

Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms

Promoting Second Language Acquisition

Teaching young children whose first language is not English can be very challenging, especially if a teacher does not speak or understand a child's native language. In addition to considering the general communication process, teachers need to be supportive of cultural differences, children's emotional needs, and educational guidelines.

Learning language is most successful and efficient when learning occurs in a meaningful context with teachers conscientiously providing appropriate labels and language models to describe children's ongoing actions and experiences.

Goal: Promote second language acquisition

- Children improve their understanding of English
- Children begin to communicate in English
- Children learn popular American English social routines.

When: During classroom conversations; during those classroom activities that include many visual and gestural props; and during activities highly routine in nature.

How: Teacher facilitates children's learning English during typical classroom activities.

Strategies:

- Talk to children in English about ongoing events.
- Incorporate gestures to support word use (e.g., demonstrate "under vs. over" when using these terms).
- Reduce rate of speech (i.e., speak more slowly, especially when introducing new concepts and language forms).
- Rephrase questions/comments to simplify language when message is unclear.
- Incorporate redundancy of key phrases and words in order to improve message clarity (e.g., "The first thing to do is *fold the paper* when you make your Mother's Day card. Okay, *fold your paper.*")
- Translate into first language when several attempts to communicate in English fail.
- Provide positive feedback for children's attempts to use English. (e.g., "Wow! I'm so proud of you. You used your English to ask for help!").
- Encourage children's use of English and provide opportunities.
- Repeat, expand and/or correctly restate children's attempts to use English; respond with direct contrastive models immediately following a child's utterance to help teach proper language forms (e.g., "My turn. It's *my* turn. Yes, it is *your* turn.").
- Limit children's verbal choices when ESL-speaking children are expected to respond in English (e.g., "Did you see a *big black bug* or a *blue butterfly*?")
- Target some highly repetitive, prop-laden classroom routines and activities to be conducted only in English (e.g., opening circle and toothbrushing).
- Introduce favorite English songs with instructional, functional actions and fingerplays at music (e.g., "Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" to teach body parts, "The Wheels on the Bus" to teach directional movements and common nouns).



Wilcox, M.J., Murphy, K.M., Bacon, C.K., and Thomas, S. (2001). *Improving language teaching practices in preschool classrooms*. Infant Child Research Programs, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. <http://icrp.asu.edu>