Language and Literacy Develop Together

Children need multiple opportunities to read and see books and print around the classroom. This includes engaging children before, during, and after read-aloud times in activities such as pointing to the story title, predicting what happens next, retelling what happened, and playing with sounds, words, and letters.

Children need numerous interactions with print such as labels on objects in classrooms, labeling in different languages that represent the backgrounds of children in your classroom, and rotating books and materials based on children's interests and experiences.

Create inviting areas in your classroom where children can read quietly or with other children and participate in activities that involve drawing and writing. These literacy activities create a context for communication and support young children's communication and language skills.

The following strategies and adaptations may help address the needs of children with communication delays or children who are dual language learners:

- Use visual props, large pictures, or other materials for children who are learning to listen and engage.
- Allow children to bring a favorite toy or stuffed animal to circle or story time to help them sit and attend. Give them a copy of the book to hold.
- Have children who are learning to engage in group activities sit next to an adult or a more competent peer. Give children frequent encouragement for sitting and listening.
- Read the same book with repetitive lines for several days in a row and ask children to help you finish telling the story or fill in words they know.

Examples: Repetitive books with Visual Props

Storytelling props for Five Little Ducks

Response book for Brown Bear

I see a

- Make a point of introducing interesting new words for children to learn into each classroom activity.
- Use visual cues and speak clearly and slowly for children who have hearing impairments or who are dual language learners. Check for understanding often.
- Have children repeat words or phrases. Use carrier phrases to help them be successful. i.e., "Adrienne, What did the boy do in our story? The boy went for a _____."
- Encourage more competent peers to model language before calling on a child learning to use a new word or phrase. i.e., "Who wants a turn?" Missy says, "I do!" Then address Jarrod, "Who else wants a turn?"

The Impact of Language Development on Literacy Skills

Communication skills which are highly correlated to literacy development include understanding words and their meanings as well as using words to describe objects, actions, and events and to answer questions.

Examples of characteristics and unique needs which impact word knowledge and literacy are below:
- Delays or Impairments of Language
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Autism Spectrum Disorder or similar characteristics
- Attention Deficit and/or Sensory Needs
- Dual language learners
- Unique needs related to socio-economic, ethnic, health, prior experiences

Children who have unique needs such as those listed above might experience a variety of needs and difficulties related to learning skills associated with literacy. Some examples are listed below:
- Difficulty recalling words
- Processing word meanings and information
- Comprehending abstract concepts related to word
- Paying attention during story time
- Difficulty, and possibly frustration, responding to questions about a story
- Listening, processing, and responding to questions and directions

It is important to observe and determine the stage of language/communication development at which a child is currently functioning in order to plan starting points and activities to increase word knowledge and usage.

Research indicates that children need both explicit and implicit instruction in order to develop vocabulary; meaning that they need to have word meanings defined in terms they understand and they need to then have experiences with hearing the words in stories, books, and experiences.

The following skills are noted in Florida Early Learning and Developmental Skills (FELDS) and are listed below in the order of age for developmental milestones.
- Listens when spoken to
- Understands words for common items
- Enjoys simple stories, songs, and rhymes
- Points to pictures, when named, in books
- Answers simple "Who?" "What?" "Where?" and "Why?" questions
- Pays attention to a short story and answers simple questions about it

Important

Children need physical contact, movement, and practice with actual items in order to remember words and meanings. These kinds of experiences can be provided during center play and can be incorporated into storytime with the use of props.
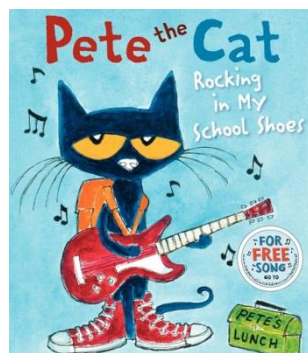
Pete the Cat series is by Eric Litwin (copyrighted)
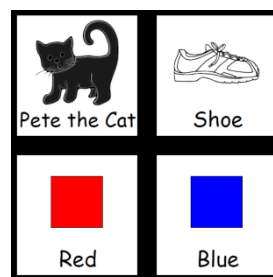
Important

The use of visuals is an important strategy in helping children make and remember word meanings and information. Show visuals along with information from lessons and stories. Use a combination of real objects, photos of real objects, colored and blackline drawings to address skills at varying levels of development. Include the word text in order to reinforce text awareness.

Resources

- Learning Language and Loving It: A Guide to Promoting Children's Social, Language and Literacy Development, Second Edition, Elaine Weitzman, Janice Greenberg. http://www.hanen.org/Programs/For-Educators/Learning-Language-Loving-It.aspx

- Read Repeat Program Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL)

- Talk, Read, and Sing Together Everyday, Too Small to Fail

- Classroom Posters for Encouraging and Embedding Literacy. Center for Early Literacy Learning