

How do I help my students?

Use instructional practices that support children's language learning:

1. Create a language-rich classroom.

Make every effort to ensure that children are engaged in meaningful conversations and language use throughout the day.

To create this environment, pre-K teachers should:

- engage children in extended conversations;
- encourage children to tell and retell stories and to describe events;
- discuss a wide range of topics;
- model use of new and unusual words;
- discuss word meanings;
- ask open-ended questions;
- give explicit guidance on vocabulary, syntax and pronunciation;
- challenge children to justify their thinking; and
- focus on the expression of ideas.



2. Engage children in shared reading of challenging books.

Reading aloud to children is one of the best ways to facilitate oral language and vocabulary development. Books expose children to several types of language that are foundational for academic success. These types include decontextualized language, sophisticated vocabulary and new concepts, and book language.

LANGUAGE FACT

By the time children arrive in kindergarten, most will know an average of 3,000 to 5,000 words.



3. Use Dialogic Reading. To encourage children to engage in conversations about books, use the acronym **CROWD**. What does **CROWD** stand for?

- **Completion questions** to focus children on the structure of language used in the book (e.g., "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see? I see a red bird staring at ____").
- **Recall questions** to check children's understanding of the content of the story.
- **Open-ended questions** to engage children in extended talk about the book.
- **"W" questions**—who, what, when, where, why—to teach vocabulary.
- **Distancing or bridging prompts** to help children relate ideas in the book to life experiences beyond the story.



4. Provide intentional instruction in phonological awareness activities. Children develop phonological awareness as they learn new vocabulary and differentiate between words that sound similar.

Types of phonological awareness for prekindergarten children include:

- **Rhyming**—the ability to notice that two or more words have endings that sound the same (also called rimes or word families);

- **Alliteration**—the ability to notice that two or more words begin with the same sound (also called onsets);
- **Sentence segmenting**—the ability to sense individual words in the stream of spoken language; and
- **Syllable blending and segmenting**—the ability to hear the separate syllables in a word, and to put syllables together orally to make a word or break a word into separate syllables.

Use high-quality oral language curricula:

1. Integrate language learning. A strong curriculum teaches vocabulary while studying interesting content. By providing repeated exposure to new words, children learn the words they need to represent the new ideas and concepts they are learning.

2. Include explicit instruction. To encourage this, use challenging read-alouds as well as daily discussions of books, new concepts and new vocabulary. Make it enjoyable for your students by incorporating games and songs into their learning.

3. Allow them to play! Early childhood educators know better than anyone how important play is to a child's development. A strong curriculum provides time and opportunities for both free and structured play, giving children the time to experiment with new concepts and vocabulary.

Oral Language Accomplishments

FOR PREKINDERGARTEN

SPEAKING

- Speak in complete sentences made up of three or more words.
- Speak clearly enough to be understood by unfamiliar adults, and use appropriate levels of volume, tone and inflection.
- Participate in extended conversations, and use appropriate conversational techniques (e.g., taking turns speaking, listening actively, contributing ideas).
- Use new vocabulary and grammatical construction appropriately in his or her own speech.
- Use spoken language to communicate thoughts, feelings and needs; to describe experiences and observations; and to express opinions and ideas.
- Tell stories.



- Repeat or act out familiar stories, songs, rhymes, and finger and counting games (fingerplays) in play activities.

LISTENING

- Understand and follow one- and two-step oral directions.
- Pay attention to sounds in language (e.g., recognize rhymes, hear alliteration, clap syllables).
- Listen for a variety of purposes (e.g., for enjoyment, to gain and share information, to perform a task, to learn what happened in a story, to converse with an adult or peer).
- Enjoy listening to and discussing storybooks; demonstrate comprehension by asking questions and making comments.
- Understand the overall sequence of events in stories.



WHAT ABOUT

English Language Learners?

Research suggests that teachers should encourage parents to continue to speak with and read stories to children in their first language at home. Children with strong first-language skills and vocabulary apply this knowledge to learning English.

ELL students tend to go through several stages of language development when they attend a prekindergarten where English is the primary language. These stages are:

- **Home language use**—Children continue to use their home language because they have not yet realized that others do not speak their language.
- **Nonverbal period in the new language**—Children learn by watching and listening to the English speakers in the classroom, perhaps using nonverbal communication such as pointing, miming, crying or whimpering.
- **Telegraphic and formulaic language**—Children begin to name objects and people or use a few key phrases they have memorized to deal with common social situations.
- **Productive use of new language**—Children begin to combine phrases they have learned and names of objects to make new sentences. They will make lots of mistakes at this stage as they experiment with communicating in English.

Teachers support children's learning of English when they:

- Demonstrate meaning using videos, pictures and concrete objects.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly, without speaking louder than usual.
- Anticipate words that will be difficult and provide explanations.
- Use gestures and body language.
- Repeat information, and review and rephrase if the child does not understand.
- Encourage peer interactions through play and small group activities.
- Are encouraging and patient.

ORAL LANGUAGE

Useful Websites



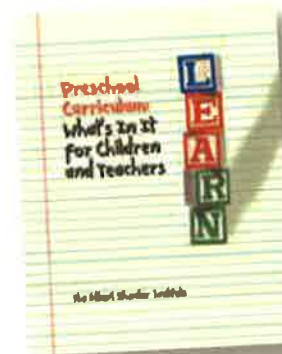
www.aft.org/yourwork/ece

www.colorincolorado.org

ies.ed.gov/ncee/www

nieer.org/standards

www.reading.org



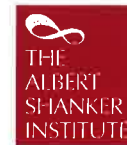
Preschool Curriculum:
What's In It for Children and Teachers

Download the full report
at www.ashankerinst.org/education.html.



Center for the
Child Care Workforce

A project of the American Federation of Teachers
Educational Foundation



American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W. • Washington, DC 20001 • 202/879-4400 • www.aft.org



Oral Language

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE LEARNING
IN THE CLASSROOM



A Union of Professionals