Enhancing oral language development in kindergarten

2020 webinar summary

Research findings

A child's ability to use oral language effectively influences all areas of their life, including their:

- sense of self

- relationships with others

- ability to learn in the classroom

- academic success (Shiel et al. 2012).

Research findings provide several key messages about oral language learning for teachers:

- Young learners are motivated to acquire language to serve certain purposes or functions, as described by Halliday's seven functions of oral language:

  - instrumental, regulatory, interactional and personal functions help to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs

  - heuristic, imaginative and representational functions help the young learner to come to terms with their environment (DoE 2018).

- These functions guide teacher decision-making about meaningful learning experiences and language exposure (the quality and quantity of words children hear) to develop language-rich environments for children.

- Romeo et al. (2018) identify language-rich environments as environments that provide a balance of teacher and child talk through high-quality verbal interactions. Language-rich environments engage children in listening, thinking and using language purposefully.

Oral language learning

Kindergarten teachers consider research findings in conjunction with the *Queensland kindergarten learning guideline* (QKLG) to provide learning experiences and environments that enhance children's oral language development.

The QKLG identifies **using language** and **listening and responding** as significant learnings in kindergarten to explore and expand children's language knowledge, skills and dispositions. This indicates that two key factors of oral language development for young children are the ability to:

- listen — comprehend language

- speak — produce language to communicate.

Effective listening and speaking includes the skills to receive and comprehend language input and produce language to respond to and communicate with others (ACARA 2010).

Oral language learning and development in kindergarten is built on in Prep. Understanding the continuity of learning between kindergarten and Prep supports teachers to make decisions about age-appropriate and meaningful learning for children. It also builds shared language and understanding of oral language and communication learning across the early years.

The following table identifies listening and speaking learning connections within the QKLG and Australian Curriculum to illustrate continuity of learning between kindergarten and Prep.

Oral language learning connections: QKLG and Australian Curriculum

Listening	Speaking
The ability to **decode** and understand language	The ability to **encode** language to express ideas, wants and needs
QKLG connections • Developing listening behaviours • Responding to show listening	**QKLG connections** • Interacting and communicating • Developing speech patterns and pronunciation • Expanding vocabulary
Australian Curriculum connections Receptive language processes: Listening, reading and viewing • Language variation and change • Language for interaction • Text structure and organisation • Expressing and developing ideas • Phonics and word knowledge	**Australian Curriculum connections** Productive language processes: Speaking, writing and creating • Language variation and change • Language for interaction • Text structure and organisation • Expressing and developing ideas • Phonics and word knowledge

Oral language teaching and learning experiences

Planning and putting into practice oral language learning will vary, depending on the individual contexts of kindergarten services. Teaching and learning experiences should be meaningful to children and the context, and encourage children to actively engage with and use language and communication skills. Providing a range and balance of play-based learning and interactions supports language development and meets the needs of individual learners. This could include learning and interactions such as:

- **story time** — reading and telling stories provide opportunities for children to
  - hear a wide range of language and build vocabulary
  - hear words in context to develop an understanding of the function and relations of words (grammar)
  - understand the meaning of the words
  - relate personal experiences and prior knowledge to written and visual text
  - practise using language through revisiting and retelling familiar stories
- **poetry** — reading poetry provides children with the opportunity to play with sounds, isolate and segment sounds, and build phonemic awareness
- **questioning** — using a mixture of lower- and higher-level questions that require a range of thinking and responses can strengthen and extend children's oral language capabilities
- **learning discussions** — providing opportunities for children to reflect on, describe and explain their thinking and reasoning through play and investigations builds vocabulary to talk about learning
- **technologies** — using a range of technologies, including apps, can encourage children to actively listen, think and speak. Technologies can be used as part of daily learning and practice in documenting and sharing children's learning.

References

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2010, 'F–10 Curriculum: English — Key ideas', ACARA 2010–2019, licensed under **CC BY 4.0**. For the latest information and additional terms of use, please check the **Australian Curriculum website** and its **copyright notice**.

Department of Education (DoE) Queensland 2018, 'Aligning curriculum, pedagogies and assessment, an example of practice in Prep/Year 1 play-based learning: Developing oral language through play (Australian Curriculum: English)', *Age-appropriate pedagogies: Examples of practice in the early years of school — examples of practice Prep/Year 1, play-based learning,* https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/earlyYears/Documents/english-play-based-learning-prep-year1.pdf.

Romeo R, Leonard, J, Robinson, S, West, M, Mackey, A, Rowe, M & Gabrieli, J 2018, 'Beyond the 30-million-word gap: Children's conversational exposure is associated with language-related brain function', *Psychological Science*, vol. 29, iss. 5, pp. 700–710, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5945324

Shiel, G, Cregan, A, McGough, A & Archer P 2012, *Oral Language in Early Childhood and Primary Education (3–8 years*), NCCA commissioned report, Research report no. 14, www.erc.ie/documents/oral_language_in_early_childhood_and_primary_education_3-8_years_.pdf.

Further reading

These additional readings may be useful in further developing knowledge and understanding of oral language development.

Edwards-Groves, C, Anstey, M & Bull, G 2014*, Classroom Talk: Understanding dialogue, pedagogy and practice*, PETAA, Newtown, NSW.

Hill, S 2010, 'Oral language play and learning', *Practically Primary* vol. 15, no. 2, Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA), www.alea.edu.au/eknowledge/area?command=record&id=288&cid=25.

National Curriculum Board 2009, 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum: English', *ACARA*, https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/Australian_Curriculum_-_English.pdf.

Spilt, JL, Koomen, HMY & Harrison, LJ 2015, 'Language development in the early school years: The importance of close relationships with teachers'*, Developmental Psychology*, vol. 51, no. 2, pp.185–196, https://pure.uva.nl/ws/files/2363421/159842_435817.pdf

Westby, C 2017, 'Marion Blank's levels of language abstraction', *Word of Mouth*, vol. 29, iss. 1, pp. 12–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/1048395017726551e.

Wetzell, J 2011, '"Robust" link between preschool, language and literacy', *Vanderbilt University: Research news @ Vanderbilt,* 18 November, https://news.vanderbilt.edu/2011/08/18/preschool-language-literacy.