Let's Talk Foundations: Oral Language Development 1

Excerpt: Supporting English Language Learners

ASI
ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

Language skills are critical to children's preparation for literacy and success in school. And you are in a critical position to enhance children's language development and improve your children's chances for future success in school.

Oral Language Development: Overview

Key Areas	You Will Learn
■ Foundations of Oral Language Development ☑ **Creating a Language-Rich Classroom** ■ Circle Time ■ Read Alouds ■ Small Group Instruction ■ Choice Time	☑ **Key concepts of language development** ■ Building receptive and expressive language ■ Ideas to promote background knowledge development in young children ■ Activities that build *vocabulary* ☑ **Supporting English language learners** ■ Organizing instruction, including how to enhance language through *curriculum integration*

In this workshop, we provide a brief overview on the key concepts of language development, but will focus on areas:

• Supports for English language learners and

• classroom arrangements that promote language learning and language-rich play opportunities.

Language development involves learning a whole set of oral and conceptual understandings, a rich knowledge base, a broad and deep vocabulary, and verbal reasoning abilities to understand the messages that are conveyed through speaking and reading.

Work with a partner or two and try to fill in the missing blanks. Here are some words to use: phonology; vocabulary, syntax or grammar, and pragmatics.

1.The first definition refers to phonology; the basic sound units of our language; the phonemes and syllables

2. The second definition refers to vocabulary. Vocabulary is the knowledge of words and word meanings. Between the ages of 2 and 6 children learn at least 3 or 4 new words a day, and expand the meanings they have for words they know. The learning occurs with lots of help from adults and other children who provide information about words and their meaning.

3.The third definition refers to which language system? Yes, grammar or syntax. Grammar, or syntax refers to the system of rules that guides how to combine words into phrases and sentences that make sense and are correct. Children learn the grammatical rules of their native language unconsciously as they acquire language.

4. The fourth language system is pragmatics. Pragmatics refers to the rules for the appropriate use of language to communicate effectively in many different situations and for many different purposes. Rules like taking turns; and basic rules of politeness.
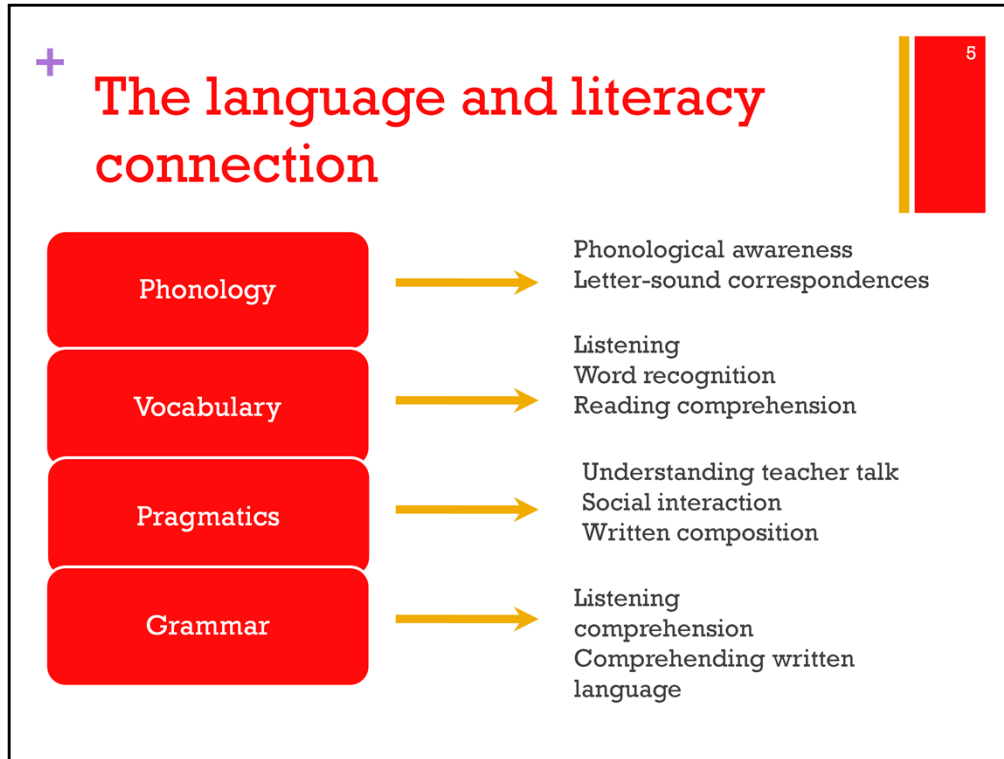
The information on this slide can be presented in a "think, pair, share" format by covering the information on the right hand side and asking teachers to consider how each language system is linked to children's later success as writers and readers.

Why is language so critical? While language skills are important in and of themselves, they are also linked to children's later success in reading and writing.

Phonology and children's awareness of the sounds of words that is, their phonological awareness, form the basis for learning letter-sound correspondences.

Vocabulary in preschool is an important predictor of later literacy success. Preschool children with large vocabularies tend to have better listening comprehension, word recognition, and reading comprehension later on.

Grammar is important because children's familiarity with complex sentence structures helps them comprehend stories read aloud to them and that they later read themselves.

Pragmatics with its emphasis on language conventions is also important.

Narrative and explanation are forms of extended discourse that appear in most books and written texts; they are critical for listening and later reading comprehension.

Pragmatic skills are important for understanding what teachers say in the classroom, much of which is explanation.

In summary, it is important to keep in mind that children's language skills in the early years are strong predictors of their future success as readers and writers.

Development of language in the early years

■ The early months (birth-8 months)

■ Crawlers and walkers(8-18 months)

■ Toddlers and 2-year olds (18 months-3 years)

The development of language is extraordinary in these early years. Some common signposts for teachers and parents to recognize may be helpful in promoting language development:

The early months:

- o Responds to human faces. Gazes at faces
- o Uses vocal and nonvocal communication to express interest
- o Babbles using all sorts of sounds

Crawlers and walkers

- o Understands many more words than can say.
- o Creates long, babbled sentences
- o Begins to use me, you, I.

Toddlers

- o Combines words
- o Listens to stories for a short while
- o Has a speaking vocabulary that may reach 200 words
- o Can use compound sentences
- o Uses adjectives and adverbs. Can recount events of the day.

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Vocabulary development

- Vocabulary is the store of words children know. It's usually organized in two types:
  - Expressive vocabulary-- speaking
  - Receptive vocabulary-- listening

Expressive vocabulary are the words children can use to express themselves

Receptive vocabulary are the words they can understand when heard in context

Generally children's receptive vocabulary (listening) is larger than their expressive vocabulary (speaking). The average preschooler, for example, knows about 5,000 words and by the end of high school will like have an estimated vocabulary size of about 60,000 words.

Children begin from repeated exposures to words in language –rich environments that expose them to many different new words in many different way and contexts.
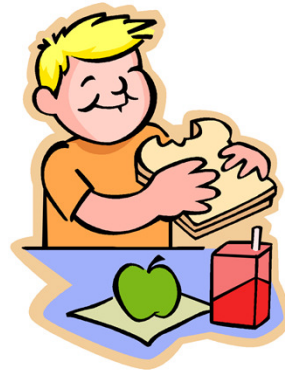
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⭐ Activity....

- Snack time
  - Make a list of ways in which snack time might be used to support children's language development.
    - Think about the different kinds of language strategies you can use.

Second language learners

- Many children enter preschool already bilingual to some degree

- Bilingual 4-year olds may have more limited vocabularies in each of their two languages than their monolingual age peers. However, their combined vocabulary in both languages is likely to be equal to or exceed that of the English-only child.

Ask participants: What does this mean for instruction? And how can you support children's language development?

Key points:

Language and dialect differences are not deficits!

We need to respect language and dialect differences among our children and help them take pride in their cultural backgrounds, as we model standard language use. Children are eager to learn a new language or language form when there is acceptance of them.

How can teachers plan instruction that takes into account children's native language abilities?

Use Handout 1. Ask teachers to pair or form a small group. Brainstorm ways to support children's language development. Following the brainstorm share across groups.

Possible responses:

- Books environmental print, and other print resources in children's native language should be made available.
- Small group activities help children interact more comfortably than in large groups settings.
- Play activities support children's language interaction.
- Involving parents in making connections from school to home.

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Optimal language development occurs when….

- …children have opportunities to use language frequently

  "Children who are constantly exposed to an environment rich in oral language and who interact frequently with adults in a supportive social and emotional environment will develop more facility with oral language than children lacking these opportunities"

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Facilitating second language acquisition

- Hold high expectations for children's learning

- Create a safe and secure learning environment

- Create opportunities for children to use English for playful and interesting purposes

- Try to involve children in one-on-one informal conversations

Stages of second language acquisition

1. Home language use

2. Nonverbal or silent period

3. Early production or telegraphic speech

4. Productive language use

Young children acquiring English as a second language tend to go through the following developmental stages:
• Some children continue to communicate using their home languages for a period of time, even with people who are not likely to understand them.

•Then, children often enter a nonverbal or silent period, in which they don't speak at all, except to speakers of their home languages. Although they are silent, children may use nonverbal forms of communication, such as gestures or pantomime. During this time, they are listening actively and gathering information about the new language.

Once they have acquired sufficient English by listening, children enter a stage of early production in which they use telegraphic speech. Telegraphic speech refers to children's use of one- or two-word phrases to communicate much longer ideas. For example, a child at this level may point and say simply "ball," meaning, "Can I please have that ball?"

• Finally, children begin productive language use. At this stage of second language acquisition, children use new vocabulary and their growing knowledge of English grammar to build sentences. It is normal for children to over-generalize language rules, such as saying 'go-ed' instead of 'went," or 'foots' instead of feet. Through this process, the focus is on meaningful communication.

•**Keep in mind: children tend to function at a slightly higher level in receptive language skills (listening) than in expressive language skills (speaking).**

•This means that often second language learners are able to understand what is said to them before they are able to communicate with their own words and sentences.

Making language comprehensible to second language learners

- Use meaningful language in context
- Use simplified language
- Use nonverbal cues
- Use manipulatives, visuals, and objects

To help children understand the new language they are hearing and to scaffold their language use:

•Use meaningful language in context
•Use simplified language.   Use simpler vocabulary and grammatical structures. You might want to use shorter sentences, and longer pauses to help children interpret your speech.
•Use nonverbal cues including gestures and facial expressions.
•Use manipulative, visual media, and objects to help children understand your message.
•Ideally, it would be great to introduce content in the child's primary language. But many times this will not be feasible. However, try to learn several words in the child's language. It will make the child feel like you care, and respect his culture.
•Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
•Repeat to make sure you are understanding what the child is saying. Rephrase and extend the child's language.
•Provide lots of opportunities for children to practice their language in small groups

•All of these ideas are effective supports for children with diverse learning needs.

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Remember…..

- The English language learner is doing twice the cognitive work of the native speaker because he or she is:
  - Acquiring new literacy concepts and skills, AND
  - Attending to the sounds, meanings, and structures of a new language.

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Embracing Diversity

- Development and learning are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.

- Teachers should learn about the culture of the majority of children they serve

Many of the children we serve come from different cultural communities. We need to understand the important role that culture plays in influencing their development. We can all benefit by learning more about the culture of the majority of children we serve. Education should be an additive process.

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Room arrangement for optimal language interaction

- Small partitioned spaces promote:
  - Higher quality verbal interaction
  - Increased cooperative play
  - Greater use of language-related activities

- Large open spaces result in:
  - Poor language interactions
  - Less use of language-related activities

+ Focus on room design

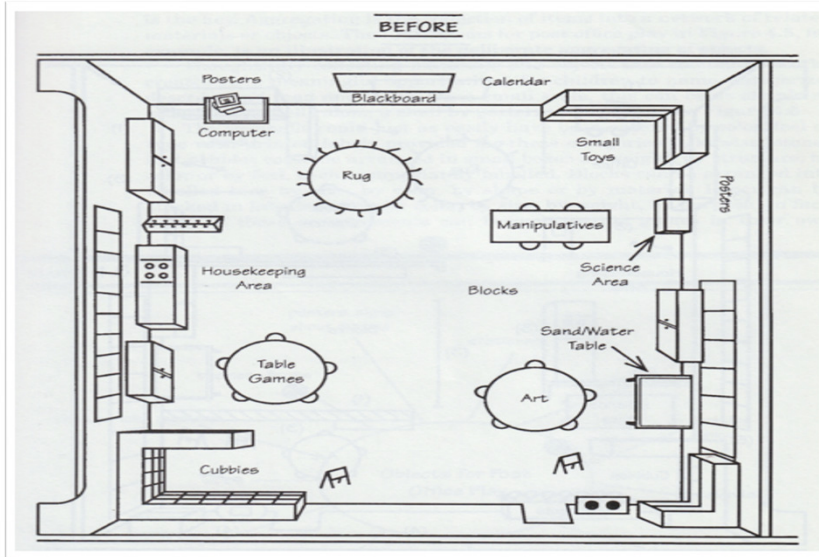## Designing environments for rich language interactions

Classroom design and use of space has an important impact on children's opportunities for language development.

+ ★ Activity….
Room arrangement (Before)

BEFORE

Materials needed: Activity Handout 2—Room Arrangement (Before)

Activity : Room arrangements for Optimal Language Interactions
In pairs, encourage teachers to review the room lay-out. Look at the spacing in the room; the choice of centers; the interest areas. Encourage them to consider the following problems:

a. Open space often leads to rough and tumble play
b.   interest areas are against the wall. They encourage only solitary play rather than interaction
c. Good environments need to be carved out to allow for 3-4 children to play
d. Environment print supports good language interaction
e. Children will use quieter voices when there is great intimacy in settings
f. Children love cozy corners, areas in which they can independently work
g. Noisy areas should be in one area of the room; quieter in another; placing the book area next to the block area is not optimal

• With a partner, evaluate the first floor plan with respect to language interaction. Can you identify things that you think need to be changed?
• Now, take a look at the second floor plan. Can you identify things that would support children's language interactions?
• Discuss one feature of your own classroom you especially like or would like to change to encourage language interaction

+ ⭐ **Activity....**
Room arrangement (After)
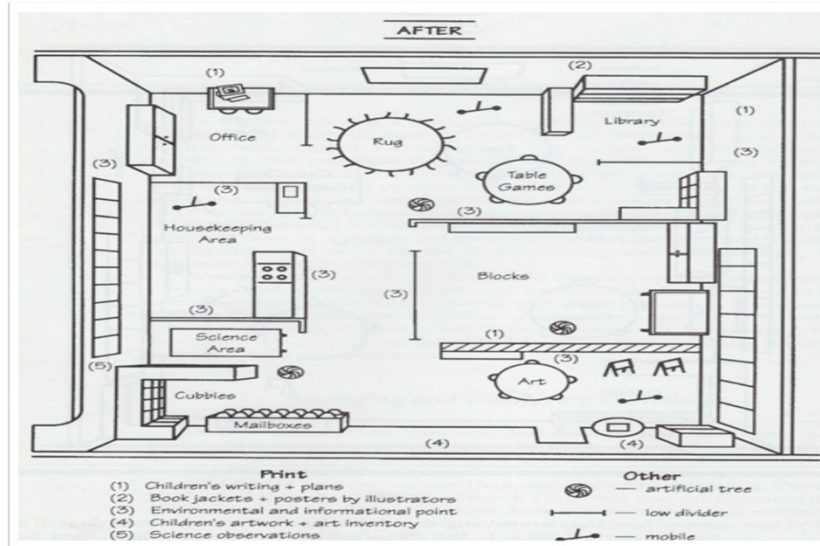
The following characteristics of room arrangement support a rich language environment

• Classrooms with small partitioned spaces promote
  •Higher quality verbal interactions
  •More cooperative play among children
  •Greater use of language-related activities

On the other hand, large open spaces tend to result in
  • Poor language interaction
  •Less use of language-related activities.

Literacy and play

- Keep in mind children's interests in the development of play themes
- Prepare the environment WITH children
- Encourage children to bring in cultural artifacts
- Include print

Both free play and "structured play" (where teachers purposefully guide play experiences to support specific learning goals) are important for this age group.

During play, children learn by exploring and manipulating materials; they learn to imagine themselves in new situations, role play, take turns, and set and follow rules; they remember, rehearse and incorporate new knowledge; and they practice oral language and new vocabulary words as they communicate with peers. Play time is also particularly important for English language learners, who learn and practice new vocabulary through interactions with English-speaking peers.

Thus, for structured play and group activities, make sure that English learners are paired with children who have strong English oral language skills.

(See hand-outs 14-17 for more on language-related play.)

+ ⭐ Activity….

- See Handout 14

- How would you identify good play? What are its characteristics?

- How would you identify play that is less ideal? What are its characteristics?

Your goal in this activity is to identify "what is good play?"

It includes the following characteristics:

❖Children are engaged in rich language interactions.
❖They are involved in socio-dramatic play (as opposed to running around or loitering).
❖The play theme is sustained, over multiple conversational turns.
❖Children engage in creative thinking and problem solving.
❖They resolve their conflicts through language interactions.

Not-so-good play includes:

❖Running from area to area
❖Gross motor activity rather than language activity
❖Manipulative play rather than socio-dramatic activity
❖Non-sustained activity
❖Loud and noisy

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Literacy and play

- Build background knowledge and vocabulary

- Model play dialogue and scenarios

- Observe and interaction children to monitor progress

- Refresh centers on a regular basis

Documenting language interaction and play

- To systematically assess children's learning, try this
  - Photo Documentation
  - Play plans and logs
  - Samples of play stories and writing
  - Play maturity and language use checklists

There are many ways to examine children's language through play. Here are four we recommend:

* Photo Documentation: Systematically collect photos of play in target settings, such as a theme-related dramatic play area. Add short descriptions of what children are doing. Display the photos.

* Play Plans and Logs: Ask children to make plans about what they are going to do in centers. Next ask them to draw a picture of who they plan to play with. After play time, ask them to remember and review what they did.

* Samples of Play Stories. Ask children to reflect on their play experience, and make a special book from it.

* Play Maturity and Language-Use Checklist (see Handout 17): Movement from immature to more mature play in the early years is an important marker of children's growth and development. Try using the checklists provided in the hand-outs.