and respecting their home languages and dialects. Furthermore, the goal is not to eradicate all other ways of speaking and to replace them with SE. Other dialects and styles serve valuable functions for self and group identity (Warren & McCloskey, 1997).

▣ **Politeness.** Related to code-switching is the ability to adapt your speech to higher status people or in more formal contexts. Adults expend great effort in teaching children to be polite, but development of polite speech forms is a gradual process, continuing well into the school years. Children usually start by adding some polite words, such as "please" and "thank you", to their otherwise impolite speech (Give me more milk…please?). Over time, they learn that they need to make their requests even more indirect (May I have more milk, please?; Warren & McCloskey, 1997). Children's understanding of indirect requests takes a while to develop, too. What happens when a 4-year-old answers the phone?



    Caller: Is your mother at home?
    Child: Yes. (long pause).
    Caller: May I speak to her?
    Child: Yes. (long pause)
    Caller: Could you please ask her to come to the phone?
    Child: Okay.

*Training activity: Ask ECEs to come up with many different ways of making the same request. Write down their suggestions, then ask them to order these from least to most polite. Discuss the fact that polite requests are sometimes so indirect that they are too vague for children to "get" ("It's getting awfully loud in here" or "This center is messy"). Finally, ask them to think of ways to teach politeness. Hint – several appear in the strategy list in this manual.*

## Narrative Development

### Narratives, extended discourse, and decontextualized language

As children get older, they start putting all their language skills together to form narratives, or connected "stories" about past or even imaginary events. To produce cohesive narratives that other people can understand, children need to be able to properly produce speech sounds, use varied vocabulary and grammatical forms, and adapt their speech to their audience. In other words, they must combine phonological, semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic skills.

Narrative skills become critical as children approach school age and the task of learning to read and write. Narratives are more removed from the immediate, here and now context (decontextualized language) and better connected in logical sequence. This is the kind of language that children will read about in books and to write – stories or explanations about facts and events that are not part of their immediate experience, and that they may never directly experience at all. For example, children will read and write about life in other countries, space exploration, and historical events.

McCabe and Rollins (1994) describe the development of personal narratives as follows:
- 2 year olds usually produce very short narratives which focus on negative events (e.g., getting hurt). For example, "I hurt my leg."
- By 3.5 years of age, children tend to combine two events in a narrative, but not more. For example, "I hurt my leg when I was at Grandma's house".
- At 4, children discuss more than 2 events but they do not tell them in the correct chronological order ('leap frog narratives'). For example, "I have a cast on my leg and I fell out of the tree at Grandma's house."
- By the age of 5, children tell their stories in the correct chronological order but they tend to end these stories abruptly ('end-at-high-point narratives'). "I went to grandma's house and climbed a tall tree and lost my balance".
- By the age of 6 children can tell 'classic narratives'; they can let listeners know most aspects of an event, including who was involved, when it happened and where the event took place. "I was at my grandma's house and climbed a tall tree. Then I fell and broke my leg and had to get a cast."

Two year-olds' narratives may consist of "centering heaps", meaning that although the statements relate in some way, there is not really a story line or time or causal connection between sentences.  For example,

> The doggie go "woof."  The cow go "moo." The man ride tractor – "bpt-bpt-bpt."

Later, children will have "centering sequences" with a more focused, ordered story,     such as,

> I ate a hamburger (mimes eating).  Mommy threw the ball, like this.  Daddy took me swimming (moves hands, acts silly).  I had two sodas.

Between 3 and 5-years-old, children start to arrange their narratives in logical sequence.

> We went to the parade.  There was a big elephant.  And tanks (moves arm like turret).  The drum was loud.  There was a clown in a little car (hand gestures "little").  And I got a balloon.  And we went home.

Notice that this child added a couple of "connectives" between ideas, in this case "and".  It is typical for "and" to be the first connective use, and it may be the only one used for a while, until "And then" emerges!

Finally, children will start to follow a "story script", starting with a clear beginning providing the characters and setting, then a logically sequenced and causally connected series of events, and some sort of ending.  Children will learn the "conventional linguistic devices" for storytelling, including beginnings ("Once upon a time, One time, Guess what happened to me, One day), a variety of connectives (and, and then, then, because, so, but), and clear endings (And so that's the end, that's what happened, all done).

(Above examples from Owens, 2005, pp. 275-276).

# Part II:

## Research background in brief
## The language skills and experiences of children from low-income families

Children from low-income families differ from their peers in many aspects of language development (Dickinson & Tabors, Hart & Risley, 1995, Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Differences in vocabulary size and in the ability to tell cohesive stories (narrative skills) are especially troubling, because these are well-documented to be related to later reading skills (Dickinson & Tabors, 2001, Lonigan, 2006, Snow et al., 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001).

Language experience seems to play a central role in the "income gap" in children's language skills. For too many children, growing up in poverty doesn't just mean having fewer financial resources, but fewer language "resources" as well, both at home and in out-of-home environments.

> "We have long known that children differ greatly in when they begin to learn language and how fast they learn once they begin. Some [children begin] to learn words with a learning trajectory that [takes off] like a small rocket. But other children, who may have even begun to say words at about the same age, [are] much slower to get off the ground, and their trajectories [are] forever in the shadow of the other children. Why?...The basic finding is that children who learn fewer words also have fewer experiences with words in interaction with other persons, and they are also children growing up in less economically advantaged homes" (Lois Bloom, in a foreword to Hart & Risley, 1995/2002, p. xiv-xv).

In fact, Hart and Risley (1995/2002) found that children from professional homes heard on average 2153 words per hour (range 1019 – 3504), compared to 1251 for children from working class homes (range 143 – 3618) and only 616 for children in welfare homes (range 231 -947). The differences in how many words they heard seemed to translate into how many different words they could use for themselves – at age 3, the vocabularies for children from professional families averaged over 1000 words, compared to 700 for working class and 500 for welfare families. And more importantly, the gap widened with age – it was already evident at 18 months and got larger over time. Hart and Risley estimated the gap would be around *3000 words* by kindergarten entry.

   Besides amount of sheer talking to their children, there were other differences between parents whose children quickly developed large vocabularies and those whose children developed more slowly.  Some of the following "experience quality" measures were even more closely related than SES to IQ at age 3, vocabulary growth, and vocabulary use:

• Language diversity (talking in many different settings and during different activities, and naming and describing a greater variety of objects and their attributes – using different words, and using words in different contexts).

• Feedback tone (overall affect, positive and negative feedback, praise, approval, criticism, discouragement and encouragement)—more positive tones highly related to later language development and IQ).  According to Hart & Risley, parent feedback may encourage or discourage a child's participation in language learning.

• Symbolic emphasis (how much of child's language experience deals with relation between things and events?  Richness of nouns, modifiers, and past-tense verbs a child heard).

• Guidance style (relative amount of prompting a child experiences, how often the child is asked rather than told what to do – parents' prompts suggest a more appropriate behavior, or a more correct label or sentence structure and ask the child to choose the more mature form, e.g., Can you, Do you, Shall we, Is it, are they? – rather than imperatives).

• Responsiveness (relative amount of a child's experience with controlling the course of interaction).  Parent responsiveness reflects a parent's interest in supporting and encouraging a child's practice and the parent's appreciation of, and adaptation to, the child's current skill and choice of topic (zone of proximal development).

   More recent studies have confirmed some of Hart and Risley's findings.  Weizman and Snow (2001) found that the low-income mothers they studied used "common words" (the 3000 most frequent English words) **99%** of the time.  But the mothers who used more rare words and embedded them in instructive/helpful interactions had children with larger vocabularies in kindergarten and second grade.  Pan, Rowe, Singer, and Snow (2005) also found that vocabulary development in children from low-income families was faster if their mothers used more diverse language and had better language and literacy skills.

## Language Environments in Early Childhood Settings

Clearly, there are enormous differences between the home language environments of children from low-income and middle-income families. Perhaps even more disturbing is that fact that these differences are not likely to be offset by the language experiences children tend to have in out-of-home care. Most child care programs, *especially* those that serve low-income children, do not provide enriching language environments. For example, Bryant, Burchinal, Lau, & Sparling (1994) used the ECERS in Head Start classrooms and found that mean scores were lowest in the areas of language and literacy. The average score was 3.76 on a scale of 1 to 7, where 5 might be considered "good".

In a large-scale national study of child care quality and its impact on children's development (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000), researchers concluded that settings serving low-income children do not provide adequate support for language



In the Harvard Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (HSLLD), Dickinson and Tabors (2001) found that the reading was rare; preschool teachers spent less than 8 minutes reading per day (on average), and only 4% of the teachers read more than 20 minutes per day. Children spent far more time in transitions than they did reading books. Furthermore, children and teachers did not spend enough time engaged in conversation. For example, during free-play activities, close to sixty percent of 4-year-olds did not talk at all (Dickinson & Sprague, 2002).

In follow-up research, observers spent two full days in Head Start classrooms in New England in the fall and again the following spring. In ¼ to 1/3 of these classrooms, reading was never observed on either day in fall or spring. When teachers did read, they spent on average only 2 ½ minutes. Reading to individuals or small groups was rare; in fact, it *never* occurred in more than half of all classrooms. The language quality of these classrooms was rated using the ELLCO. Teacher support for oral language was low quality in 26%, basic in 45%, and high quality in only 29% (Dickinson & Sprague, 2002).

But the good news from the HSLLD study was that when children were immersed in high quality preschool language environments, they performed significantly better on tests of vocabulary and narrative development. In fact, it appeared that having a high quality preschool language environment was even more important than having a high quality home language environment (Tabors, Dickinson, & Snow, 2001). Many features of the language environment were important for language growth and later literacy, but a few stood out. These included the teachers' use of rare words, how often teachers extended children's comments and engaged them in "cognitively challenging" conversations, the teachers' ability to limit what they said and allow children to talk, the quality of teacher-child conversations about books, the amount of time that children spent in verbalized dramatic play, and the amount of time that children spent talking to each other (Dickinson & Sprague, 2002).

## Making a Difference:  Training Early Childhood Educators to Provide High Quality Language Environments

Paula Schwanenflugel and her colleagues (Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Bradley, Ruston, Neuharth-Pritchett, & Restrepo, 2005) had an ECEPD grant (Early Childhood Educator Professional Development) like our prior Early SUCCESS grant.  Theirs was dubbed "PAVEd for Success", referring to Phonological Awareness (PA) and Vocabulary Enhancement (VE). Thirty-seven public school Pre-K classrooms in Georgia participated.  Some of the teachers got training in only one area (PA *or* VE), others got both (PAVE), and some got neither (control). Vocabulary enhancement training included both implicit and explicit practices – meaning that some practices were more indirect (talking more with children and reading books interactively) while others directly focused on introducing new vocabulary words (didactic-interactive book reading with a focus on selected vocabulary words, and an activity designed to teach new vocabulary words).  Training involved 3 days of PD before school started followed by biweekly classroom visits over a 15-week period.  The program had very little effect on expressive vocabulary (EVT scores), but significant effects on receptive vocabulary (PPVT-III scores).  Children improved more when they had teachers who used more of the practices they were trained on (both implicit and explicit, but especially the explicit).

Wasik, Bond, & Hindman (2006) worked with 16 Head Start classrooms, training the teachers in 10 of those classrooms to use two types of language enhancing strategies.  One was an interactive book reading technique that focused on teaching new vocabulary, asking open-ended questions, and making connections.  The other, oral language training, included practicing and promoting active listening (teachers listening to children and children listening to teachers and other children), modeling rich language (using diverse vocabulary and more detailed descriptions and explanations), and providing feedback (narrating ongoing activities, recasting and expanding children's speech, and asking open-ended questions).  Over a 9 month period, training was conducted once a month for 2 hours in a group, but within a week of each training session, the strategies were modeled in each teacher's classroom.  Teachers were given 2 weeks to practice; then they were observed and given feedback.  Children whose teachers used these practices showed significant improvements in both receptive and expressive vocabulary.

### *Valuable Lessons*

The great news is that both of these training programs resulted in significant gains in teacher's practices and in children's vocabulary skills.  But we need to pay very close attention to the problems that both Schwanenflugel et al. (2005) and Wasik et al. (2006) encountered. Briefly, both found initial resistance to some of the practices and Schwanenflugel 's teachers showed a tendency to drop practices they deemed to be time consuming or demanding when the intervention period was over (second half of the school year).

For example, teachers had reservations about finding the time for small group reading and for one-on-one conversations.  Most eventually "translated" the interactive book reading techniques into large group times.  Many teachers abandoned the practice of selecting theme or book-based target vocabulary words to focus on each week and developing activities to extend the vocabulary learning.

Wasik et al. (2006, p. 72) said,

"There are challenges in trying to change the way teachers talk with children. Often the culture of Head Start classrooms specifically and preschool classrooms in general is to keep order and manage the classroom. Unfortunately, this goal is often translated into teachers communicating with children in ways that do not encourage children to talk. Instead, a premium is placed on children listening and following directions. In this study, teachers were initially reluctant to ask questions of children and allow them to talk. In general, teachers were concerned that the children would become unruly and that talking would lead to chaos….."

"When attempting to change the way in which teachers verbally interact with children, one needs to invest considerable time in working closely with the teachers. Teachers need the opportunities to have the desired behaviors modeled and to have time to practice these behaviors. Without feedback on their behaviors, teachers could be implementing the strategies ineffectively but would not know this. Having trainers available to observe and provide feedback helped most teachers implement the strategies with fidelity."

"In addition, training teachers in why they should be doing something is equally as important as showing them what they need to do. Having the conceptual knowledge about why conversation and book reading strategies are important influenced teachers to change their behaviors…. Before teachers will adopt a new approach, they need to have a clear understanding of children and why the strategies are effective."

Head Start and Public Pre-K teachers are not the only ones resistant to change!. In Early SUCCESS, we found that many of our infant and toddler teachers did not seem to understand the need to talk to these very young children. Therefore, in the next section, we will present the rationale for "baby-talk".

### *Facilitating language development: The truth about baby-talk (or, don't throw the baby-talk out with the bath water)*

→ What is **Babytalk**? Technically, it's the way babies themselves talk, with childishly pronounced words (Wawa, Baba) and short, simplified sentences that leave out words unimportant to the main message (Want wawa, Mommy go work).

→ Babytalk has gotten a bad reputation. You've probably heard that you shouldn't use babytalk. And even in the High/Scope literature, recommendations are to avoid babytalk. But, strictly speaking, babytalk is not the way we speak TO babies. The speech addressed to babies and young children is more correctly referred to as Motherese, Parentese, Caretaker speech, Infant-Directed Speech, or I think most generally, **Child-Directed Speech** (CDS). (Bohannon & Bonvillian, 1997). CDS is a better name because all adults, whether they are parents or not (yes, even men) use CDS when speaking to young children. Even children use CDS when talking to younger children! CDS has been recorded in 4 year olds talking to 2 year olds.

→ How is **CDS different from Babytalk**? When we speak to children, we don't usually use their word pronunciation (although we do sometimes), and even though we simplify our sentences, we don't do it they same way they do -- We don't say "Mommy go work", but perhaps we say "Mommy is going to work"

→ **Should you use babytalk** when you talk to babies?. Yes! Research shows that babies prefer listening to babytalk over adult speech. It gets and holds their attention better, too. And the exaggerated intonation patterns and rhythms seem to help babies grasp the different sounds better.

→ How about using babytalk **with older children**? Don't use "babytalk" but you should use CDS. Using CDS does NOT delay language development, as you might have heard. Instead, research shows that some     aspects of CDS actually help young children to learn language. For example: 1) the higher pitch and exaggerated intonation of CDS gets and keeps children's attention better ; 2) speed - it's slower than the way we talk to other adults, and has longer pauses between sentences, so it is easier to process; 3) simplicity of the words and the grammar - we use more concrete words and shorter, less complex sentence structures; 4) better enunciation/articulation than adult-adult speech makes it easier to pick out the distinct words and sounds; 5) greater emphasis/stress placed on the most meaningful words within sentences (e.g., nouns, verbs) and 6) redundancy/repetition - gives children more exposure.

→ In addition, research shows that parents and other adults "fine-tune" their speech to the level of the child's understanding. They tend to talk at a level just a bit more complex than the child, and as the child's language develops, adults increase the complexity of their own language to the child. **Perfect teaching strategy, without consciously trying!** And it is done quickly and virtually automatically, as long as an adult is actively interacting – listening to and watching the child's "cues".

→ There are cultural differences in attitudes about "baby-talk". Some people believe there's no point in talking to a child until they can talk back, and that baby-talk or CDS is "silly" – especially asking questions they can't answer. You need to emphasize to teachers that you DON'T have to over-exaggerate the intonation or use the "precious" words and names, and that babies can learn valuable things about language when you simplify, slow-down, and enunciate clearly. You would do the latter things when speaking to an English Language Learner of any age.

# Part III

## "LEADing" the way in language development

The following strategies are based on the general principle of  LEADing.  This form of LEADing refers to how you will present and model strategies for the ECEs.

> **L = Label**
> **E = Explain**
> **A = Ask Questions**
> **D = Describe/Demonstrate   (Sandefur, 2005)**

ECEs can think of LEADing children's language development in another way:

> **L = Listen**
> **E = Elaborate and expand**
> **A = Ask open-ended questions**
> **D = Demonstrate rich language/Diversity**

In general, you will be encouraging ECEs to provide an enriching language environment that meets the following five markers (from Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003, p. 96)



⇨ **Responsiveness:  Does the caregiver or teacher respond when the child addresses her?**

⇨ **Positive emotion:  Does she respond with a smile and a positive disposition?**

⇨ **Does the teacher have the attention of the children?  Is she talking about things the children are interested in?**

⇨ **Expansions:  is the teacher asking questions and building on the children's talk?**

⇨ **Reading:  Is the room filled with written material and books?  Does the teacher read to the children?**

# IDEAS FOR SUPPORTING ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

**Strategies appropriate for all ages:**

♔ **Sing songs** from CD's, videos, and TV commercials, chant nursery and other rhymes (pat-a-cake, for example), and make up repeated, rhythmic language with children to help them develop oral fluency.

♔ **Expand and elaborate upon** whatever young children say. If a baby says, "baba" you can say, "Yes, it's time for your bottle". If a child says, "Doggie" when seeing a picture of a dog in a book, you might say, "Yes, that's a big brown dog, isn't it?"  If a 4-year-old says "That's a deer" You can say "Yes, that's a doe, that's a female deer, and she's with her baby, the fawn."

♔  **Ask open-ended questions.**   With babies and young children, you can ask simple questions such as "Where's the dog?  What is that?  What color is the apple?  With older children, you can ask more challenging questions that require longer responses, such as "What happened at the end of the story?  Where did you go yesterday?  What did you see at the zoo?"

♔  **Encourage give and take.**  For example, if a child is getting dressed you can ask, "What do we put on next?" rather than saying "Put on those pants".  When adults dominate interactions and use too many commands and instructions, children's vocabulary development is slowed (Rice, 1989).

♔  Give children the l**anguage to label their emotions**.  Look at pictures in books and label characters' emotions, have children guess the emotion you show with your face and body, have children become "feelings statues" in which they freeze their face in an emotion until a peer correctly guesses that emotion.

♔ **Use "event casts".**  An event cast is like a sports cast – you can be the play by play announcer and color commentator.  You can talk about what the children are doing (Oh, I see you are building a big block tower.  You're picking up the big red block now).  Or you can talk about what you are doing.  The general rule is **talk** about what you're going to do, **talk** while you're doing it, and afterward, **talk** about what you did!  "Oh, it's time to change your diaper.  Up you go!  Now, let's take off that shirt."  Event casts are especially useful in problem-solving situations.  For example, during a cooking activity, you could narrate, "Hmm, the recipe says we need 1 cup of milk.  Okay, I am pouring the milk into the measuring cup.  Now I have one cup.  Now I'll pour it in the bowl and mix it up".  But a note of caution – do this sparingly, or you will end up dominating the language environment (Bunce & Watkins, 1995)

🏆  **Use routine and transition times (e.g., snacks, diapering, lining up, cleaning up) as language enrichment opportunities!**  Research shows that a huge proportion of any day is spent on routine care and transitions. With younger children, these routines are a chance for one-on-one conversations!

🏆  **Have a predictable schedule and classroom routines.** Familiar routines help children learn what is expected and the words and phrases used in those settings.  For example, children learn to respond with "I'm here" when the teacher does "roll call", or to say their name when the teacher asks who the "line leader" or the "lunch helper" is that day.  Talk about what you are going to do before you do it ("What are we doing next?  Right, we're going outside.  Then we will come in and wash our hands.  Then we will eat lunch")  (Bunce & Watkins, 1995).

🏆 **Shake things up every once in a while so that children have to ask you for information or supplies.**  Put out the paper but no crayons; put out the juice but not the crackers.  Or leave off the day on the calendar or the names on the job chart.  Then wait and see if the children tell you what you "forgot"  (Bunce & Watkins, 1995).

🏆 Give children **time to talk to each other**.  Although it may seem silly, children can learn a lot about communication and language from talking and playing with one another.

🏆  **Prompt or redirect children to talk to each other**.  If a child comes to you and says "Billy won't give me the truck", redirect the child by saying, "Tell Billy, "It's my turn for the truck now", instead of speaking to Billy yourself.   Even if the child does not come to you for assistance, you can prompt the child to "Tell Billy "May I please have a turn?" (Bunce & Watkins, 1995).

🏆  **Model polite language in your own speech.**  But don't be so polite that children don't understand what you mean – e.g., say, "Please put away the blocks now so we can eat lunch" instead of "It's almost time for lunch now" (too indirect) or "Get those blocks picked up right now so we can eat!" (too direct).

🏆 **Talk to each child one-on-one**, every day.

🏆 **Read to children every day.**  We should **share books with babies as young as six weeks**!  Talking about simple concept books with babies helps develop their potential for language construction.  The labeling of pictures in books and the teacher's talk about the pictures is an important opportunity for young children.

♛ Use **wordless picture books** with children.  With babies and young toddlers, you can label the pictures and tell a short story about them.  With older children, you should demonstrate how you tell a story through the pictures, and then provide children opportunities to do their own storytelling in the reading center/library.  This is a valuable way to involve low literacy parent/caregivers in sharing books with their children.

♛ **Read books with new and "rare" words**, and talk about what those words mean.  With older children, before reading the book aloud, you can show a picture or an object that represents the new word, and ask "What is this?", or "What can I do with this _____?" or "Tell me what you know about this _____".  Then read the book and discuss the new vocabulary words when they occur.  (Wasik & Bond, 2001).

♛ **Reread books** so that children have *more* exposure to unfamiliar words.

♛ **Always relate books to children's lives**. Even if children are too young to reply to some of the questions and prompts recommended for reading aloud, we should relate the objects or story to the child's life.

| Teacher: | "Josephina, here's a jack-in-the-box in the picture!  You were playing with a jack-in-the-box this morning." |
|---|---|
| Teacher: | "Dylan, you broke your arm last month, too, just like Jackson in the story.  Jackson was riding his bike when he crashed; Dylan, would you tell us again how you broke your arm?" |

If the book is not about a topic which naturally relates to your children's lives, then point out the differences.

| Teacher: | "This book is about the desert.  The desert is hot and dry and does not have many tall green trees with leaves.  This doesn't look like it does outside here.  How is that different from where we live?" |
|---|---|

♛ Teachers need to **step into dramatic play** in centers to increase the language usage and extend/ enrich the interaction.  In the post office, pretend you are a customer needing to ship a package to Nashville.  Support them in their understandings of writing addresses, using stamps, exchanging money, etc.  In the grocery center, pretend that you are bringing in a shipment of produce and you need to know where to put the apples, bananas, oranges, etc.  In the restaurant, read the menu and have the children describe what they will be serving.  You don't need to stay for the entire play period, but it is good practice to step in, create language opportunities, then step out while the play continues.  With older children, you need to "step in" less often and "step out" more quickly.  Teachers need to set up language-rich dramatic play opportunities, but not dominate them.  Research by Pelligrini (1984; Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1989) found that having more adults around inhibited the pretend play of 3/12 to 5-year-olds, and having more peers around stimulated their play.  Children's language was richer and more  sophisticated when interacting with peers than when interacting with adults .  But In younger children (2-year-olds), social behavior and play were more sophisticated in the present of adults than in the presence of peers. (from Beginning reading and writing, Strickland, D.S. & Morrow, L.M. (2000)  In general, the more time spent in dramatic play, the better children are able to use language and literacy processes in later years (David Dickinson, Heads Up Reading, 2002).

🏆 Use **focused contrasts**.  When children seem to be "working on" developing a new  language form, then use two contrasting forms back to back in conversation with that child.  For example, if a child in the process of learning plurals is looking at picture of dogs, you might say, "There's one big *dog*, and one little *dog*.  There are two *dogs*".  For past and present tense, you might say "Look, she's *jumping* on the trampoline.  She's having fun *jumping*!  She *jumped* yesterday, too.  She *jumped* for a long time (Bunce & Watkins, 1995)

🏆 **Restate "child dialect."**  Children are not developmentally prepared to analyze the difference between their "child dialect" and the adult conventional form.  When children use "child dialect," just repeat back to them what they said in conventional form.  For example, Child: "Jermaine . . . him don't never let me play!" Teacher:  "Jermaine doesn't ever let you play?" or Child:  "Dat's fwog"  Teacher:  Yes, *th*at's a *fr*og!".

🏆 It takes time for children to formulate what they want to say.  Let's ensure that we give children plenty of **"wait time"** to construct what they want to say and then produce the language to communicate their message.

🏆 Perhaps most importantly, **we must be good listeners** and participate in "respectful communication" with young children.  Children will talk more in a safe environment that encourages and values their communications.  The more closely we listen, the more we can support their increasing language skills.

**Strategies most appropriate for younger children (infants and young toddlers):**

❖ "**Sing, coo, babble, smile, and laugh with babies during diapering, feeding, and play times**.  Let them know you notice them cooing and babbling to themselves.  Respond to their sounds and actions:  'You touched my nose, Carlos.  Now I'm going to touch your nose!'" (www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/babies.html, p. 3).

❖ **Label babies' and toddlers' body parts and encourage them to point in response**, during diapering, dressing, and the like.  "Where's your tummy?  Where's your nose?  Where are your eyes?  (Klass, 1999).

❖ **Go ahead, talk "baby talk" to babies**.  You can skip the "wah wah" and "bah bah", but use the high pitch, sing-song intonation, and slower pace. Babies prefer the higher pitch and sing-song intonation pattern.  It seems to get their attention, and the intonation contours (Good boy! vs NO!  Don't do that!) convey meaning to babies even before they can understand any of the words. The long drawn-out words and pauses between them, and greater stress on certain words, seem to help babies learn to segment the "speech stream" into smaller pieces (Sachs, 1997).

❖ **Have "conversations" with babies**.  Let them take their turns by cooing, smiling, burping, or however they can contribute!  Respond to their efforts by acting like they were telling you something quite important, "You don't say?"  "Well, my goodness". (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003).

❖ **"Point out sounds babies hear** indoors and outdoors.  'That was Inez banging spoons together.'  'A train just went by'  Did you hear that siren?" (www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/babies.html, p. 3).

❖ **"Give simple directions to babies** by using words and gestures, and by varying the expression on your face.  For example, a teacher smiles and holds out her hand while saying, 'Kendra, give me the bottle, please.'  When Kendra holds out the bottle, the teacher takes it from her and says, 'Thank you, Kendra.  Let's put the bottle away now'"    (www.ed.gov/Family/RSRforCaregvr/ babies.html, p. 3).

❖ **Play repeated games with babies and young toddlers**, such as Peekaboo, So Big, This Little Piggy, Ride a Horse (bouncing on your knees).  Use the same words over and over so that they begin to anticipate, and eventually can fill in the word or phrase at the right moment  -- For example, "Where's baby?  Where's baby? There he is!"  eventually elicits "Dereeiz!"

❖ **"Speak in an easily understandable way** [but not "baby talk"] with toddlers.  When conversing with toddlers who are just learning language, it is a good idea to simplify verbalization" ("Position Statement of the Southern Early Childhood Association, 2002).  Use language slightly above the child's level, It is typically easy to "fine-tune" your language use to children's abilities.  Research shows that it is an almost automatic response to feedback from children (Bohannon & Bonvillian, 1997).

❖ **Show your excitement when babies begin to talk**.  Help families keep track of these first words.  Provide the names for objects, actions, and feelings.  "Look at that truck.  Does Garrett like that truck?  Oh, Garrett is making that truck go all around town.  Garrett is a happy boy!"

❖**Talk about whatever babies and toddlers are looking at or are currently doing**.  Young children profit from this **joint attention**, and learn more from your labeling and questions when they are already attending, instead having to redirect their attention to whatever you may be talking about.  (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003)

❖ **Remember the "Three Bears" rule**—use words that are "just right" at the basic level (such as dog) rather than too general (animals) or too specific (poodle) when talking to the youngest children about picture books or everyday life experiences.

**Strategies most appropriate for older children (older toddlers through Pre-K)**

❖ **Make "conversation appointments" and/or keep a log** to ensure that you talk to every child for at least 5 minutes at least once a week. You can set up a special appointment for "talking time" in a "talking place" (e.g., in a corner with your rocking chair or in one of the center/activity areas), or you arrange for a child to come a few minutes early or stay a few minutes later. You could eat lunch or snack with an individual child, or talk to them as they wind down before nap ("cot talk"). Keep the log or appointment book so you don't leave anyone out. This will be the child's chance to report on their news of the week. With younger, less verbal, or shy children, you will need to do more prompting at first, but you may be surprised at what these children will tell you when they are not in a large group competing for your attention! (Schwanenflugel et al., 2005).

❖ **Use some uncommon words in your own everyday speech.** With older toddlers, you might say "wrench" rather than "turn-thingy", or "Dalmation" instead of just "dog". And with somewhat older children, you can introduce even more rare and technical words (e.g., "Let's use the stethoscope to listen to your heartbeat!", or, "It's hot out here. We really need to stop for a drink of water, or we will get dehydrated"), as long as you do so in a *meaningful context* (in other words, **no flash cards**).

❖**Select and explicitly "teach" several new vocabulary words related to a theme every week or every two weeks**. (It needs to be more than "the word of the week", or you will only introduce 52 words per year). **Develop hands-on activities using those words and make those available as part of your daily centers and activity areas.** For example, you can use a word learning strategy that is often effective for young children – the process of elimination. If you are trying to teach the word "bobcat", then ask the child to find the bobcat given pictures of the bobcat along with pictures of two known animals (say, dog and elephant). (Schwanenflugel et al., 2005) You can use chart paper and pictures to show how words/concepts are related to each other ("a chair and a table are both kinds of furniture", "Dalmations and German Shepherds are both kinds of dogs") and how they are different. You can play a matching game in which children match concepts/words that are related, but not identical (match a dachshund with a Labrador, lion with a tabby cat, and a fire truck with an 18-wheeler). Or you can play "Guess what I'm thinking of", giving very detailed "hints" , including pictures and concrete objects (e.g., "It lives near a pond, it hops, it's green"). For other vocabulary teaching activities, see Notari-Syverson, O'Connor, & Vadasy, 1998).

❖ **Read books using Interactive/ Dialogic reading principles** in small groups (5 or fewer children). The goal is to promote discussion during and after the book reading, providing children with opportunities to talk and be heard. For younger children, ask open-ended questions that focus on single pages of the book "What's this? What's she doing?," With older children, you can still ask some of these "competence" questions, but add other open-ended questions that connect across pages and more abstract questions such as, "What is she thinking? What do you think will happen next? Why is she feeling this way? Also add questions that relate the story to the children's lives, e.g., "How is she the same as you? What would you do if you could (action)?" Following the book reading, you can ask "reflection" questions, such as "what part of the book did you like the best? Or "Tell me why you thought that ……… happened?" Develop some of each type of question in advance, and write them on sticky notes that you stick to the appropriate page – this will remind you to ask the questions and make sure that you use the right kind of question.

Remember the acronym "CAR" talk (Schwanenflugel et al., 2005).
*C* - Competence questions
*A* - Abstract thinking questions
*R* - Relate the book to children's lives and reflect afterwards

Another acronym for dialogic reading is CROWD (from Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, Roskos, Tabors, & Lenhart, 2004).
*C*- Completion prompts (leave a blank at the end of the sentence for children to fill in)
*R*- Recall prompts (encourage children to remember what happened in the book, to help organize the story and remember the sequence)
*O*- Open-ended prompts that focus on the pictures in the books ("What's happening on this page?")
*W* – What, when, where, and why questions that focus on the pictures ("What is this, Why do you think the puppy is sad?")
*D* – Distancing prompts guide children to take things from the book and apply them to their own lives (at a distance).

This type of book reading has been proven to boost vocabulary development in preschool children from low-income families (Wasik & Bond, 2001; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006, Whitehurst et al., 1994, 1988).

❖ **Do a "Book Show and Tell". Ask children to share their favorite book** with the rest of the group. They can bring a book from home or pick one from your setting. You can prompt them to give the title, the setting, the main characters, how it begins, the main events, and ending of the story (Notari-Syverson, O'Connor, & Vadasy, 1998).

❖ **Create a listening center** where children may listen to books and poetry on tape, as well as children's music by Raffi, Dr. Jean, Sandra Boynton, and other early childhood-focused musical artists.

❖ **Eat lunch with the children** and use this time for conversation. Research shows that there is much more talking, and richer conversations, when teachers sit rather than circulate (Cote, 2001).

❖ **Play "nice way to say, bossy way to say"** with puppets. One puppet is labeled Bossy, the other Nice. Have the bossy puppet say something like, "Give me a cookie!", then ask the children how the Nice puppet would say it. (Warren & McCloskey, 1997).

❖ **Play "School talk, Home talk" or Teacher Talk/Friend Talk** with older children, making sure that you point out that teacher talk and school talk may not sound right at home or with friends, just as friend talk doesn't sound right for teachers.

❖ **Play "Another Way to Say".** Pick a word/phrase that has many different ways of expression. You can ask, "What's another way to say "Hello?" (and they may say, Hi, Hey, What's up?, Howdy, or even Ola or Bonjour); or you can say, "What's another way to say "big" (and could introduce huge, enormous, large, grand, etc.). Write these on chart paper and talk about how many different ways there are to say things, and that people who live in different places or come from different places may have different ways of saying the same things (Notari-Syverson et al., 1998).

❖ **Play "Guess what I have? "** with older children. Have children sit opposite each other with some sort of "screen" between them so they cannot see the objects in front of the other child, or they can take turns wearing a blindfold. Each child should have similar objects (blocks of different colors or shapes, plastic animals, etc.) on their "side". The goal is to take turns describing VERBALLY what is on each side, rather than simply pointing or saying "Look at this". For example, a child has to say "I have a red block" or "I have a round block" rather than just "I have a block". You will most likely need to model the kind of language needed for this activity, and point out the kinds of talk needed when people don't share a point of view (e.g., "She can't see what you are talking about, so you'll have to **tell** her all about it). (Notari-Syverson et al., 1998; Warren & McCloskey, 1997).

❖**Support children in asking questions** about books, concrete experiences, people, places, etc. This can be done by your modeling just how questions are asked. We need to ask children lots of questions that require more than a one word answer. For example, ask in center time questions like, "How is business in the restaurant today?" or after a book, "Tell me about your favorite part." Asking open-ended questions that you do not already know the answer to ("How?" "Why?" "Tell me about.") are often the questions that elicit responses longer than just one or two words. Some examples follow:

| | |
|---|---|
| What do you see? | What do you think that is? |
| What does that look like? | Tell me what happened yesterday. |
| Why did it do that? | Where have you seen that before? |
| What are you thinking about . . . ? | What did you learn about . . . ? |
| What do you know about . . .? | How do you know that? |
| How are they alike? | How are they different? |
| What do you think will happen? | Is this like something at your house? |
| Why do you like this? | Why don't you like this? |

❖ Interesting experiences provide a **reason** to listen and then a **reason** to talk about that experience!  **Take field trips**, go on a scavenger hunt outside, do classroom experiments, bring in guest speakers, bring in guest pets, use recipes for baking, bring in interesting objects, and demonstrate interesting processes.  Encourage children to talk to any guests or experts they meet during these experiences.

❖**Ask children to give you directions** for familiar processes, like making a peanut butter & jelly sandwich, brushing your teeth, ordering from a drive-up window, playing a specific game, using a specific toy, etc.

❖**Model the use of language for directing "problem-solving"** ("Hmm, I wonder where this puzzle piece goes", "I'd better remember to buy more paper").

❖ Children need to **tell original stories and the stories of their own lives** to interested teachers and caregivers.  Offer time during the day--perhaps at morning circle time--for one or two children to tell fantasy or personal stories.   Make sure that they know what day they are to share and that have "rehearsed" their story with family and/or friends.  Or take advantage of more "spontaneous" occasions.  If a child says something about a dinosaur, then prompt a story with "Yes, once upon a time there was a dinosaur, and the dinosaur was green??" Child:  No, blue.  Teacher:  Right.  Once upon a time there was a blue dinosaur and it was very hungrey…." (from Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003, p. 86).

❖ Children need a great deal of **practice** in **retelling familiar stories**.  Throughout the day ask children to retell the morning story, and the following day have children retell the previous day's story or informational book.   Offer children props for retellings; such as flannel boards, picture sequencing from the book, and small toys; to access their story memories, build their understanding of story sequence, and inspire their language.

## Suggestions for children with special needs:

◆ Every child benefits from a **language enriched environment.**  By using all routines and activities that occur in a child's day, caregivers have the opportunity to provide language enrichment that enables children with special needs to gain language skills.

◆ Use **mealtimes** to talk about foods, colors, size and shapes.

◆ **Self-help activities** can be opportunities to sing songs, count fingers and toes, talk about body parts, and use rhyming words.

◆ During **dramatic play, block play, and outdoor play** talk to children about what they are doing.

◆ **Self-talk**
"Talk about what you do as you do it. 'It's time for lunch. Now I'll put the forks on the table."

◆ **Parallel talk**
If a child puts a book on the shelf, talk about what they are doing. "You put the big red book on the shelf."

◆ **Corrective echoing**
If a child says "Her frew dat ball." You can say, "She threw that ball."

◆ Use **focused contrasts** for specific speech/language problems. ("That's one *dog*, there are two *dogs*" , there's a *F*ish, this is a *D*ish").

◆ **Language enrichment**
Expand and model what children say. (www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/pubs/nc17.html, p.3).

◆ **Waiting**
Often in trying to get children to communicate we overstimulate them. We ask a string of questions and do not give the child time to respond. Children with delays need more time to communicate than others. It is very important to wait and give children the opportunity to do something (www.childrensdisabilities.info/speech/waiting.html, p. 1).

◆ All children have **various learning styles**. Some are visual learners, some auditory learners and some tactile learners. It is important for children with special needs to be presented language visually as well as verbally. Use pictures and objects paired with the spoken word to encourage communication.

◆ **Sign Language**
Some research shows that babies exposed to signs understand more words, have larger vocabularies and engage in more sophisticated play than non-signing babies. They may have decreased frustration, increased communication and enriched parent-infant bonding. They also show an increased interest in books. They tend to talk earlier than non-signing babies do. For a child with special needs signing simultaneously with the spoken word is very successful.

◆ Signs such as stop and share help toddlers learn to play together cooperatively. It has decreased biting in some childcare centers.

◆ Signing empowers children to express their wants and needs before they can speak. Using signs such as "eat" and "more" to let caregivers know what they want decreases crying. They have some control of the world around them (www.sign2me.com/science.html, p. 1). Also see the book "Baby Signs" by Acredolo & Goodwyn, 2002).

## Strategies for ESL learners (or English Language Learners):

✓ Children who are learning English as a second language have an additional mental task to learn both English and the language spoken in their homes. We need to do everything we can to support the child's use of his/her native language while simultaneously learning English. If you possibly can, us **volunteers who speak the child's home** language, books and materials from the child's home language (if possible), and bilingual labels for items in the environment. Remember that children must remain connected to their home language; it is the language that will provide the foundation for learning English. It is best to ADD a second language, not to replace the first language with another.

✓ You may need to convince parents that it is best for them to speak to their children at home using their native language. Here are some reasons why they should maintain their home language:
- ⊙ If the parents have limited control over English, then they may not be the best models for their children in this new language. Their English usage will not be as rich and complex as their native language, and they may actually contribute to bad English language habits if they speak limited English.
- ⊙ If parents cannot use English to express complex thoughts or abstractions, then children's thinking and language may suffer limitations.
- ⊙ Remind parents that children's culture and identity is best shared by parents in their home language. If parents limit themselves to speaking in only English, and that communication is difficult for them, then they will be challenged in sharing the socialization "rules," beliefs, and value systems of their culture to their children.

✓ Ask families of children learning English as a second language to teach you **the rhymes and traditional games their babies enjoy at home.** Learn a few important words in the babies' home languages so you can comfort them as their families do.

✓ Use many **props, gestures and body language** to support your communication with and ESL learner. Also, try to incorporate as many pictures and concrete objects as possible so that, even if you don't know the word for something in the child's language, you could show a picture or an object to the child to connect to the English word. You can also use toy telephones to encourage children to speak to you.

✓ **Maintain a consistent routine** so children can tell what is going to happen next, even if they can't understand what you are saying. This not only helps them to do what is expected even when they don't understand your language, but it provides them a recurring context in which they will better learn the language. (She keeps saying the sounds "outside", and then we go play on the playground. Maybe "outside" means something about where we go afterwards.).

✓ **Speak slowly and enunciate** clearly with ESL learners, but be careful not to raise your voice.

✓ Children are often the best teachers of other children.  Make sure that your English-speaking children have many **opportunities to talk in small groups** and in pairs with the second-language speaker.

✓ **Allow children some time to be quiet**.  They need time to simply listen and grow accustomed to the sounds and rhythm of the new language.  And just like with first-language learners, pressuring children to speak may actually reduce their willingness to do so.  Some ESL children will not feel comfortable speaking until they have "mastered" the sounds, whereas others are bolder.

✓**Avoid using idioms and slang**.  Second language learners who have not grown up with this metaphorical way of talking will have trouble with certain phrases that we sprinkle into our language without realizing it.  For example, some frequently used idioms are as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| piece of cake | easy as pie |
| break my heart | cut it out |
| do a bang up job | get going |
| get on my nerves | give you  a hand |
| How come? | keep an eye on you |
| make up your mind | pull my leg |
| run down | take it easy |
| under the weather | driving me crazy |

✓ It's also easy to interject slang into our conversations with ESL children, and they may have trouble interpreting what we're trying to communicate to them:

| | |
|---|---|
| cool (really neat) | dinosaur (something old) |
| goof (mistake--or--silly person) | 24/7 (every day, all week) |
| hyper (active) | lame (dumb) |
| riot (funny) | zip (energy) |

✓ As with all children, try to anticipate words that may not be familiar and give clear meaning to the words.  A child from a landlocked region may never have been introduced to the concept of a lighthouse, so when a child sees the image or hears about a lighthouse in a text, make sure that you take a moment to point out the features of a lighthouse and explain its function.

✓ We need to ensure that we follow a child's cultural and religious practices.  Ask the parents if there are any dietary or other practices that we need to support to maintain continuity between the home and school ("Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity," NAEYC, 1995).

## Working with parents:

❖ Support parents' talk with children by suggesting they turn off the radio, stereo, and television at pre-set times and talk to children. Children will appreciate parent/caregivers talking about their lives at work and asking children about their work at preschool. Families will benefit from talk, talk, talk about family and community stories, shared experiences, and books!

❖ Teach parents to ask questions that will be more likely to elicit informative answers from children. Asking "how was your day today?" typically gets "okay", and asking "What did you do today?" often gets "Nothing". So parents can ask, "What was the best part of your day today?" "What was the most fun thing you did?" and the like.

❖ Share with parents the songs and rhymes you use in your classroom, so their children can benefit from continuous exposure. Tell parents to ask their children questions such as, "What do you say when it is time to clean up? What do you sing when it is time to go outside?"

❖ Share with parents their children's new words and sentences.

❖ Send home papers showing the title of a book you have read with the children, along with the child's drawing of their favorite part. (Today we read …….. My favorite part was …). Ask parents to get their children to describe the story and their drawing.
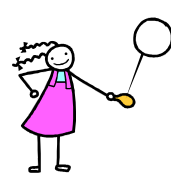
## Suggestions for Evaluation:

✎ Record on audiotape a child's language (anything from cooing to story-telling) at the beginning of their time in your care, and then at the end of each year. Listen to the tapes to see how their language has changed. If you have a concern about the child's language development level, play the tape to someone familiar with children, but unfamiliar with that particular child. Ask the person listening to the tape to guess how old the child is. If the child is old enough (maybe over 2 years), then ask the listener to tell you what the child was saying (repeating back the "gist" of each sentence). If that listener cannot understand most of what the child is saying, then ask the child's home caregiver to "translate" for you. If the parent does not understand the majority of what the child is saying, then you may want to ask for referral advice.

✎ Keep a list of words or phrases that you notice a child has recently added to her vocablary.

✎ Make up your own "picture vocabulary test".  First, make a short list that is a subset of the words that you think every child at a certain age should understand.  Then create some pictures that illustrate those words, or cut out some pictures from magazines. You can have the child look at 3 or 4 pictures, and ask questions such as "Point to the bear" (showing pictures of a bear, a rabbit, and a beaver, for example).  Make notes about how many they get correct (and make sure to say "good job" or give some praise when they are correct), and if they get one "wrong", correctly label the picture they have selected, and also the correct picture (That one's a beaver, it's the same color as the bear; the bear is this one here).  Then elaborate on the topics of both pictures.

✎ Make up your own "grammar test" to assess children's progress.  Use made up animal names or pictures of unfamiliar animals and actions.  Here is a "wug".  Now there are two of them.  I have two …… (and the child should fill in "Wugs!").  Or "these children are boshing.  Yesterday they ……." (boshed).  (Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2003)

✎ Assess children's receptive language by observing their responses to a few requests or commands ("Please bring me the ball".  "Walk over to the door.").