

SUPPORTING LANGUAGE & VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

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WHAT IS LANGUAGE AND WHY IS LANGUAGE IMPORTANT?

- Oral language encompasses five main skill areas:
 - Content = vocabulary
 - Form = syntax/grammar, morphology, phonology
 - Use = pragmatics
- All of these aspects are highly interconnected and can be mutually supportive.
- All of these foundational skills connect to language skills we apply when listening or reading such as drawing inferences, comprehending and retelling narratives, and monitoring and trying to repair our misunderstandings or miscommunications when we convey information to others.
- Language directly connects to reading comprehension, and also supports the development of strong decoding skills—together linguistic comprehension and decoding are the most important and strongest contributors to successful reading comprehension. Language is especially important as text becomes more complex and as decoding skills typically become more automatic.
- Language skills also are connected to every academic domain and to social-emotional skills.

HOW CAN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS SUPPORT LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM?

- Supports for Language in the classroom should be:
 - **Intentional:** Plan ahead to support all of these key components.
 - **Intensive and Consistent:** Language development improvement doesn't happen overnight.
 - **Individualized:** Meet children where they are and provide scaffolds to support progress.
 - **Interactive:** Children learn language by USING language.
 - **Implicit, Incidental, and Explicit:** These are complementary not contradictory strategies!
 - **Integrated and Multi-faceted:** Focus on all the aspects of language: Content, form, and use!

WHAT SPECIFIC INTENTIONAL AND EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES CAN TEACHERS IMPLEMENT?

- **Book Embedded Vocabulary Instruction:** Pick books to teach world knowledge, then pick words to support content understanding and teach with child-friendly definitions and illustrations.
- **Interactive Narrative Reading:** Use books to build understanding of narrative text structure and discuss the books. Both literal and inferential questions provide opportunities to use expressive language to talk about the book, connect it to other knowledge, and connect it to our own lives.
- **Support Syntax Development in Guided Play Interactions:** Match targets to ongoing themes and embed in children's play in centers, outside, during routine activities and in transitions.
- **Small-Group Dialogic Reading:** Repeated readings of books with systematically layered questions builds new vocabulary and supports progress in expressive language skills.

HOW CAN TEACHERS INCREASE THE SUCCESS OF THESE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES?

- Match activities with specific learning **goals** for children!
- **Plan and prepare** ahead of time!
- Use scaffolding **strategies** to support and challenge individual children!



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