4 Language Development

In This Chapter

You will be introduced to the essential knowledge and skills related to the following Unit of Competency from CHC02 Community Services (Children's Services) National Training Package:

CHCFC5C Foster and enhance children's cognitive and language development

When you have completed this chapter

You should be able to demonstrate that you are able to:

- understand the factors that influence language development
- understand how language develops and are aware of theories related to language development
- provide experiences to support children's language and literacy development
- support children for whom English is a second language.

Language Development

This chapter explores the development of language and communication. It examines the strategies that can be used to nurture language development, identifies common language and communication problems in young children and also addresses how to support children for whom English is their second language.

The process of learning to communicate begins at birth.

Language, in its most basic form, is used to communicate our needs and wants. At a more complex level it is the means by which we convey our thoughts, feelings and beliefs. Language is also a social and cultural tool used to transmit social and cultural norms. Language can generate powerful emotions – it can be used to soothe, to enrage, as humour, to engender sadness, empathy and pity. Language combines spoken and written words, signing, gestures, facial expressions, posture and eye contact.

To stimulate children's use and understanding of language, provide successful language experiences and identify children with possible language problems requires a sound knowledge of:

- the structure and components of a language
- the developmental sequence of language and communication skills
- how children acquire language.

Language acquisition begins with the recognition of a language's sound patterns. This skill is acquired in the first year of life and is not dependent on an understanding of word meaning. By 12 months children will have acquired the meaning of many words and around this time they will also begin to utter their first words such as names of objects, action words and social interactions. By 18 months children begin to use two-word phrases. As the child approaches the age of three years they become fluent at using grammar and by age four children have acquired sophisticated language skills. The stages of language development tend to be consistent but the rate at which children proceed through these stages can differ greatly from one child to another.

How do Children Learn Language?

Language is learned without direct instruction and children acquire the rules of language without being directly taught. Children also use non-verbal communication in much the same way as adults – perhaps even better! It is generally agreed that children pass through relatively consistent stages of language development, although debate continues about how language is acquired.

Chomsky believes that the development of language is innate; that is, we are born with linguistic knowledge. Bruner believed that language is acquired through social interactions within the environment. Piaget's theory of language development is argued in the context of cognitive development, while Skinner believed that language was acquired through conditioning. The answer to the question of how language develops probably lies somewhere in all of them; that is, language development is a combination of innate ability, reinforcement, cognition, and social and environmental factors.

There is also debate about the relationship between language and cognition – are they developed independently? Is language acquisition and cognition co-dependent? Can thought and language be separated? These are questions that theorists have long debated.

What is agreed is that the acquisition of language is a complex process dependent on many factors, both innate and environmental. Table 4.1 provides a simple overview of the key arguments in relation to language development.

Table 4.1: How language is acquired

INNATE FACTORS	ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS
Language is acquired at around the same time and in the same way regardless of the child's culture.	Children learn language through imitation.
Children with little or no hearing begin to babble in the same way as hearing children	Non-hearing children learn sign language through imitation.
All children experiment with sounds and make up their own words.	Children experiement with words and sounds they hear in their environment.
Language is not taught, it is acquired.	Children who are exposed to a rich langauge envronment are more competent language users than children who come from language poor environments.

Source: Adapted from: Gestwicki, C. (1995) **Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Curriculum and Development in Early Education**. Albany: Delmar Publishers Inc. (p225)

Skinner's Behaviourist Theory of Language /Development

Skinner's (1957) behaviourist theory of language development, explains language acquisition as a 'stimulus-response' process. Behaviourists believe language is learned through imitation and practice; infants learn to speak and listen by turn-taking with the adult carer. A process of modelling and reinforcement is used as the child imitates and practices language. The child was seen as 'an empty vessel' waiting to be filled with knowledge and

information. Children learned language by imitating an adult model and having their attempts either positively or negatively reinforced.

Noam Chomsky's Theory of Language Development

Chomsky's (1965) innatist theory of language development suggests children are born with the ability to learn language. Innativists suggest that human beings are equipped with language skills at birth and these are activated as the child matures. Language development follows a cycle: the infant makes gurgling sounds which the adult imitates, the infant then repeats initial gurgling as an intentional response, the adult makes small changes or additions which the infant listens to and then repeats. The adult reinforces this by smiling and congratulating the infant.

Chomsky believed there were 'universal principles' built into the brain, and that the child was pre-programmed to learn language. He used the term Language Acquisition Device (LAD) to describe this special biological brain mechanism. He felt this explained why children around the world learn language at about the same time and in a similar way. It could also explain how a child learns the complex components such as grammar without apparently being 'taught'. Chomsky believed language development would 'unfold' as the child matured – it was not dependent on modelling or rewards. Chomsky believes that the LAD is activated when infants begin to be exposed to language.

Chomsky also developed the term 'universal grammar' to describe the unconscious process by which we determine whether a sentence is well formed, for example the child's ability to understand that 'the chair on sit' is grammatically incorrect and 'sit on the chair' is correct. Chomsky argues that children are born with this ability, which is acquired after the child hears a few examples from their native language. This approach supports the social constructivist theory of children as capable and resourceful learners.

Recent critics of Chomsky suggest that, rather than being born with the innate ability to use language, children are born with the ability to interpret language using structural analysis. Lust (1998) refers to this as the ability to 'crack the codes' of their language, which she has demonstrated to a universal skill. Lust believes that children can work out their language system of word meaning, sentence structure and sounds with great accuracy.

Source: Lust, S. (1998) CU studies show evidence babies are born with language leaning ability. **Cornell Chronicle**.

Bruner's Theory of Development

Bruner (1974) developed a constructivist model of development in which the child is actively engaged in meaning making though their interactions with people and the environment. Bruner suggested that meaning making included not only how children make sense of the world but also how they understand themselves. He referred to both constructing meaning and processing of information as a way of understanding development. Bruner also argued that development could not be studied apart from the child's social and cultural environment. Bruner saw cognition as something that was deeply embedded in both language and culture. Bruner suggested that the outcome of cognition was thinking and that

it was through this thinking process that children were able to understand themselves and the word through their own experiences. The process and construction of meaning are achieved through concept attainment, in which the child assesses incoming information and determines its relevant features based on problem solving and trial and error. Like Piaget, Bruner advocated discovery learning, believing that the child would gain understanding through first-hand experience and exploratory play. Bruner believed that cognition developed in stages or modes of representation, with each stage becoming increasingly complex:

- **enactive representation stage**: during infancy the child's world is represented through sensory experiences
- **iconic representation stage**: at about the age of two or three years the child begins to use mental images to represent real objects
- **symbolic representation stage**: at around the age of seven years the child develops the ability to use symbols to create meaning. These symbols primarily include written language and mathematics.

Bruner developed the term Language Activating Support System (LASS) to describe the socialising process that drives children towards language learning. In this model Bruner considered the carer-child relationship to be a critical factor in language development.

Figure 4.1 depicts Bruner's (1996) belief that individuals only reach their full potential through social and cultural interactions that allow us to make sense of the world, shaping our ideas and our beliefs and providing us with a language to express our thoughts.

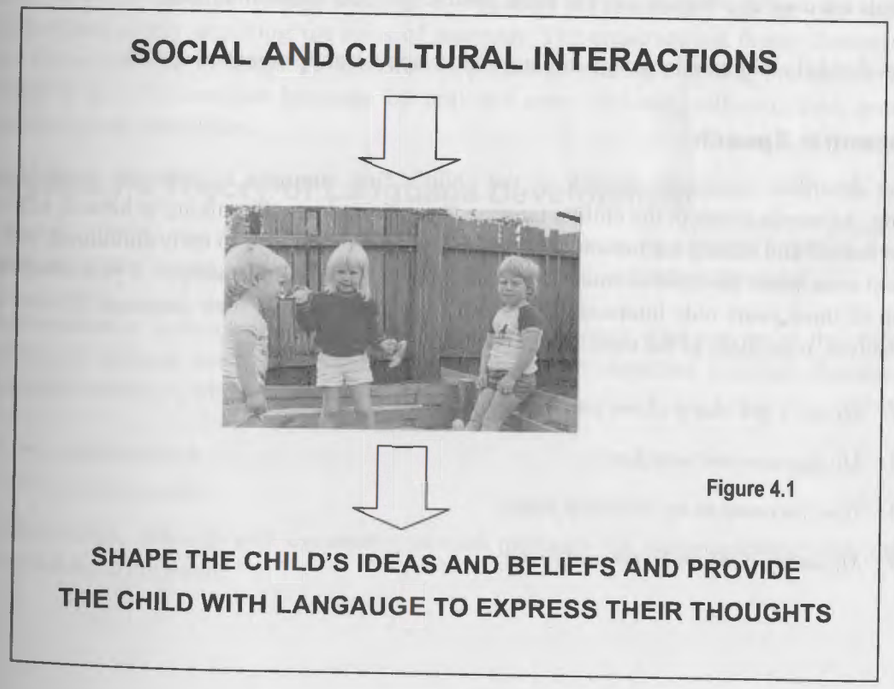


Figure 4.1

Piaget's Theory of Language Development

Piaget thought language reflected rather than determined cognitive development.

Piaget theorised that cognitive development proceeds as a result of a child's interaction with the environment. Interactionists theorise that language does not develop 'in a vacuum'. Language depends on cognition. Interactionists see the child as an active learner who uses language to make sense of their environment. Language learning is acquired by the same process used to acquire other knowledge.

Language may, in Piaget's opinion, 'amplify or facilitate' learning, but it does not bring about cognitive growth. Piaget implies that the ability to communicate adequately is connected to cognitive development, but more often language reflects rather than determines cognitive development.

Piaget believed children passed through predictable, sequential stages of cognitive development. In the first stage, sensorimotor, the infant learns about her environment by exploring through her senses. Towards the end of the sensorimotor stage the child begins to understand the existence of symbols for real objects. Initially these symbolic representations are spoken words that represent people or objects such as *'mummy', 'daddy'* or *'ball'*.

During the next stage of development, the pre-operational stage, the child develops an understanding that written words can represent people, objects, actions and feelings, tell a story or give information.

At the concrete operational stage the child uses logic and predictions to solve problems such as mathematical concepts. By the time the child reaches the formal operational stage symbols are used in complex ways to think abstractly about ideas and issues.

Piaget divided children's language into egocentric speech and socialised speech.

Egocentric Speech

Piaget described egocentric speech as the child's first attempts at language – babbling, cooing. As words develop, the child's language centres on herself – talking to herself, talking about herself and talking for herself. Egocentric speech continues into early childhood, and is present even when the child is interacting with other children. For example, if you observe a group of three years olds interacting you will find that much of their language focuses on themselves, regardless of the topic of conversation.

A: 'My cat's got sharp claws and he scratched me.'

B: 'My dog can run very fast.'

A: 'You can come to my birthday party.'

B: 'My daddy can run faster and faster.'

Socialised Speech

Piaget observed that, by age seven, egocentric speech begins to be replaced with socialised speech as children become less egocentric and are more able to respond to topic of conversation.

A: 'My cat's got sharp claws and he scratched me.'

B: 'Let me see, did it hurt?'

A: 'Yes, I cried and my mum put some cream on it.'

B: 'I don't like it when my dog jumps on me.'

Piaget believed that the child's growing ability to attach meaning to language was primarily a result of knowledge acquired by the child's own self-directed exploration and manipulation of objects in the environment.

Piaget believed that adult interaction did not play any significant role in the development of children's language.

When learning new skills or concepts the child draws on past experiences to make sense of the new situation. Past knowledge or experiences help to develop a frame of reference from which new information can be processed. This process is known as constructivism. That is, the child constructs their own understandings by drawing on prior knowledge and learning. For example a child who has no past experience in an early childhood setting will have a different interpretation of the first day of kindergarten than a child who has had a range of experiences in an early childhood setting.

Constructivists describe young children as 'builders of language', adding one word to another and slowly acquiring the rules of grammar. The constructivist theory demonstrates that the acquisition of language is more complex than merely imitating the spoken word. Children actively construct language by trial and error, self-talk, self-correction, practice, repetition and observation.

Vygotsky's Theory of Language Development

Vygotsky believed language was central to cognitive development. Language and thought were inextricably tied together.

Vygotsky (1934) also described children's early language as egocentric; however, he also emphasised that language development occurred in a social and cultural context.

Communication is developed by interactions with the parents who pass on to the child the social and cultural norms of their language. Vygotsky identified two key functions of children's language, which he called:

- public speech
- private speech.

Public speech, although still egocentric, is used primarily for communicating with others. *'I'm making a big house.'*

The child uses private speech for the purposes of self-direction, self-control and problem solving. '*Where is that red car? It can go in the garage. Can't find it. OK blue car you can go in instead.*'

The use of private speech becomes internalised as the child matures and is replaced with **self-talk** or **inner speech**, which is used to think through tasks and problem-solve. A good example of this is our own self-talk when we are thinking about what to do or how to go about a task.

Vygotsyky also believed children used language to help internalise their knowledge and understanding of the world, and that this understanding of language is made meaningful by interactions with adults.

Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed that there was a critical time in learning where children could be assisted to develop to a higher level of language with adult intervention. This was called the Zone of Proximal Development.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

By now you should be very familiar with ZPD. Vygotsky believed that children pass through three stages in the ZPD:

1. unable to complete a specific task when the adult is unavailable to assist
2. able to complete the task if the adult assists verbally and/or physically
3. able to complete the task without adult assistance.

Vygotsky emphasised that social, language and cognitive development were integrated. He identified language as central to the child's ability to internalise knowledge.

Vygotsky believed that as the child learns to use words to label objects or express needs the child is also developing concepts about relationships between objects and events.

Generalising Meaning

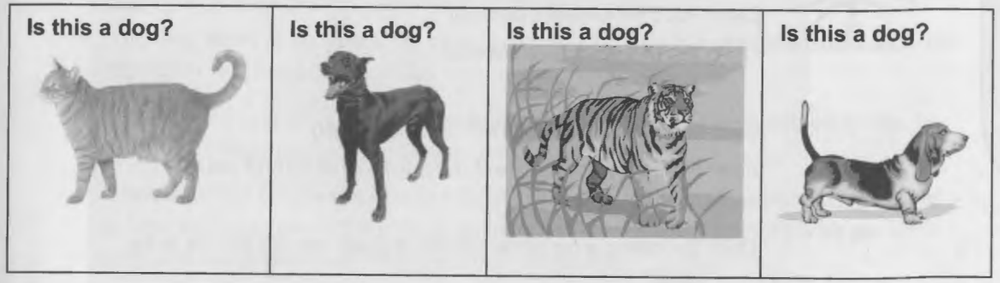
As the child hears the same word or phrase used in different experiences or situations he or she is able to begin to generalise the meaning of the word.

For example the word '*dog*' might only be applied to the pet dog at home. However as the child hears the word '*dog*' applied to similar creatures in other settings the child is able to generalise the meaning of the word dog to mean a category of animals with a particular set of characteristics that define them as '*dogs*'. This generalisation may take the child some time to achieve.

Overextension

At first, the child may assign the label '*dog*' to all four-legged animals. This generalisation of word meaning is known as overextension and is commonly seen with toddlers who may refer to cats as dogs or vice versa depending on their own experiences.

The ability of the child to make this generalisation is quite astounding given that the child has only a very limited knowledge of what makes a dog different to a cat or a goat or a horse etc. The child must develop a set of characteristics that can be assigned to all animals that are '*dogs*' – quite a task considering the variety of colours, shapes and sizes of the dog world!



The child must use their newly acquired knowledge of the word 'dog' to meaningfully assign attributes that can be generalised to distinguish 'dogs' from all other animals.

Language and Thought are Tightly Interwoven

Language helps the child to begin to develop the skills to categorise and classify objects, actions and situations. The ability to classify is an important cognitive task that helps us to make sense of the world.

Words have meanings – they convey concepts, ideas and understanding that have an agreed meaning without the need to depend on concrete objects or materials. For example, if you were to say to a typical four-year-old, *'We are going shopping today to buy a new television'*, the child would understand the concept of 'shopping', would know that it means going outside of the home to a 'shop' and would understand the word 'television'. It would not be necessary to explain each of these concepts to the child.

Now consider the same statement conveyed to an adult. Imagine your friend says to you, *'We are going shopping today to buy a new television'*. What additional meaning might this convey to you? You may think about the cost or size of the television, or you may think about where the television is being purchased; you may even think about your own television and wish you could buy a new one! It is important to remember that the child's ability to attach meaning to words is limited by their level of cognitive development.

Role of the Adult

Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky believed that adults played a significant role in actively 'scaffolding' to enrich children's language development.

Vygotsky believed the adult played a significant role in a child's language development and cognitive development. You will already be familiar with Vygotsky's idea of scaffolding learning.

Scaffolding Language

Child: 'I wanna make one of those things.'

Carer: 'You'd like to make a placemat?'

Child: 'Yes I'd like to make a placemat.'

Child: 'My wented to the beach with my daddy this day.'

Carer: 'You went to the beach with daddy today? Tell me what you did.'

Child: 'I'm making a big castle with lots of pointy tops like the one in the story.'

Carer: 'Those pointy tops are called turrets. Would you like me to get the book so you can look at the pictures again?'

Child: 'My poppy gotted a new lawn mower.'

Carer: 'Oh, he must be very pleased.'

Child: 'Yes, he's got lots and lots of grass to mow and he said I can help him!'

Carer: 'What special jobs do you do to help poppy?'

Intentionality

Intentionality theories in relation to language development describe the child as an active co-constructor of their own learning and suggest that language development must be addressed in the context of other domains of development as well as the socio-cultural environment and how the child interacts with these elements. This is the concept of intentionality. This approach takes into account how other domains of development such as cognitive, social and emotional development may contribute to language acquisition.

Language and Brain Development

Brain development research continues to challenge our beliefs and understanding about many aspects of development. Language is the tool by which we transmit information into thoughts. Research into brain development shows that what we hear is translated into abstract representation, which is stored in our memory for later recall. Typically we do not store information verbatim, but rather we translate and store key concepts.

Research specific discoveries related to language development include:

- In the fifth month in utero, the brain begins to wire itself for sound and 10 weeks prior to birth the infant is learning the melody of mother's voice and her sound pattern of language.
- Infants respond positively to the speech parents naturally use when speaking to an infant; this speech is referred to as motherese or parentese.
- At birth infants are able to distinguish the sound of all languages but by six months of age they are able to recognise only the sounds of their native language.
- In the fourth to eighth month of life, a neuron is assigned to every sound in the native language, forming a 'native language map'.
- From two years to six years, the brain's 'wiring' for vision matures, small muscle co-ordination is achieved and critical thinking emerges
- In the second year of life, when the child looks at pictures that are named by the parent the brain organises the connections for language.
- When the child is between two and three years of age, the brain is increasingly able to form mental symbols for objects, people and events; this coincides with an increased vocabulary and the use of short sentences.
- The brain appears to have specific areas within it that are used for processing distinct aspect of language.
- Spoken language reinforces brain connections.
- In the presence of chronic stress the brain produces a hormone called cortisol. Children with high levels of cortisol have been found to experience more cognitive, motor and social delays than other children.

Brain research has also reinforced the critical importance of the establishing warm and caring relationships with children. Brain research has demonstrated that positive interactions stimulate and strengthen the formation connections or synapses between brain cells. These connections form neural pathways critical for language, learning and emotional development.

Source: Schiller, P., (2003) A Joyful Journey to Literacy. The Great Debate, **Child Care Information Exchange**. No.154, Redmond WA.

Early Brain Development and Child Care. **Healthy Child Care America**. Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1999

Language and Culture

Language is integral to our culture. Each culture has its own meanings, values and practices in relation to language. Language development is a naturally occurring process; it is acquired as part of the socialisation and enculturation that begins at birth.

The social functions of language and the 'rules' for speaking vary from culture to culture.

Language socialisation is the way in which language is used in one's culture to express cultural practices and values such as politeness and respect. Language is acquired as the child interacts with the family and through the family is socialised into the community. It is through this process that the child learns the social functions of language and the 'rules' for speaking. These rules vary from culture to culture. For example, in some cultures it is considered impolite for children to make eye contact when speaking to an adult while in other cultures it is consider impolite not to make eye contact when speaking to an adult. At a very early age we begin to teach social skills such as saying 'please' and 'thank you'.

> *'Through daily interaction with other language users, children earn how to use language to convey messages, to express feelings, and to achieve intentions which enable them to function in a society ... Through the process of language learning, parents socialise their children into socially and culturally appropriate ways of behaving, speaking and thinking.'* *Eric Digest No. 154*

Language and communication development must be considered in the context of the whole child. Although the acquisition of language occurs in a predictable age-related sequence there are many factors that influence an individual's language development.

The family is the most powerful influence on children's language development. The quality and amount of adult and child 'talk' will affect the rate of language acquisition. Families teach children that language can be used in different ways. A child may learn at a very early age that:

- talking is a way of exploring boundaries, of finding out information and sharing ideas
- talking is used as a strategy for informing and enriching
- words are used to reassure and comfort
- talking is limited to giving directions
- asking questions leads to conflict, and explanations are not encouraged
- talking may be used as a weapon to upset, humiliate or hurt people.

Storytelling

Grace, Albert, Edward and William are growing up in a household rich in storytelling. As part of the family's Aboriginal traditions the children are told many stories by senior members of the family. These stories tell about family history, customs, traditions and beliefs. The children are encouraged to listen and ask questions. Storytelling has also been used to teach the children their traditional language. As a result of the storytelling the children have extensive and rich vocabularies and have learned the value of oral storytelling as a way of preserving their cultural heritage.

Seen But Not Heard

Victor (14 moths) is the youngest of four children ranging in age from 18 years to six years. Victor attends long day care five days per week. He is a quiet child who is easily managed. He is quite happy to toddle around from one area to another. Victor makes no attempt to talk but has good receptive language skills.

Bedtime

Enzo and Pia look forward to their bedtime ritual. Each even their father reads them stories using his voice and facial expressions to bring the stories to life.

The children also love to hear their father's stories of his childhood in Italy. Even though some of the stories have been told many times the children never tire of them. 'Tell us about the time you fell out of the boat.' 'Tell us about the time when your mum made you go to school wearing your funny suit.'

Georga

Georga is cared for each day by her grandparents, Bob and Pam. Pam sits Georga in her highchair and chats to her as she is working in the kitchen. Bob likes to take Georga outside and show her things in the garden.

At the weekly coffee mornings Georga is talked to and fussed over by Pam's friends. Bob takes Georga for a walk each morning to buy the paper. Rita, who works at the newsagency, loves her morning chats with Georga.

Language development is shaped by the life experiences to which the child is exposed. Children who are left alone for long periods of time are seldom involved in meaningful conversation, and those who have limited exposure to books and stories are unlikely to have the same level of language development as a child of similar age who has been exposed to a language-rich environment and has had a variety of stimulating life experiences.

Children from socially and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to use language for reporting, logical reasoning, anticipating, predicting, recognising problems and

reflecting on solutions, considering the feelings and needs of others, or use language to enrich imaginative play.

Richard

Richard (3 years) lives with his mother who is a drug user. Richard has never had a story read to him. His mother never sings to him or even talks to him unless it's to give directions. She yells at him a lot. Richard copes by keeping silent. He knows that if he answers back his mother will become even angrier.

Pressure

Leo (4 years) is a timid and anxious child. His parents have high expectations for Leo. Apart from attending preschool three days per week, Leo also attends violin lessons, swimming and art classes.

Leo has begun to develop a stutter, which is more pronounced when he is talking to his parents or when he is required to speak in a group situation.

Richard's father believes that Leo's stutter is a sing of laziness. He becomes angry with Leo when he stutters; this in turn makes the stuttering worse.

Slow

Connie (3 years) is still speaking in two or three word phrases. She also relies a great deal on gestures to convey meaning and make herself understood. Her articulation is poor and she often substitutes beginning sounds, making her very difficult to understand.

The carer has recommended that Connie have her hearing tested. So far Connie's mother has resisted, claiming that Connie is 'just slow'.

Dummy

Sam (4 years) has a severe articulation disorder. He is extremely difficult to understand and becomes angry and frustrated when he can't make himself understood. His family hadn't consider his articulation an issue as they were all able to understand Sam and are surprised that the carer wants Sam to attend speech therapy.

Delays in physical development may also have an impact on language development, particularly when the area of the mouth or face is affected. A pre-schooler who has poor eye–hand co-ordination, poor concentration skills and poor visual discrimination skills may struggle with later literacy development.

Poor nutrition before birth and during the first few years of life will directly affect the child's brain development and can lead to learning disabilities and behaviour disorders.

A toddler who has a poor diet, is fed mainly soft foods and has a high intake of processed foods may suffer speech delays because of insufficient development of the muscles needed for speech.

Miko

Miko (2 years 6 months) lives with his mother and four-year-old twin brothers in a high rise housing estate. Miko and his brothers attend family day care three days per week. The children often arrive without breakfast and without a nutritious lunch. The carer is concerned that Miko is very small for his age and is lagging in all areas of development, including language. Miko's brothers are very rough with him, snatching things from him and pushing him. Miko is often upset.

The ability to communicate effectively affects all areas of development. Children who have poor language skills are at high risk of school failure, social isolation and low self-esteem as they struggle to make themselves understood.

Applying Theory to Practice

Language development is a huge and complex field of study. The speed with which children acquire language and apply the rules related to their native language is staggering. While brain research is helping to answer some of the questions surrounding the acquisition of language there is still much to be explored.

The debate about language, cognition and the way in which thought and language interrelate continues. The role of the social and cultural context in relation to language development also continues to be debated.

However, we do know that language acquisition occurs in a predictable sequence, that language and thought are intimately related and that parents and other primary carers play a critical role in stimulating language development.

In relation to children's language development The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System Quality Practices Guide (2005:42) states:

> *'Children are competent individuals who use language to explore their sense of self, knowledge about others, and their place in the world ... It is socially constructed and culturally specific. The acquisition of language is an individual experience and is determined by many interrelating factors such as environment, appropriate role modelling, and supported opportunities to practise and develop skills.'*

In early childhood curriculum frameworks language is central feature and is emphasised as one of the primary tools used to construct meaningful relationships with children and families.

'Communicating permeates all areas of the preschool curriculum. It is important for children to be encouraged and supported in using a range of communication modes and media and in listening to and interpreting others' ideas.'

Queensland School Curriculum Council. Preschool Curriculum Guidelines, 1998 p. 44

The NSW Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood (2000:59) describes four main 'responsibilities' of carers in supporting language development:

1. Providing an environment that supports communication:
   - Where there is the opportunity to communicate and be responded to
   - Where there are worthwhile, meaningful experiences and objects for adults and children to talk about
   - Where literacy is embedded appropriately in every provision made
   - Where there is sufficient 'space' for children to communicate
   - Where language at its richest is used.
2. Using language and other forms of communication appropriately with children
3. Responding in a meaningful way to children's efforts to communicate, both verbal and non-verbal. Sometimes professionals have to try hard to figure out what is being communicated and respond appropriately
4. Actively encouraging children to use language and to recognise the power of language, while at the same time encouraging and acknowledging the power of non-verbal means of communication.

It is evident that language as a communication tool is valued beyond its use to send and receive messages and convey information. It is also vital to the establishment of trusting relationships which are central to all high quaity early childhood environments.

Think About

There is no single agreed upon theory of how language develops. What is agreed is that language acquisition is a remarkable human feat.

The process of language acquisition is supported by social interactions with significant others. Infrequent interactions and failure to reinforce attempts to communicate can significantly reduce the quality of language development.

Language and Communication

The Functions of Language

Communication includes oral and written language, sign language and non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and body language. Children are also exposed to other forms of communication such as dance, music, singing, movies, television, radio and computers. All of these modes of communication provide children with experiences that foster and support their language development.

Gestures can communicate very clear messages.

Language is used in many different ways and for many different purposes, for example to inform, express feelings, clarify ideas or direct. When considering language and young children language also has any purposes, such as:

- **making needs known** – although infants and toddlers rely on gestures or sounds, using words is a much more efficient and effective. Being able to verbalise needs, express opinions and reason with others is essential if the child is to reach their full potential
- **conveying the rules and norms of society** such as greeting others or politeness, or the rule of 'back and forth' or understanding the turn-taking aspect of conversation vital for effective communication
- **the development of independence** and dealing successfully with everyday life challenges
- **developing social skills** – language is used to make social connections, develop and sustain friendships and maintain personal relationships
- **developing an awareness of self and others** – helping children to understand how their actions affect others, how others see them, how they see themselves and how to express emotions in a socially appropriate manner
- **sustaining curiosity, imagination and interest** – the ability to ask questions, explore ideas and pursue interests is an important life skill and is the basic motivation for learning new skills and information
- **promoting thinking skills** – applying acquired knowledge about the world and understanding phenomena in order to think through a task, problem, issue or

challenge is fundamental for daily survival; language is also the primary tool used in thinking and creating new ideas

- **developing and expanding the imagination** – being able to imagine helps individuals to hypothesise, to examine possibilities, consider ideas and arguments and to think in creative ways
- **beginning literacy skills**, which draw on experience with the spoken word. A child who has poor language skills is more likely to develop poor literacy skills.

Source: Sowers, J (2000) Language **Arts in Early Education**. South Melbourne: Delmar Thomson Learning.

Stages of Language Development

Language development occurs in predictable, sequential age-related stages. The ability to acquire language is interdependent on the child's cognitive abilities, which are also sequential in development. The rate at which language develops may vary from one child to another. Language develops as a result of the child's interactions with people and the environment; cultural variations in language development will also occur. Table 4.2 provides a summary of how language develops.

Table 4.2

Overview of How Language Develops	
0-3 months	Learns the basic skills of communication. Hearing develops, learns to make different sounds, makes eye contact, smiles, responds to sounds.
3-6 months	Reacts to sound of voice; makes isolated sounds other than cries – 'cooing', e.g. vowels '*ah ah oo oo*' and some consonants *'k', 'g'*; makes noises at others.
6-9 months	'Babbling', a string of connected sounds, uses 'sing song sound' sound patterns of adult speech, sings along with favourite music. Recognises common objects by name; recognises some words: *bottle, mummy, daddy, no*; uses simple gestures like clapping hands; understands simple requests. Recognises and responds to own name
9-12 months	'Jargonning' or long strings of babbled sound that sound like a foreign language. Begins to copy sounds in environment. May develop first words *'mama'* and '*dada*'; by 12 months most children using five words consistently and understand and increasing number of words. Language sample at 12 months (While playing with doll's house) – mostly single words with a few two-word combinations *Matt up; boy; chair; jump; more; that; look; wee; no; sock; shoe; nose; ear; bed.*
12-18 months	Develops more words and jargoning reduces; often shortens longer words: '*bottle* becomes *bot*'; understands and can follow simple directions; use short 2-3 word phrases; recognises and identifies common objects. The first 50 words are usually connected to significant people and objects. Single words used to refer to many objects. Different word combinations: *daddy car*, (subject and object)

	daddy go, (subject and action) *drive car*, (action and object) *go car*, (action and place) *daddy car*, (possessor and possessed) *big car*, (description and object or person) *that car*, (demonstrator and object or person) *me go car* Language sample at 18 months (While playing with doll's house) Uses two-word combinations, nouns, verbs, locatives and adjective. *that doll, boy go, mum there, dolly up, no more, that bed, big bed, me sleep.*
2-2½ years	Uses two- or three-word sentences, understands action words; points to picture to identify actions and family members; knows function of objects; develops listening and turn-taking skills of conversation; responds to directions and questions; can repeat two or more numbers. Language sample at 2 years (while playing with variety of toys) *look duck, oo that duck, sit down, more?, me jump, duck jump, quack quack, pig, look more pig mum, there more, that truck gone; me spoon.*
2½-5 years	Develops understanding of variety of rules of vocabulary, word and sentence structure; uses sentences and can tell stories; has extensive vocabulary; can relay information; can report past events; constantly asks questions. Language sample at 3 years (looking at book) *Me see dog Mum. That big dog.* *He's my dog. He's digging a hole. He's going home now. His Mum got more bones. His Mum cook those bones. Where are more bones?* Language sample at 4 years (describing game) *I was the mum. A pretend one. Then we were sitting on the blackboard. I hurt my knee. What was the slippery dip for? Why is that slippery dip not working? I get Mark to fix. Mark was the father. He can fix slippery dip.* Language sample at 5 years (describing what happens at school) *They have lots of books and toys. There's a dolly's house in the corner. I play with dolly house every single day. Then we go outside for lunch. We sit in the shed when it is raining.*
5-7 years	Has developed most language skills; all sounds are produced clearly; some occasional errors with irregular verbs ('*broked*' instead of *'broken'*).

Adapted from: Clark, L., & Ireland, C., (1996) **Learning to Talk. Talking to Learn**. Australia: Angus & Robertson. (p. 25)

Mulvaney, A., (1991) **Look Who's Talking! How to Help Children With Their Communication Skills**, Simon Schuster, NSW (pp. 21–37)

Speech and Language: the Same or Different?

Speech and language are two separate but closely related areas of development.

What is Language?

Language is an organised system of symbols or signs used by individuals to share meaning. 'Language' can take the form of words, spoken or written, or gestures. Each language comprises symbols, rules and uses. Learning language is one of the most important developmental tasks of childhood.

Speech Development

Speech development is divided into two key areas:

1. **articulation:** the ability to produce speech sounds.

2. **quality of voice:** this refers to how speech sounds when it is spoken. Is the voice loud, soft, husky, fluid, fast, slow, hesitant or does the voice sound just right? Quality of voice becomes a problem if it is difficult for the child to be understood or if it interferes with the child's ability to interact effectively. Physical problems with the mouth, throat or hearing impairment will affect quality of voice.

Language Development

Language development refers to how children understand, organise, speak and use words in order to communicate at an effective, age-appropriate level. Language development is divided into two areas:

1. **receptive language:** This refers to how well the child understands what is said. Receptive language develops well before the ability to use spoken language. Infants and toddlers have the ability to understand and respond to spoken language before they are able to use words.

2. **expressive language:** This refers to the ability to meaningfully communicate thoughts and needs to others, both verbally and non-verbally. . For example, toddlers will use gestures such as pointing or leading the adult by the hand to make their needs known.

It is important to remember that the child's receptive language develops at a much faster rate than their expressive language. For example, a 12-month-old may have a receptive language of around 15 words while having an expressive language of only one or two words.

Universal Listeners

Until about six months of age, babies are referred to as the 'universal listener.' They can distinguish differences in phonemes that an adult cannot hear. They lose this ability around six months when the brain begins to filter out sounds not heard in the environment.

However, if babies are regularly exposed to the sounds of another language before 10 months they retain the ability to recognise the sounds from both languages.

All babies across cultures babble in the same way. By nine to 10 months their babbling contains only the sounds of their native language.

Components of Language

The English language is very complex. There are:

- 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds
- over 300 ways of combining letters into sequences to make distinct sounds
- approximately 1,000 rules of grammar, which dictate how words must be connected to one another to convey meaning
- in excess of 50,000 words in the average adult vocabulary
- countless non-verbal gestures made with hands, faces and bodies that convey and reinforce the meaning of spoken words.

There are also a range of conversation skills that must be learned:

- initiating a new topic
- determining what the listener already knows and does not know
- deciding what the listener might be interested in hearing
- formulating and responding to questions
- responding to emotional outbursts
- applying social rules such as speaking politely
- making and maintaining eye contact
- allowing the other person to finish speaking before responding.

Spoken language is made up of different components. Children acquire the skills associated with these components in the following sequence: phonemes, lexicons, single words, syntax, morphemes and pragmatics.

Phonemes

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that affects meaning. For example, consider two words that sound similar such as 'nut' and 'cut'. We know they are different words with different meanings by the sound of the beginning letter of each word.

Phonemes
Phonemes are sets of sounds of a particular language.

Table: 4.3 Phonemes

Order of Phonemic Development		
Age	**Consonants Generally Acquired**	**Predictable Errors**
1-2 years	p, m, n, w, h	Omissions of final consonants – 'ca' for 'cat' Substitutions for consonants – 'pall' for 'ball' Reduction of consonant blends – 'sore' for 'store' By two years, intelligibility of 60%
2-4 years	b, d, k, g, f, y	Omission of medial consonants – '*birhouse*' for '*birdhouse*' Substitutions – '*peder*' for '*feather*' By fours years, intelligibility of 90%
5-6 years	t, ing, r, l	Errors with difficult blends – '*stap*' for '*strap*' Substitution of 'r' for 'l' - '*yerrow*' for '*yellow*'
6-7 years	voiceless th, sh, ch, j	Distortion and substitutions – '*tink*' for '*think*', '*gar*' for '*jar*'
7-8 years	voiced th, v, z, zh	Substitution of voiceless pair for voiced pair – '*soo*' for "*zoo*', '*wash*' for '*watch*' By seven years, 100% intelligibility

Source: Sowers, J. (2000) **Language Arts in Early Education**. South Melbourne: Delmar Thomson Learning. (p60)

Lexicons

Lexicons
The vocabulary of a language.

All languages would have a lexicon for words such as 'mother' or 'father' but not all languages have lexicons for more complex concepts or specific technical names like 'discrimination', 'democracy' or 'computer'. In Japan the lexicon 'on' is one's responsibility to a kindness that has been done and can never be repaid. There is no single equivalent word in the English language. Lexicons are often borrowed and assimilated from other languages, for example, lasagne, kimono and khaki.

Table 4.4 Lexicon Development

Order of Lexicon Development: Prepositions and Adjectives	
Phase	**Prepositions**
1	in, on, under, beside
2	behind, in front of – objects with visible front and back
3	behind, in front of – relationships between people and objects
Phase	Adjectives
1	big, small – to represent any aspect of size
2	tall, short – to describe one dimension of size long, short, high, low

3	thick, thin – to describe a second dimension of size wide, narrow deep, shallow

Source: Sowers, J. (2000) **Language Arts in Early Education**. South Melbourne: Delmar Thomson Learning. (p. 62)

Single Words: First Words

After a period of babbling, single words begin to appear and are used until the child is around two years. The sequence of single words usually appears in the following order: nouns, verbs, adjectives and prepositions. First single words tend to be nouns that represent things that are important to the baby such as *mumma, dada, bubba, bottle* and *dog*. The baby may add 'ie' or 'y' to words to create two syllables such as '*doggie*'; relational/functional words such as *'no', 'mine' 'gone'* also begin to appear.

Before 24 months the child uses a single word to represent an entire group of words. For example '*car*' might refer to all four-wheeled vehicles. At about two years children begin to put two words together to make simple phrases.

Table 4.5

Common First Words					
People	**Objects**	**Location words**	**Actions**	**Modifiers**	**Socially useful**
mummy daddy baby family names child's name teacher's name pet's names favourite toys pronouns me I you mine	apple ball bikky bus car cup comb chair dolly shoe spoon sweets teddy bath man bed eye key door dog sock tv book light tree see-saw clock	up down there here in on that this	kiss sleep gimme want eat wash drink sit down fall comb/ brush gone/ all gone go stop throw up in do open fix come look	more my yours big little mine hot wet that this a yuk!	bye-bye hi hello no please thanks ta

Source: Clark, L., & Ireland, C., (1996) **Learning to Talk. Talking to Learn**. Australia: Angus & Robertson. p. 25

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Prepositions

In order to use prepositions the child must understand the physical relationship between two objects. For example *'Put teddy in the box'* requires the child to understand the concept of 'in' as opposed to 'on'.

Adjectives

Using adjectives to describe an object, action or person requires a higher level of cognitive skills. The child will initially draw on a single perception as a way of using adjectives, for example, *'big doggie'*. Just as a child uses a single lexicon such as 'car' to describe all four-wheeled vehicles, they will use a single adjective to represent a number of concepts. For example, 'big' might be used to refer to height, width, or depth. The following scenario demonstrates the link between language and cognitive development. The children have different meanings for the word 'big', they are unable to understand each other's perception.

Mine is Biggest

Cameron (4 years 5 months) and Seth (4 years) are in block corner. Cameron has used many blocks of different shapes to construct a complex building that takes up a considerable area on the mat. Seth has balanced the hollow blocks on top of each other and made a 'tower' as high as himself. They are arguing about whose building is 'biggest'.

Syntax

Syntax
The word order of language.

All languages have rules in relation to word order. In the English language the general rule of syntax is subject (S) first, then the verb (V) and the object (O) last. For example: '*The boy* (S) *sat* (V) *on the horse* (O)'.

As children begin to construct sentences they may get the word order wrong, for example '*Daddy car goed*' instead of '*Daddy went in the car*'. Learning syntax is a developmental task, which most children achieve by the age of seven to eight years.

Table 4.6

Order of Syntactical Development		
Length of Phrase	**Example**	**Age Typically Developed**
One word	'Drink'	12 months – 18 months
Two words	'Drink gone'	18 mths- 24 months
Three words	'More drink me'	24 mths – 30 months
Four or more words	'I drink very many milks'	36 mths- 42 months

Source: Sowers, J. (2000) **Language Arts in Early Education**. South Melbourne: Delmar Thomson Learning. p. 64

Morphemes

Morphemes also indicate ownership (brother's); plurality (shoes); time of occurrence or tense (walks, walking, walked); and comparisons (longer, longest). Other morphemes include prefixes (such as 'anti' or 'dis') and suffixes (such as 'ist' or 'ism'). Morphemes also include irregular past tense verbs such as 'ran', 'gone', 'drank', 'ate' or 'slept'.

Morphemes
The addition and changes made to words in order to give the sentence clarity.

Common Mistakes

Until children learn the correct morphemes they often make substitutions by applying rules in a universal manner.

A three-year-old might say: *'We wented to the shops and mummy buyed me some new shoes!'*

A five-year-old might say: *'We went to the shops and mummy buyed me some new shoes!'*

An eight-year-old might say: '*We went to the shops and mum bought me a new pair of shoes!'*

Table 4.7

Order of Morphological Development		
Morpheme	**Grammatical Use**	**Example**
-ing	To indicate current actions; used in present progressive verbs	Me playing. No eating.
-s	To indicate more then one of something; used as a plural noun marker	Big birds. Dogs eating birds.
-'s	To indicate ownership; used as a possessive marker	Taylor's room. Baby's bed.
-ed	To indicate past action; used as a tense marker of verbs	Outside played. Stayed home.
entire word	To indicate past action; used as irregular verbs	Baby *ran* away. Big macaroni *ate*.

Source: Sowers, J. (2000) **Language Arts in Early Education**. South Melbourne: Delmar Thomson Learning. p. 65

The level of morpheme development can affect the clarity of the message as demonstrated in the following conversation between a six-year-old and a three-year-old about the relative dangers of forgetting to feed the goldfish versus overfeeding the goldfish.

Feeding the Fish

Six-year-old: *It's worse to forget to feed them.*

Three-year-old: *No, it's badder to feed them too much.*

Six-year-old: *You don't say badder, you say worser.*

Three-year-old: *But it's baddest to give them too much food.*

Six-year-old: *No it's not. It's worsest to forget to feed them.*

Source: Bee, H (1997) **The Developing Child** (8th Edition) New York: Longman.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics
The social meaning of language.

Pragmatics includes spoken language, body language, facial expressions, gestures, voice intonation and intensity, and context. Understanding the social meaning of language is not an easy task – many adults fail to completely master this skill. Pragmatics may be specific to a language and culture. Pragmatic skills include:

- knowing that you have to answer when a question has been asked
- being able to participate in a conversation by taking it in turns with the other speaker
- the ability to notice and respond to non-verbal aspects of language
- awareness that you have to introduce a topic of conversation in order for the listener to fully understand
- knowing which words or what sort of sentence-type to use when initiating a conversation or responding to something someone said
- the ability to maintain a topic
- the ability to maintain appropriate eye-contact during a conversation
- the ability to distinguish how to talk and behave towards different communicative partners.

A good example of pragmatics is the use of sarcasm. For example, take *'Oh sure, I don't mind if you go out'*. Depending on intonation, facial expression and body language this may mean, *'It is OK with me if you go out'* or it may mean *'No, it's not OK with me if you go out'*.

The use of pragmatic language is often subtle and difficult for young children to interpret. As young children are concrete thinkers the sarcasm of the above example would be impossible for them to comprehend. Sarcasm is a particularly negative use of language and should never be used with children.

Strategies for Supporting Language Development

The Role of the Carer

In early childhood settings the carer takes on a variety of roles throughout the days. These roles include planner, facilitator, observer, devil's advocate, mediator and co-researcher.

Providing a balanced program give children mar opportunities to develop their languag and communicati skills.

Early childhood programs are largely self-directed – a range of experiences are set up based on the children's interests, and children are encouraged to select and move freely from one play space to another. Children are encouraged to think for themselves, and to respect the rights and needs of others.

The language used by the carer tends to encourage reflection, such as asking questions, reminding and descriptive comments. Carers also use projective language such as questioning and making comments that challenge children to think and problem solve.

The role of the carer in children's play may be one of observation or interaction, depending on the individuals involved. It is important to respect children's play and not to interrupt it unnecessarily; however, there will be times when intervening in children's play can improve the quality of the play.

Questioning is an effective strategy to extend children's play. *'How are you going to get the cars across the railway track?' 'I wonder what would happen if you put that on the top?' 'I think dolly is crying, does she need a drink?'* By questioning children carers can extend children's play and encourage them to verbalise their thoughts, actions and plans.

Talking to children may help them to find new solutions or extend their play in new ways. Carers can also use language to help children resolve conflicts that arise during play. This is often the best time to help children to develop negotiation and conflict resolution skills. A simple comment to a child during play may also lead to the child providing a detailed description or explanation of their play and offers the child an excellent opportunity to practice their language skills.

Experiences that allow the child to make a representation of some kind, such as painting, drawing, clay work, woodwork, collage and other craft, provide the carer with opportunities to use language to encourage explanation, description and intent. Often the child will give a much more detailed explanation of the representation than is visible.

The Magic Dog

When asked, 'Tell me about your painting', Jules gives an elaborate, imaginative description of a 'magic dog who can do tricks and make things disappear. He can make himself disappear too and he likes to eat sausages and dodie biscuits. His name is Colin and he lives far, far away but he comes and stays and my house and does his magic tricks for me'.

All this was 'hidden' in a few lines, dots and squiggles!

Similarly a four-year-old involved in collage and box construction may be able to give a detailed account of her intentions when asked, '*How are you going to get those boxes to stick together?*' Such comments by the carer challenge the child to use language in a rich and complex way.

In the case of a young toddler the carer may simply use language to describe what the child is doing: *'You've painted lots of long red lines on your paper today, Lucy'.*

With older children who have developed an interest in print the carer can invite the child to dictate an explanation of the representation. This is very satisfying for young children as they begin to realise that written words can mean the same thing as spoken words.

Often children will make up a completely new 'story' to accompany their representation. Carers can also assist children to make signs for displaying their representations, for example *'Jack made a dinosaur from the clay.' 'This is a map of our street.' 'These are the things we saw on our walk.'*

Carers can encourage investigation by providing experiences that stimulate thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills. The child is encouraged to verbalise the experience and will often be introduced to new words and concepts. Such experiences help children to develop their observation skills, encouraging them to make comparisons, describe, compare and make simple deductions. This will lead children to experiment and explore cause and effect. Investigation encourages children to focus on detail and explore the properties of the subject being investigated.

Tadpoles

The carer in the preschool room has set up a display of 'pond life' with reference materials for the children to do 'research'. Over the coming weeks the children will be encouraged to observe, record and predict when the tadpoles will change into frogs.

Wet Sand

Two-year-olds are given the opportunity to investigate as they discover a series of objects that have been buried into the wet sand. The carer is on hand to ask questions that will lead to investigation, experimentation and verbalisation.

Some strategies for supporting language development include the following:

- Language is linked to all activities, routines, and directions.
- As children are guided through the day they are required to attend to the carer's language and to use their cognitive skills to process and act on the information being provided.
- Routines are also an important feature of programs and are used as prime times for learning.
- Language materials that capture the child's attention and stimulate a response are designed as an integral part of the physical environment.
- Books can play a major role in supporting language development. For toddlers who are learning to speak, books with repetitive pictures helps the child to identify objects and apply labels. Books with pictures of household items, food and animals provide successful language experiences for toddlers.
- The child learns that in order to understand she must listen. The most common example is 'story time', where the carer tells or reads stories to individuals and small groups. Stories are a way of exposing children to new words and new concepts. Stories stimulate children's imagination and thinking skills.
- Developmentally relevant opportunities for children to listen to language are provided.
- Opportunities for group discussions and exchange of views between children are created.
- Language and other forms of communication are used appropriately with children.
- Two-way communication is modelled and encouraged by questions and careful listening.
- Carers respond in a meaningful way to children's efforts to communicate, both verbal and non-verbal.
- Children's expressions are repeated and expanded in a natural style of conversation.
- Children are spoken to clearly and frequently in language that is appropriate to the age of the child.
- Carers actively encourage children to use language and to recognise the power of language, while at the same time encouraging and acknowledging the power of non-verbal means of communication.
- Children are encouraged to express their thoughts, feelings and words by the use of open-ended questions.

Each day children are provided with structured, carer-directed experiences that encourage children to listen, understand and interpret language used in a formal setting. In such experiences the child must focus on the spoken word, must concentrate on what is being said and must then process this information in order to make sense of the activity. The child learns that in order to understand she must listen. The most common example is 'storytime', where the carer tells or reads stories to individuals and small groups. Stories are a way of exposing children to new words and new concepts. Stories stimulate children's imagination and thinking skills.

The possibilities for extending children's language through stories are endless and should be a regular part of the daily program. Discussing stories helps children to develop sequencing and memory skills. It also offers opportunities for children to express ideas and predict outcomes. '*I wonder what mother bear is going to say when she gets home*?' '*How did the girl feel when the other children called her names?*' '*Where did Harry hide the scrubbing brush*?'

Stories provide opportunities to enrich children's language.

Stories are also important for introducing children to the concept of written communication. Songs, rhymes and finger plays also require children to actively listen, recall and experiment with sound. Providing a balanced program gives children many opportunities to develop their language and communication skills.

Conger and Rose (1995) outline the general strategies listed below for carers in relation to language development.

Encourage listening skills by:

- role modelling being a good listener
- giving clear verbal instructions
- encouraging conversation
- encouraging children to tune out background noise and concentrate
- plan a variety of listening activities
- encouraging children to identify sounds in the environment
- playing listening and word games.

Expand children's vocabulary by:

- using new words along with familiar ones
- describing actions, objects, feeling and experiences
- selecting stories that will introduce the child to new words
- using correct terminology

- asking questions that encourage children to describe or explain
- commenting when children use new words
- encouraging the exploration of rhyming words.

Assist children's use of language as a social tool by:

- providing a secure, safe environment where children are encouraged to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings
- reminding children of the social 'rules' of conversation: listening to others without interruption; maintaining eye contact; turn-taking; using people names when talking to them: '*Jack, you'll have to wait a moment, right now I'm talking to Nick*'.
- always responding to children's questions or comments and help children to do the same: '*Ali, Victor asked you to tell him about the dog*'.
- encouraging discussion of concerns, problems and issues: *'I can see you're upset, let's talk about it'.*
- modelling appropriate voice quality – talk quietly when inside; answer questions in a voice that others can hear
- modelling appropriate language to express feelings: '*I'm feeling very sad because my dad is in hospital'.*

Help children to understanding spoken language by:

- talking to children frequently on a one-to-one basis
- using correct labels or terms
- using language to describe actions, objects, people, events etc.
- labelling/describing pictures
- answering children's questions in language that they will understand
- explaining new words and expressions in simple terms;
- use words and terms over and over so that they become familiar to children
- providing lots of opportunities for children to speak informally
- providing regular planned, age-appropriate language activities.
- reading and telling stories to children on a daily basis.

Encourage the creative use of language by:

- providing opportunities for children to try out the sounds and rhymes of words: use stories that have rhyming words or nonsense words; introduce stories that are humorous
- checking to make sure that when a new word is used children know what it means – say it in another way or give examples

- providing opportunities for children to use their imagination: '*If I could fly.... 'If I were a dog I'd ...' 'What would happen if there were no cars?'*

Encourage children to use language correctly by:

- always being a good speech model by speaking clearly and pronouncing words correctly
- modelling good listening skills by maintaining eye contact, and giving the child your full attention;
- not hurrying children when they are talking
- encouraging children to speak clearly and not too fast
- not 'correcting' children as they are speaking to you
- encouraging the use of full sentences, paraphrase single words or phrases: If a toddler say '*Dink*' you might respond by saying: '*Would you like a drink, Max?'*

Source: Stabler Conger, F., & Rose, I (1995) **Child Care Aide Skills**. Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company

Language represents our thoughts and feelings. Language also influences our thinking and emotions. Research shows that early language interactions can increase cognitive capacity.

Questioning Techniques

The use of different questioning techniques is an effective way of extending children's language and cognitive development. You will now be very competent at framing open questions, which stimulate thinking and verbal responses. By careful questioning the carer can help children to explore issues, concepts, properties etc. in order to increase skills and knowledge.

You will recall Vygotsky referred to this as 'scaffolding' or 'assisted learning', where the adult uses opportunities to stimulate learning through shared participation and interaction with the child. By guiding and informing the child the adult is supporting learning. You will recall that this is an example of what Vygotsky called the 'Zone of Proximal Development' – the gap between what the child can do (or know) alone and what the child can do when supported and guided by the adult.

When questioning children it is important to go beyond simply asking them to recall facts, label objects or give simple descriptions. To extend children's language and cognitive development questions should also encourage children to:

- **Compare:** *'Which is the biggest, the puppy or the kitten?'*
- **Evaluate:** '*Is it better to put our hats ons on before we go outside or when we get outside?'*
- **Analyse:** *'Why was the old man mean to the children?'*
- **Classify:** *'How could we sort the blocks?'*

- **Reconstruct their experiences:** '*Tell me about the things you did on the weekend.'*

Remember, children need time to think and respond to questions, their answers should not be rushed. Carers should pause for a few seconds before probing for answers. Carers can also model the listening and turn-taking skills need to have a converstation. Table 4.8outlines different types of questions that carers might use with children.

Table 4.8

Question Types	Purpose	Example
Open	To explore broad background information.	*Tell me about….*
	To explore opinions or attitudes.	*What do you think about ?* *How do you think she feels ?*
Probe	To seek information when more than a one word label is required.	*What's happening here?* *What happens when you ?*
	To seek information – no particular answer expected	*I wonder what that is?*
	To request elaboration of information.	*What sort of clothes?* *How do you know? Why?*
	Key word repetition to elicit further information	Child: *They're all funny.* Adult: *Funny?*
	Showing interest or encouragement	*Hmm? Eh?* (accompanied by appropriate body language)
Closed	To establish specific facts/information with a yes/no response.	*Have we got one like that?* *Do you think she likes that?*
	Identification of person, animal, object, number, etc.	*What's that?* (pointing) *How many can you see?*

Source: Lennox, S., Sharing Books with Children. **Australian Journal of Early Childhood**. V. 20, No. 1, March, 1995. (p. 14). Early Childhood Australia.

The Worm Farm

Zane, Ali and Nick are helping the carer, Tom, to remove the worm droppings from the worm farm ready to place in the garden. The boys also have a container of food scraps to feed the worms. Zane has asked why the worms like to live in the dark inside the worm farm.

Open–ended question: '*That's a good question, Zane. I wonder what would happen if we put the worms on the grass for a while?'*

Probe: '*Let's take a closer look at the worms. How do they manage to live under the ground?'*

Closed: *'Do the worms feel warm or cold?'*

Assisting children to use langauge is an important role for carers who must act as role models and encourage thinking, questioning and listening skills.

Our Special Time

Clare takes time to sit with each infant and toddler to chat, share a game, a cuddle and a song. She calls it 'Our Special Time' and tries to make the sure she gives her full attention to the child. Clare says:

'"Special Time" is just as important for me as it is for the children. I make it a priority each day – it comes before writing observations, or cleaning or other housekeeping tasks. I share a moment in time with the children and it is always the highlight of my day. It reminds me of why I am here.

'Giving my time to these children and really talking and listening to them is the most precious gift I can give them.

'It makes me feel really connected to them in a way that doesn't happen at other times.

'Even though the infants and toddlers are not able to use many words they have very powerful ways of communicating that I continue to find amazing. The babies will look at me very intently when I talk and sing to them. It's as though they are taking in every single word. Their expressions are delightful and I feel as though they really enjoy their 'Special Time' just as much as I do.

'The amazing thing is that the toddlers really respect this one-to-one time. I only have to say to them 'I am having special time with x right now, and they nod and go away. It's as though they acknowledge and respect that this time is not to be interrupted!'

Think About

Some children attend childcare five days per week for 48 weeks of the year. What is it like for these children to have to spend most of their waking hours in a group setting and share one of their primary carers with lots of other children?

What might it be like for these children if the only time the carer talked to them was as part of a group?

Can you imagine going through each day without having the opportunity to engage in a quiet one-to-one conversation with someone who cares about you and is interested in what you do and what you have to say?

What might it be like for an infant if the only time the carer talks to them one-to-one is the brief routine times when the carer and child are alone fro a few minutes?

English as a Second Language

Importance of Maintaining First Language

The Australian population is made up of people from many cultures who altogether speak over 200 different languages. Many early childhood services have children who come from homes where English is not the primary language. Not being able to effectively communicate in the dominant language can be both isolating and disempowering for both the child and the family.

Maintaining a child's first language is essential for cultural identity.

Language and communication are closely linked to cognitive development. The NSW Curriculum Framework (2000:58) suggests:

> *'The importance of maintaining the child's first language cannot be over-estimated. Language is a tool for thinking, and to deprive a child of the language which is so closely connected to understandings and information acquired in early life is to restrict a child's thinking and learning opportunities.'*

Research has shown that:

- success in school can depend upon the child's mastery of cognition/academic language, which may be very different from the language used at home.
- the development of cognitive/academic language requires about four to seven years of formal instruction
- individuals most easily develop cognitive skills and master content material when they are taught in a familiar language.

Source: Papadaki-D'Onofrio, E., **Bilingualism/Multiculturalism and Language Acquisition Theories,** in Child Care Information Exchange September/October 2003 #153 Redmond, WA. (pp. 46–49)

Language and communication also affect self-concept and social relationships. As you are aware, the child's cultural background is part of a child's identity. The child's home language is also part of the child's identity and should be honoured and respected.

Children from both English-speaking and non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) can be made aware that there are many languages and accents and no one language is 'better' than any other language.

Cultural Differences in Communication

We know that non-verbal communication is used across all cultures but the way in which it is used may be different. All people pay a great deal of attention to facial expressions, voice tone and body posture. Often these things communicate more to us than the actual words spoken.

If you are trying to communicate with someone who does not share a common language with you, you will probably rely on a combination of words, gestures and other 'visual' means of communication.

Problems arise when cultures have different expectations about eye contact, physical touch and gestures. In many cultures other factors such as gender, age, and position in society can determine what communication is acceptable. For example, in some cultures it is not acceptable to touch an adult's head but it is acceptable to pat a child's head. Preferences about 'personal space' also vary between cultures.

While carers cannot be expected to know what gestures and touches are acceptable or not acceptable for individual cultures, it is important that they are aware that non-verbal communication can be very powerful and some cultures have strong taboos about gestures and touching. Making an effort to obtain information about such culturally sensitive issues can help to avoid misunderstandings and offending others.

Maintaining the Home Language

Parents may need support to understand the critical importance of maintaining the child's home language.

Some families have concerns about the effect of maintaining their children's first language. Often parents will stop using their first language, thinking this will help their children learn English. Many families are misinformed about the benefits of maintaining the home language and its importance in relation to learning a second language.

Research has shown that children who are fluent in their home language are more successful in learning a second language. Young children who have not yet become proficient in their home language will benefit from continuing to learn their home language at the same time as they are acquiring a new language.

Parents should be encouraged to speak their native language to children in the home to ensure children develop proficiency in their first language.

Carers can reassure parents that research shows that bilingual children attain developmental milestones at much the same time as monolingual children. Bilingual children in fact appear to have several advantages in their development including problem-solving abilities, cognitive flexibility and increased self-esteem. Bilingual children also simultaneously learn the cultural values and social behaviours associated with each language they learn.

Source: Casely, M., (2001) **Bilingualism in Children's Services**, Every Child, Volume 7, No. 3, Winter. Early Childhood Australia.

Bon Jour, Spot

Therese is from Lebanon. She speaks several languages including French. She cares for her granddaughter, Zanthe, and has spoken to her in French since she was a baby. Zanthe uses both languages quite naturally; she seems confused when her mother, Pia, says she can't read the French version of 'Spot' to her.

Where's Spot? *is available in:*
Arabic
Chinese
French
Gujarati
Hebrew
Hindi
Japanese
Urdu
Punjabi
Spanish
Turkish
Tamil and sign language.

Services should have a clear language policy that includes the importance of the home language and supports families in their efforts to maintain their home language. Parents should be encouraged to share information about their culture with the service and inform workers of key words and phrases that can be used with their child.

Not every family who is from a NESB may want their children to be bilingual. It is important that this decision is respected. It is also important not to make assumptions or generalise about cultural practices and language use. In the following scenario the carer's enthusiasm to embrace Helene's cultural heritage has met with some obstacles, simply because the carer made assumptions without first checking with the family!

Hola Helene?

At story time the carer reads a story about a Spanish child. In the discussion that follows the carer introduces the children to greetings in different languages. Helene's family are Spanish.

The carer says, 'Helene's family say "Hola" instead of "Hello", don't they, Helene?'

Helene looks confused, 'No, we say "Hello"'.

Benefits of Hearing First Language

It is very reassuring for children and families to be able to hear or converse in their home language when they first arrive at a service. Having someone available who speaks the child's first language, at least some of the time, has the following benefits:

- It enables the child to understand more of what is going on.
- The child perceives that the first language is valued.
- The building of a sense of security and trust is supported.
- The learning of English as a second language is linked to proficiency in the first language.
- Other staff can be helped to understand the child.

Some services have bilingual staff or can access support workers or interpreter services. Other services may find that they have to rely on the good will of parents or members of the community to assist with interpreter services. If no such support is available services will need to access a multicultural children's resources unit or a multicultural resource service in their nearest capital city for telephone support and advice.

Speaking English

A young Ethiopian family, after one year of living and working in a small Australian community, found themselves speaking only English to their children. When questioned by friends as to why this happened, the family responded this way.

Mother: 'We feel uncomfortable speaking in our own language. People look at us funny.'

Father: 'My boss told me I should only speak English to my children.'

Mother: 'I worry about my children suffering at school. I don't want the other children to make fun of them. Children can be so cruel at times. It can be confusing, you know. My oldest child's teacher said we should speak English at home so that the children learn. But at the child care centre they tell me it is important to speak our own language at home so that the children can speak both languages. I don't know what to do. I worry for my children. I want them to be happy and to fit in. it is hard enough that they have different-coloured skin. They must be able to speak like the other children.'

Acquiring a Second Language

You have already been introduced to several theories of how children acquire language. There are also theories and studies related to how children acquire a second language. There are two ways of learning a second language:

1. **Simultaneous acquisition** occurs when children are exposed to a second or third language from birth.

2. **Sequential or successive acquisition** occurs when children begin to learn a second language after a first language is partially established.

Concerns have been raised that some children learn a second at the expense of their first language (subtractive bilingualism) rather than adding to an existing language (additive bilingualism).

The research on brain development has increased our understanding of the child's ability to acquire a second language. The following is known about bilingual acquisition:

- All children are capable of learning two languages.
- Hearing two or more languages in childhood is not a cause of language disorder or language delay.
- Children do not just 'pick up' a second language; they need regular and meaningful exposure to the second language.
- Knowing the language of one's parents is an important and essential component of children's cultural identity and sense of belonging.
- Bilingual children who have regular and rich exposure to both languages on a daily basis exhibit the same milestones in language development and at roughly the same ages as monolingual children.
- Bilingual children should be provided with systematic exposure to both languages without radical changes.
- Bilingual children can acquire the same proficiency in all aspects of their two languages over time as monolingual children, even though they have less exposure to each language.
- Bilingual children may have different patterns of language development, particularly in relation to vocabulary in the short term. Sometimes bilingual children know fewer words in one or both languages in comparison with monolingual children of the same age; these differences are usually short term.
- Bilingual children may differ in interpersonal communication skills as their way of communicating in certain social situations or expressing certain meanings can be quite different in some languages.
- Bilingual children may need additional support to develop social language skills.
- Young bilingual children will, from time-to-time, use a mixture of words from both languages when communicating in either language. This is usually because the child does not yet have sufficient vocabulary in one or both languages to express themselves entirely in one language. Borrowing of words from each language is temporary. It is not uncommon for people who are bilingual to mix words from both languages when communicating.

Source: Houwer, A., (1999) **Two or More Languages in Early Childhood. Some General Points and Practical Recommendation**. National Parent Information Network.

The Milestones of Second Language Development

Papadaki-D'Onofrio (2003:48) suggests there are five common stages in the development of a second language.

The Silent Stage

Some children need time before they feel confident to use their second language. Children going through this stage may not speak in either their first language or English. During this time it may be obvious the child understands but still does not speak. There is no definitive

time frame attached to this stage; however, pressuring children to speak during this time will interfere with their language development and extend the period of silence.

On the other hand, the child should not be left alone or ignored. They are not being uncooperative; they are looking, listening and absorbing language ready for the time when they will speak.

During the 'silent period' the quality of interactions with adults is very important.

Mei Has a Puppy

Mei (4 years) has been attending preschool for several months. Both Mei's mother and father speak English as well as Cantonese. Mei speaks Cantonese at home.

Mei watches the children play, stands close by and laughs at appropriate times; she responds to requests and follows instructions. The carers are becoming concerned. One morning 'out of the blue' Mei approaches a carer and says, 'We have a puppy'.

Clarke (1988) identifies these effective strategies for carers to use during a child's 'silent period':

It is important to reject the idea that difference means inferiority or that competency in the English language is the same as cognitive ability (Clarke 1988)

- talking to the child even if there is no response
- including the child in small groups of other children
- asking a variety of questions
- including other children as the focus of conversation
- using songs
- learning a few simple phrases and counting in the child's first language
- encouraging the child to respond non-verbally
- giving lots of praise for effort
- offer opportunities for child to repeat what has been said (if willing)
- provide many opportunities for interaction with other children – children's language is less complex
- provide lots of opportunity to role play – a good way to practise language.

The Mixing Languages and Code-Switching Stage

Most bilingual children will use sounds and words from both languages at some stage, even if the person they are talking to is using only one language. Researchers believe this is a very effective communication strategy and should not be discouraged.

The Separation Languages Stage

Most bilingual children associate a language with a person or place and this helps them to separate the two languages.

The Dominance of One Language Over Another Stage

This often occurs when children begin school as they do not want to appear different. They may also be reluctant to use their first language at home.

The Stage of Rapid Shift in Balance

When a child visits the 'home' country or a relative who only speaks the first language comes for an extended visit there may be an increase in proficiency in the first language.

Source:, Papadaki-D'Onofrio E., Bilingualism/Multiculturalism and Language Acquisition Theories, in **Child Care Information Exchange** September/October 2003 #153 Redmond, WA. (Pp46 – 49)

Role of the Carer

All staff should be expected to make a contribution to supporting bilingualism, not just bilingual staff or special resource workers. It is essential that carers reflect on their own attitudes to bilingualism and its benefits, and model attitudes of respect and acceptance of all languages.

Before a child arrives at the service it can be very helpful to access information on the child's culture, cultural child-rearing practices and a list of key words.

Supporting NESB Children

What do you do when a child arrives at your service with little or no English? First, acknowledge that the child is already a competent, capable and active learner. The role of the carer is to facilitate the learning of English by providing appropriate, supportive physical and emotional environments, as well as being available to scaffold learning. The strategies suggested to support NESB children are an integral part of any quality learning environment.

Provide Motivation

Like any other young child, children from a NESB must be provided with situations where they can develop language and other skills by exploring, experimenting and following their own interests. Children need:

- open-ended experiences and long periods of uninterrupted play time
- concrete learning experiences
- frequent opportunities to interact with other children and adults
- a curriculum that uses 'webbing' and allows opportunities to reuse and practise learned words and phrases, for example, reading a story about cooking a pizza and providing related dramatic play props indoors and outdoors
- an organised room where play materials are visible, inviting and accessible

- a predictable routine that offers opportunities to hear and use key phrases associated with routines; songs or non-verbal gestures will give children visual and auditory clues so they can follow routines with the group
- an atmosphere of 'welcome' where all children and adults respect each other.

Source: Elgas, M., Prendeville, J., Moomaw, S and Kretchmer, R., (2002) **Child Care Information Exchange, #** 143 Redmond, WA (P18)

Five Little Ducks

Kai-jye, Taizo and Charles are at the water trough where rubber ducks are 'swimming'.

Kai-jye and Taizo (who speak limited English) begin singing the song 'Five Little Ducks' in broken English.

Charles joins in and says to the boys, 'You can speak the same as me now!'

The children all smile and continue playing together.

Later at the dough table Taizo says, 'duck', holding up his dough creation.

Charles comments to the carer, 'Lisa, Taizo can say "duck" and he can sing too.'

Multicultural Materials

Imagine what it feels like to enter a room filled with unfamiliar faces and people who do not speak your language. The room contains furniture and furnishings that reflect a culture very different to your own. As you gaze around you cannot see anything that is familiar to you. Even the smells are different. For most of us that would be a very daunting experience. For young children it can also be a very frightening experience.

Exposing children to a variety of cultural resources provides an added dimension to the program.

To overcome this carers can set up the environment to reflect a multicultural perspective which includes a variety of images and objects from different cultures, This can help children to feel to feel more comfortable and welcome. Familiar objects also act as tools for children to enter play and begin to establish relationships with children before they are able to speak English.

When thinking about what resources to use try to be thoughtful and where possible talk to parents or resource services about what might be appropriate. Avoid stereotypes – not all Japanese children learn to make origami from rice paper, and not all Asian children use chopsticks.

Source: Elgas, M., Prendeville,J., Moomaw, S and Kretchmer, R., (2002) **Child Care Information Exchange, #** 143 Redmond, WA (P18)

Houses

Hussein is busy in the block area. He has created a series of buildings using a variety of blocks and other materials.

The carer has placed a series of pictures on the wall depicting houses from different cultures. Hussien tells the carer he has built all different houses.

'See, I have made this house and this house and this house. They are all different.' As he is talking he points at the pictures on the wall.

Lunch

Kai-ye moves from the block area to the dramatic play area where several children are cooking in the kitchen and tending babies at the adjacent baby bed.

Kai-ye watches for a minute, then immediately goes to the stove where he begins stirring the contents of his wok. He serves the food into two bowls and gives it to the girls who are now sitting at the table. Kai-ye then gives the girls a set of chopsticks and proceeds to show them how they are used. The girls laugh and copy Kai-ye who moves their fingers so that they are holding the chopsticks correctly.

Building a Sense of Belonging

All children have a right to feel that their culture is valued.

Feeling accepted, valued and part of the group is essential for all children. It is important for carers to work with all children to help them accept and tolerate differences. Carers can do this by encouraging children to notice and talk about differences and similarities. For example, talk about physical features such as skin, eye and hair colour. Carers can teach children words, songs and rhymes in different languages. Cares should respond promptly to negative comments from other children, for example, *'She can't talk', 'He talks funny', 'She can't play with us because she's dumb* . Carers must point out that such comments can be hurtful and also provide children with factual information about differences, for example, '*Hula speaks Arabic at home and she is learning to speak English. Maybe Hula can teach us some words in Arabic*'. If there are two or more children of the same language background ensure that these children interact with each other in their home language during the day. For example sit the children together at meals times so that they can socialise in their first language.

Facilitating Learning

Carers need to have a positive attitude and confidence that the program can provide for the NESB children. Although gestures and shortened sentences can be used, carers must communicate with children in a way that recognises the child is already a competent, capable learner with knowledge about the world.

Carers will need to help bilingual children to extend their English by providing experiences that will give them opportunities to use the more complex functions such as reasoning and predicting.

Kai-jye

Kai-jye is watching the other children at the college table. The carer approaches and says, 'Kai-jye would you like to do a collage?' As she talks she points and gestures at the collage table.

Kai-jye smiles and nods as the carer motions for him to sit down at the table.

The carer stays near-by, saying to the other children, 'Kai-jye is going to join you and do a collage'.

Kai-jye continues to watch the other children. Lilly says, 'Kai-jye, here's a brush for you. You have to put the pasts on first and then you stick things on. OK?'

Kai-jye smiles and begins to create his collage. Lilly periodically smiles and encourages him. 'Good work, Kai-jye!'

When he is finished Lilly shows Kai-jye where to put his collage to dry.

Later the carer says to Lilly, 'Lilly, I saw you helping Kai-jye at the collage table this morning. Thank you for helping him. It was very kind of you to be his friend.'

Lilly smiles broadly and skips away saying, 'Kai-jye is my friend'.

The scenario 'Kai-jye' demonstrates some important points when working with NESB children:

- The carer assumes Kai-jye is capable of participating and encourages him to do so.
- By scaffolding (using gestures and phrases) the carer adjusts her communication to facilitate his understanding and help him participate.
- The area is set up to communicate and support expectations of behaviour.
- Kai-jye learns that this is a place he can participate and the carer believes he is competent – he is more likely to feel safe and view the carer as supportive, both necessary if he is to continue to explore and interact

- The carer positively reinforces Lilly for supporting Kai-jye, ensuring that Lilly will continue her friendly overtures.

Source: Elgas, M., Prendeville,J., Moomaw, S and Kretchmer, R., (2002) **Child Care Information Exchange, #** 143 Redmond, WA (p. 18)

Benefits of Bilingualism

There are many benefits of bilingualism for all children and the community at large. Within any group of children there will be great diversity in language proficiency. An understanding and acceptance of other languages is central to an anti-bias program. When a program is rich in language diversity, children are able to develop their understanding of similarities and differences. Research shows that all children can learn other languages and bilingualism is a skill that can be supported and nurtured from a very early age.

Mie recently went to Malaysia with her parents to visit family. Mie sent this photo of herself and her cousin to the carers and children. The photo stimulated a great deal of discussion about other cultures.

Think About

How might teaching children some words in another language or seeing their name written in another language help them to develop their understanding of language and culture?

How might the photograph above assist children at Mie's child care centre to gain an understanding of cultural differences?

How might Mie's experience of visiting her family in Malaysia add to her sense of cultural identity?

Emergent Literacy

The Role of the Family

'... we know that literacy begins well before formal school entry. It begins in the home ... Children's success in literacy is strongly influenced by what they have learned before they enter school.'

Issues and practices in literacy development. AECA (1999:v)

The family has an enormous influence on early literacy development. Family attitudes and practices will largely determine whether children value and enjoy literacy experiences. Carers can play a critical role in helping parents to understand their role in providing early literary experiences.

When family members read regularly to children they are building early literacy skills.

Mem Fox (2001:10-11) in her book 'Reading Magic' writes enthusiastically about parents' role in promoting literacy – in particular reading stories:

'If every parent understood the huge educational benefits and intense happiness brought about by reading aloud to their children, and if every parent – and every adult caring for a child – read aloud a minimum of three stories a day to the children in their lives, we could probably wipe out illiteracy within one generation.'

When children realise 'reading' isn't just a bedtime story but a 'code' for the spoken word they begin to ask, *'What does that say?'*

Parents who take the time to answer theis question are making a valuable contribution to their child's developing literacy skills.

Emergent Literacy

Emergent literacy encompasses speaking, listening, looking, thinking, reading and writing. Recent research supports the idea that the development of oral language and literacy are closely linked and that children build their understandings of reading and writing concurrently, with knowledge about one adding to knowledge about the other.

Children are immersed in literacy – they hear spoken language and they see print in many forms including books, newspapers, magazines, advertising, food packaging, computers, television, on clothing and fabric. They also see people making and using print, for example,

writing lists and letters, word processing, filling in forms. They observe and use all types of print-making tools like pens, Textas, pencils, crayons, and computers.

- **Literacy is a social process**: it occurs in the context of children's interactions with other children and adults.
- **Emergent literacy begins at birth**: from birth children begin to attend to the sound of human voices and by six months will look intently at pictures in books.
- **All aspects of literacy development are interdependent**: listening, speaking, reading, writing and thinking.
- **Literacy develops along a continuum just like other areas of development**: each child will develop literacy skills at their own pace.

Source: Schiller, P., **A Joyful Journey to Literacy – The Great Debate** in Child Care Information Exchange Nov/Dec 2003 Redmond WA (p8)

The Role of the Carer

Reading in one form or another is a skill we all need throughout life. Adults involved in the care of young children should make time to read aloud to children and support their early interest in reading and writing. With more than half of children in Australia under the age of five in some form of out-of-home care, carers have an important role to play in promoting and supporting children's emerging literacy.

The early childhood years are the most important for literacy development and children need lots of early experiences involving oral language and print material. The more experiences children have with language and printed material, the more likely they will become interested in reading and writing. Carers who understand the importance of early experiences in relation to literacy development can provide a 'rich literary environment' to support early literacy.

A study carried out by McNaughton (1999) to map literacy practices used in early childhood services identified a number of strategies that could be implemented to improve early literacy development. These strategies included:

- having writing centres or literacy materials in a range of learning areas
- linking spoken communication with written language
- labelling shelves and containers
- using meals and snack times to promote literacy development
- using music and movement to promote literacy development
- promoting acceptance of diversity
- encouraging the development of meta-linguistic skills (focusing on sequence of sound in words, language, play, syntax etc.)
- the quality of play and literacy interactions.

McNaughton also stressed the role of the carer in facilitating children's dramatic play, for example, by modelling use of resources, assisting children to integrate literacy props into their dramatic play, and encouraging the use of home language as appropriate.

Supporting the Development of Reading and Writing Skills

Reading and writing are complex learning tasks and success depends on children having a range of prerequisite skills before they can be considered 'ready' to be introduced to formal reading and writing experiences.

Children will develop these prerequisite skills through participation in lots of experiences involving looking, observing, talking, listening, concentrating and moving. There is a range of experiences that can be provided to assist children in developing pre-requisite skills.

Talking

- Talk about a book after you have read it. Choose a page and encourage children to talk about what they see.
- 'Read' books with no words like Pat Hutchin's 'Rosie's Walk' or Jan Ormerod's 'Sunshine' and encourage children to supply the story line.
- Describe objects, talk about what you are doing.
- Ask children to recall in order some activity they have done during the day.

Listening

- Encourage children to attend to particular sounds and differences in sounds as well as remembering directions.
- Help them learn songs, rhymes and finger plays.
- Listen to taped stories (without a book).
- After reading a story, ask '*Who came in after ...?*'
- After watching television, ask, *'What did say when ...?'*
- Play games involving following directions, build difficulty by adding more steps.

Concentration

To increase the time a child attends to an activity or game:

- Sit close or opposite.
- Encourage them to focus on object or activity, not on the surroundings.
- Use a quiet place or corner to reduce distractions.
- Face the child away from any activity in the room.
- Pretend you can't do it: '*I can't do this, can you show me how?*'
- Challenge: 'I *wonder if you can ...*'
- Constantly give verbal encouragement, praise and feedback.

- Choose games, books etc. that child is interested in.
- Try to extend activity by saying 'do one for Nanna' etc.
- Keep language simple and clear.
- Don't nag! If you or the child has run out of patience, put it away! Activities should be fun.

Movement

Studies have shown that exercise and specialised movement programs support growth and development in many ways. In relation to early literacy skills, movement can help the child to:

- improve co-ordination, balance and timing
- improve spatial concepts
- develop confidence and creativity.

Each of these skills requires the child to use a combination of physical and cognitive necessary for beginning readers.

Development of Reading

Children do not learn to read at the same pace. They learn gradually and by using many different methods. Children usually begin to read before they begin to write.

Traditionally children were not considered to be ready to read and write until they began formal school. Recent brain research shows that around two years of age seems to be an optimal time for learning language.

Brain studies have led some researchers to believe that, because the brain does not differentiate between various languages or a type of language that is being learnt, learning to speak and learning to read should occur together.

There are many views about whether young children should learn to read and write before they begin formal school. Carers and parents ask, *'Is three too young to start to read?' 'Will it be too much pressure?' 'Will they be bored when they go to school?' 'Will it give them a head start?' 'If they can't read and write their name when they go to school will they be disadvantaged?'*

According to brain research, the age of two years is an optimal time for learning language and perhaps reading. However, experiences must still be developmentally appropriate.

Ready to Read?

Early childhood educators agree that children are actively involved in generating their own learning and they learn about written language in the same way as they learn oral language – they observe, imitate, explore, experiment and practise.

Maturation and Brain Development

The 'normal' age range for reading readiness can vary by as much as three years.

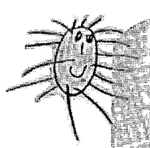
Research has shown that maturation, brain development and experience influence the child's ability to learn to read. Between the ages of two to six years the abilities necessary for reading mature:

- vision improves
- small muscle control is achieved
- critical thinking emerges
- attention span and concentration is extended
- spoken language develops rapidly.

During this time children must also have a 'high exposure' to all forms of language experiences. By four or five most children are making the connection between a written symbol and an object or idea. They demonstrate this when they can:

- recognise their own name
- recognise the names on food packages
- recognise the names of fast food outlets and department stores
- recognise various road signs such as 'STOP', 'GIVE WAY'
- recognise the name of favourite television programs
- recognise names printed on clothing
- use a computer keyboard
- play video games and read some instructions or words.

Children begin to understand that a series of symbols can represent spoken words and the symbols contain a message that can be 'read'.



Ladies and Gents

Callie (4 years 5 months) and her family have just returned from a camping holiday. She tells her carer 'the toilet doors had writing on them to tell you if it was boys or girls!'

Callie is fascinated that sometimes she had to pay money to open the toilet door. The carer helps Callie make two signs for the bathroom: 'Boys' and 'Girls'.

Stages of Development of Reading

Learning to read is a complex task. Table 4.9 outlines the stages of development in reading and the skills necessary to progress through the stages.

Table 4.9

Stages of Development	Skills
Getting Ready Listening Falling in Love with Sounds	Auditory Memory Auditory Perception
Developing Oral Language Extending and Enriching Vocabulary Matching Words to Thoughts and Actions	Language Development Auditory Perception
Comprehending Enacting, Dramatizing, and Recreating Stories Answering Multi-level Questions	Language Development Conceptual Development Critical thinking
Understanding Functions of Print Understanding Spatial Orientation Recognising Part/Whole Relationships Putting Thoughts on Paper	Visual Perception Visual Memory Motor Co-ordination Visual Motor Co-ordination Conceptual Development
Acquiring Reading Skills Reading Predictable Text Recognising Sight Words Developing Phonological Awareness	Auditory Memory Auditory Perception Visual Perception Visual Memory Visual Motor Co-ordination Language Development Conceptual Development Critical Thinking

Source: Schiller, P., **A Joyful Journey to Literacy – The Great Debate** in Child Care Information Exchange Nov/Dec 2003 Redmond WA (p. 8)

Supporting Reading Readiness

The following strategies can be used to support reading readiness:

- Provide a print-rich environment.
- Provide a variety of pre-reading experiences.

'Print-rich environments' are those which incorporate print into many areas of the play environment. You can:

- label shelves and toy boxes
- provide signs or materials to make signs in the block corner
- include print from other cultures, e.g. print from a Chinese newspaper to paint on or use at craft centre

Maturation and Brain Development

The 'normal' age range for reading readiness can vary by as much as three years.

Research has shown that maturation, brain development and experience influence the child's ability to learn to read. Between the ages of two to six years the abilities necessary for reading mature:

- vision improves
- small muscle control is achieved
- critical thinking emerges
- attention span and concentration is extended
- spoken language develops rapidly.

During this time children must also have a 'high exposure' to all forms of language experiences. By four or five most children are making the connection between a written symbol and an object or idea. They demonstrate this when they can:

- recognise their own name
- recognise the names on food packages
- recognise the names of fast food outlets and department stores
- recognise various road signs such as 'STOP', 'GIVE WAY'
- recognise the name of favourite television programs
- recognise names printed on clothing
- use a computer keyboard
- play video games and read some instructions or words.

Children begin to understand that a series of symbols can represent spoken words and the symbols contain a message that can be 'read'.

Ladies and Gents

Callie (4 years 5 months) and her family have just returned from a camping holiday. She tells her carer 'the toilet doors had writing on them to tell you if it was boys or girls!'

Callie is fascinated that sometimes she had to pay money to open the toilet door. The carer helps Callie make two signs for the bathroom: 'Boys' and 'Girls'.

Stages of Development of Reading

Learning to read is a complex task. Table 4.9 outlines the stages of development in reading and the skills necessary to progress through the stages.

Table 4.9

Stages of Development	Skills
Getting Ready Listening Falling in Love with Sounds	Auditory Memory Auditory Perception
Developing Oral Language Extending and Enriching Vocabulary Matching Words to Thoughts and Actions	Language Development Auditory Perception
Comprehending Enacting, Dramatizing, and Recreating Stories Answering Multi-level Questions	Language Development Conceptual Development Critical thinking
Understanding Functions of Print Understanding Spatial Orientation Recognising Part/Whole Relationships Putting Thoughts on Paper	Visual Perception Visual Memory Motor Co-ordination Visual Motor Co-ordination Conceptual Development
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- ensure that books reflect and affirm a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Ensure books are accessible to children – display them on low shelves with the covers visible to encourage interest. Provide comfortable, cosy places where children can sit and read without being disturbed. Include a table and chair for some bigger 'coffee table' type books. Include an eye-catching display related to the children's current 'most popular' book.
- add captions to displays of creative work or photographs BUT don't overdo it! Too much printed material on the walls starts to look like patterned wallpaper and children don't have the visual skills to distinguish important features from clutter.
- label displays on science and interest centres
- include signs outdoors on the bike track, shed, tap
- use reading as a behaviour management strategy; for example, to restrict numbers in a play area, children need to put their name card or locker symbol on display – four names means no more room
- until children learn to write their own name, offer printed name tags to glue on art/craft work
- use printed props with dramatic play.

Views vary about the value and impact of providing print-rich environments.

Cairney (1990) believes 'children learn about literacy by looking at almost any form of print: signs, labels, clothing, television, computers, automatic tellers, and mobile phones'.

On the other hand Mimi Wellisch (2000) writes, 'Having print around in the environment is not enough. We actually have to read the words to the children, explain their significance, and deliberately introduce words to ensure that children take notice'. She goes on to say that whatever early childhood services have been offering children in the past does not seem to have been effective since so many children experience difficulties learning to read when they go to school. Wellisch believes 'children learn to read by practising reading'.

This presents a challenge to early childhood educators who support the concept of 'readiness' but have been reluctant to begin any formal teaching even though an individual child shows a persistent interest in reading and has the necessary skills. The key factor is being certain children have the underlying skills and understanding necessary to cope with more formal directed activities.

Anna Knows the Alphabet

Anna is two years old. She is very interested in stories and her language is well developed for her age. Her cousin Matthew is four and a half years. Matthew's mother comments to the children's grandmother, 'Matthew is way behind Anna – she already knows the alphabet and she's only two!'

Pre-Reading Experiences

Services offer many pre-reading experiences during play, to give children opportunities to practise specific underlying skills believed to be necessary for later success at reading (and writing). Experiences are planned which recognise the need to involve as many of the senses as possible – hearing, sight and touch – as well as the sequence of the reading process:

- identifying/naming actual objects
- naming pictures of objects – understanding that the picture represents or is a symbol for the object
- written shapes are symbols for sounds
- groups of letters are written symbols for spoken words.

Some of the necessary underlying skills for reading readiness include:

- concentration and task application
- left/right eye movement
- the ability to discriminate between size, shape, internal details and direction of pictures and, later, of letters
- the ability to find a particular picture, shape or letter when seen in a different surrounding
- the ability to identify a picture, shape of letter when surrounded by drawings that look very much the same
- the ability to copy pictures, shapes and letters
- the ability to remember the names of letters and shapes
- the ability to draw letter shapes from memory.

Stencils and Workbooks: Do They Have a Role?

Many parents and carers use stencils or commercial workbooks. These are often too difficult for preschoolers, as they involve colouring-in and fine motor skills inappropriate for young children.

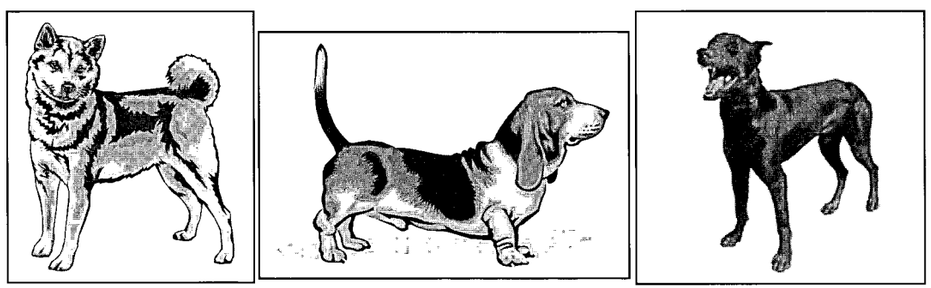
She Just Loves Doing Homework

Mattie (4 years) has two older sisters. Mattie's mum has bought some pre-reading workbooks for Mattie who wants 'to do homework too.' Mattie's Mum is obviously pleased although Mattie has a great deal of difficulty completing the activities that require skills she has not developed.

Pre- Reading Games

There are numerous activities and games that can be used during play to help children develop pre-reading skills. – many of them have to do with understanding and making sense of what they are seeing (visual perception).

What's the Difference? (Visual Discrimination)



This skill involves being able to see/identify small differences between objects, pictures or symbols.

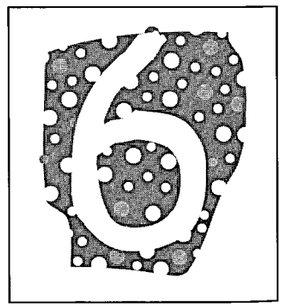
Provide lots of sorting/matching activities, which allow children to explore the development of the concepts of 'same' and 'different' (maths) as well as develop, vocabulary and discrimination skills for reading:

- Experiences should start with real objects that are identical, for example, two tins of baked beans, two socks, two toy cars.
- The next step is to talk about one feature or 'attribute' that is the same or different, for example two different cars, which share the same colour. Use photos or pictures that are the same, for example, lotto and snap games.
- Lastly, use symbols, for example, '*b' 'b' 'd' 'b'* or '*car', 'can', 'cab' 'car'.*

During activities ask children *'Why did you put this here?' 'How are these the same?' 'Does this one go here ... why not?'* Remember that children have different learning styles and learn at different paces – it may take many months for some children to develop a skill.

Where is it? (Figure–Ground)

This skill allows children to screen out irrelevant visual details and focus on chosen details:



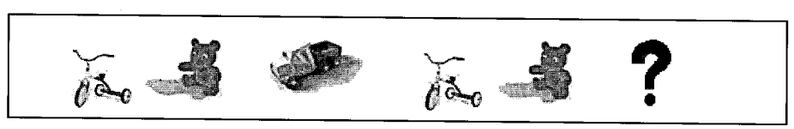
- Begin by asking children to find/point to objects in the room.
- Extend by sorting activities with real objects; for example, find the square button among the round ones. This can be made more difficult by asking them to find the square blue buttons among a mixed box of buttons.

- Lastly, use pictures or posters and ask children to find the … There are some great books on the market. While doing these 'scanning' activities encourage children to start to look in the top left-hand corner, to look from left to right and from top to bottom. You might cover the page and show only a section at a time.

Spatial Relationships

This is the ability to understand how objects relate to one another in space, which direction they face, above, below, next to, under etc.

- Begin by using real objects, toys, people etc. *'Which one is going the wrong way?'*
- During craft or at the puzzle table, talk about above, below, between, next to, beside, over, under.
- Use magnetic shapes and pictures to challenge the child to find '*Which one is facing the wrong way?'*
- Use activities requiring children to orient objects above or below a line.
- When sequencing beads, patterns, pictures – what comes next?



What Was It? (Visual Memory)

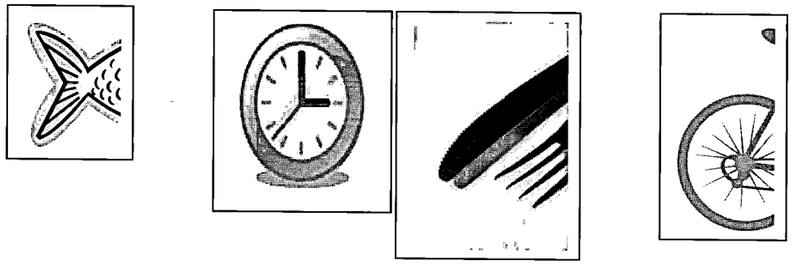
This is the ability to recall what you saw:

- Play a memory game: begin with real objects, for example a plate, spoon, cup. Look – say the names – cover – and ask *'What was there?'* Increase the difficulty by adding more or similar objects. Then take one object away and ask *'What's missing?'*
- Offer games like Memory with a limited number of pairs in a regular pattern. To increase the challenge, increase number of pairs and place cards in random pattern.
- Play games involving remembering/copying a sequence.

What Could it Be? (Visual Closure)

This is the ability to imagine or visualise a whole image when only a fragment or parts are present:

- Play 'squiggles' – draw half an object;
- Use puzzles – talk about what you need to make the complete picture.



Assisting Early Readers

If you are working in family day care or out of school hours care, part of your role may include supporting and assisting early readers. You are not a reading teacher or remedial reading assistant, but you can promote literacy skills within the care environment.

Marie Clay (in Walker 2000:106) emphasises that all readers need to use:

- their knowledge of how the world works
- the possible meaning of the text
- the sentence structure
- the importance of the order of ideas, or of words or of letters
- the size of the words
- special features of sounds, shape and layout
- special knowledge from past literary experience

before they resort to left to right sounding out of chunks of letter clusters or, in the last resort, single letters.

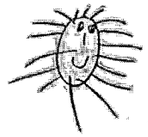
Dramatic Play

Dramatic play also allows children to use their emerging literacy in meaningful, realistic situations.

> *'The provision of literacy props in play settings allows children the opportunity to explore and experiment with writing, and to understand the function and purpose of print in meaningful contexts.'*
>
> *Issues and practices in literacy development .Early Childhood Australia (1999:14)*

Dramatic play provides opportunities for children to use oral language in different roles and contexts, write a shopping list, read a magazine at the hairdresser's, read newspaper at breakfast, read a recipe or read a menu at a restaurant.

Dramatic play gives children the opportunity to use actions, props, sounds or words to symbolise ideas. For example Troy places a bowl on a saucer and makes a '*whr r... whrrr ...*' sound to represent an electric mixer.



Dramatic Play

'Dramatic play is a big feature of our program For the toddlers and the preschoolers. We have about 20 dramatic play kits and they seem to keep growing. It's a great system, as the children show an interest in a particular area we are able to get the kit out and way we go. The last kit we developed was a camping kit. The children had a lot of fun with that and it lead to all sorts of exploration such as stars, batteries, cooking – it seemed to go on for a very long time.

We always make sure that we have signs and reading materials related to each prop. For example we have menus, pens and note pads and several different signs for our restaurant kit.

The children regularly write signs and notes which they read to each other. Recently the children wrote notes to each other relating to a shoe shop that had been set up. They wrote signs such as 'men's shoes', 'ladies shoes', 'size 6', 'pay here'. We took lots of photos and later we worked with the children to develop a scrapbook. The children dictated what they wanted written under each photo. That scrapbook is one of the most well read books in the children's library.

Using Projects

Projects offer endless opportunities for emergent literacy experiences including hands-on investigation, research using books, Internet and videos, and experiments which involve trial and error, predicting and analysing, all of which may include a literacy focus.

Projects can be short-term or extended over a period of time, depending on the children's interests and the ability of the carer to challenge, extend and sustain the children's enthusiasm.

The Gardening Project

The idea of the garden arose from one of the toddlers interest in flowers. Sharne's grandfather has a beautiful flower garden and he and Sharne spend lots of time together looking after the plants. He gave Sharne some pansy seedlings for the centre and offer to come and help with the planting.

The preschool children then became involved and now we have a flower and vegetable garden as well as a worm farm. The children pick flowers for the table each day and arrange them in little vases.

Sharne's grandfather comes in once a fortnight and works in the garden with the children. At the moment they are germinating seeds. Sharne's grandfather showed the children how to collect seeds and store them in little paper bags. They have also planted bulbs and are waiting anxiously for the first shoots to appear.

The children have made lots of signs for the garden, labeling the plants and giving instructions such as 'water once per week.

The children's vocabulary has also increased as a result of this project. I really have to work fast to stay ahead of them now! Even the toddlers are using words like 'mulch' and 'seedlings'.

The garden has also allowed the toddlers and the older children to work together. The toddlers make their own 'signs' for the garden and they are put up next to the others.

Reading Books and Story Telling

When carers read to children, children are also learning that reading is a social experience.

There is a strong link between early language and literacy experiences and later reading success.

Looking at or reading books together helps build a closer relationship. You are giving the child your undivided attention in a pleasant 'cosy' situation. Be comfortable and close, relax, and forget about the rest of the world for a while. Reading is a great time to share feelings too. Reading together can be a calming experience.

Your attitude is very important – when adults read with enthusiasm and express enjoyment they encourage children to 'read'. Many boys are poor readers so it is important to encourage fathers to read with children and convey the impression that men enjoy books, too. If you are busy, distracted or don't feel 'in the mood' – be honest; children will know if you are half-hearted.

Dull, disinterested reading will give children the impression that reading is boring. If you are not a natural reader yourself, work to make reading enjoyable for yourself as well as for the children by finding books you like; whether they are funny or familiar, most of us can empathise with some of the characters in children's books! Use silly voices and don't take it too seriously; relax and enjoy yourself!

Infants from a few months of age can be introduced to books. Sharing stories and books helps children to develop language skills and to develop an awareness of the purpose of print.

Reading books develops good observation skills. By looking at details in pictures, shapes and words children notice similarities and differences – a pre-reading skill. Reading books develops concentration and good listening skills. When you have children's undivided attention they will hear the differences in sounds, sounds that rhyme and the rhythm of words. Being able to concentrate and listen without distraction is an important skill for success at school where so much information is given verbally.

Reading books encourages language and communication. Children learn the meaning of words and gather information. They ask questions, predict what might happen, follow sequences of events, and develop memory. 'Story time' might be the first real group social experience for many children. If you watch a group of toddlers at story time much of their attention is focused on who they are sitting next to, sitting close, touching and looking at each other.

Reading books helps children to understand their own world. Stories about familiar events give them a chance to think and talk about their own lives and feelings.

Reading books stimulates and encourages imagination. In their imagination children can take part in adventures and experiences they will never experience in reality. Looking at books introduces and promotes pre-reading skills such as:

- improved concentration
- awareness of detail
- moving eyes from left to right
- turning pages properly and understanding how books are arranged
- understanding the link between spoken and written language.

If young children are used to handling books and enjoy 'reading' or being read to they are more likely to be motivated to learn to read themselves. Reading for enjoyment and leisure is a lifelong pleasure so carers and parents need to consciously promote reading as FUN!

Carers should read to children individually and in small groups. There should be many opportunities for spontaneous reading and storytelling throughout the day. If story time is to be used as a transition time for a group of children, care should be taken to ensure that reading a story is not just a way of controlling or managing children. For group story time to be an enjoyable, positive experience the group size needs to be kept to a minimum and the experience planned and prepared ahead of time. Grabbing a book from the shelf and expecting a diverse group of children with different interests and skills to 'listen to a story' usually does not work!

Storytelling

Some families and cultures have a strong oral tradition. You might have a member of your family who has a reputation for being a great storyteller. Storytelling has one important advantage – there is no barrier between the teller of the story and the audience. Being able to maintain eye contact with children strengthens the link between participants and gives the storyteller valuable feedback, which allows them to adjust their story to suit the audience.

Props make story telling interesting and exciting!

Before You Begin

It is important to be aware of the age and reading development of your audience. Choosing the right story for a child or group is not always easy but there are some things you can think about when choosing stories:

- Choose stories you like and ones appropriate to your audience.
- Choose simple stories appropriate to the age and abilities of your audience. There is great variation between the stories you can share with toddlers (0-3 years) and those you can share with pre-schoolers (3-5 years).

Stories For 0–3's Should Have:

- familiar topics and events
- simple familiar plots

- uncluttered, realistic, bold illustrations that children will recognise and understand
- repetition.

Stories For 3–5's Should Have:

- simple plot
- humour
- imagination
- information which extends their knowledge of the world
- more detail in illustrations
- introduction of difficult concepts/abstract concepts, e.g. 'Mr Archimedes' Bath'
- introduction of different cultures.

Consider the Matching of Text and Illustration

The close matching of text and illustration is important in choosing books for the 0-3-year-olds. You need to consider whether the illustrations assist in helping the child to understand the text? Are the illustrations consistent with the action in the story? Are they authentic where necessary? Picture books with more complex relationships between text and picture can be shared with 3-5-year-olds.

Consider the Format of the Story

When using picture book stories, physical format is often overlooked. You need to consider such things as:

- book size: make sure the children can see the book you are sharing
- cover and end pages: do these match the story theme?
- avoid little books with small detailed illustrations for group reading – these are best to share with one or two children
- avoid books containing prejudice, bias or stereotypes
- use other media – taped stories, felt board stories, puppets, shadows, big books.

Setting the Scene for Reading and Storytelling

Be prepared and plan where and when you will read/tell the story. Think about what else is going on at the service at the same time.

Where you gather will be important, if children are facing into a corner there will be fewer visual distractions from passing children or other staff. Outdoors under the low branches of a shady tree can really add 'atmosphere'. If you are following up the story with movement, for example 'We're Going on a Bear Hunt', make sure the area is cleared before you start the story. You want to be able to flow into the activity without losing the 'feeling' of the story. Comfortable floor coverings and good light are also essential.

What is Your Goal?

It will be difficult to keep children's attention if another group is having a noisy energetic movement and music session or the cook revs up the mixer!

Before you begin you need to think about your goal. Do you want the children to be totally absorbed by the magic of a well read/told story? If you do, you will want to read/tell the story without interruption. If you want the children to participate by joining in repetitious choruses, handling the props or asking and answering questions your presentation will be different.

Focus Children's Attention

Decide how you will gather and settle the children, introduce the story, organise props, involve the children etc. Have all the equipment you need ready before the children gather. Be familiar with the story.

Sit comfortably and make sure the children are sitting comfortably and can see you and the book/props.

You might do this by using a familiar routine or ritual – children understand what is going to happen and the behaviour expected at storytime. For example use the following fingerplay:

I wriggle my fingers, I wriggle my toes,

I wriggle my shoulders and I wriggle my nose.

Now no more wriggles are left in me

And I can sit still as still as can be.

(Author unknown)

Once you have the children's attention you need to 'set the scene'. A story can be introduced in various ways. Some suggestions include:

- using a familiar puppet that only comes out at story time to introduce the story. You can build the personality of the puppet so children are keen to gather and listen. The puppet might also bring a prop to stimulate some introductory discussion about the story subject
- a story light/candle that burns for the duration of the story and signals that children need to listen
- using a special 'story box' or bag that can be opened by a child or the puppet to reveal props or book
- a story apron with props associated with the story hidden in various pockets
- familiar fingerplays or songs with a theme common to the story
- look at the cover, talk about *'What might the story be about?'*
- introduce the main characters in the story: *'This is a book about a little boy called Billy – just about the same age as you ...'*

The Storyteller

When learning stories to tell, read and reread the story to yourself as well as out loud, visualising the action in your mind. Remember the basic plot and sequence of events. You may even wish to write these down and list important details and characters. Try telling the story to yourself; refer back to the text to see what you've forgotten.

Don't memorise the story word for word, but tell it in your own way. There are, of course, a few exceptions such as poetry and stories in rhyme. It is also common to memorise repetitive lines as well. Do memorise the first and last lines so you can start and finish with confidence.

Practise with any visual props such as the felt board pieces, stick puppets or anything else you may be using. You will find that felt board pieces and stick puppets help you to remember the sequence of events and characters. So make sure you practise with the pieces in order in your lap. This will ensure that the telling goes smoothly and that you know where and when to place the pieces on the felt board or hold or turn the stick puppets or other props.

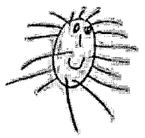
Use your voice to convey mood and atmosphere and to bring the story to life. Vary volume, tone, pitch, pace and pausing. Shout and whisper, become excited or sad as the story dictates. If you are not good at changing your voice to give distinctive character, especially different accents, don't do this, but try to experiment with volume, tone, pitch, pace and pausing. Never read or tell too fast, as this is a common mistake of beginners. Pace the story and allow ample time for children to see any visual props or picture book illustrations.

Be aware of space; think about the space around yourself and your audience. The physical environment in which you tell a story is often crucial to a successful telling, so consider space, comfort, noise levels, temperature and light. Always consider how your audience is positioned in relation to yourself and any story props you may be using. It is often helpful to practise telling or reading stories in front of a mirror or to your family and friends. Holding up and reading a picture book successfully to a group of children requires practice and an awareness of what the children can see.

Talking about the Book

- Ask questions that encourage children to evaluate, analyse, compare, rather than questions that just test recall of plot. Time the questions to give children time to think about the answers. Listen to their comments to be aware of their level of understanding and interest.
- Recall the story.
- Relate story to a real experience during the day or ask questions which prompt children to relate their own experiences to the story.
- Relate story to an individual child: '*This little girl has a new baby brother like you, Tina'.*
- Explore feelings: '*How would you have felt if ....'*

- Discuss the part/page you liked most and why, then invite children to do the same.

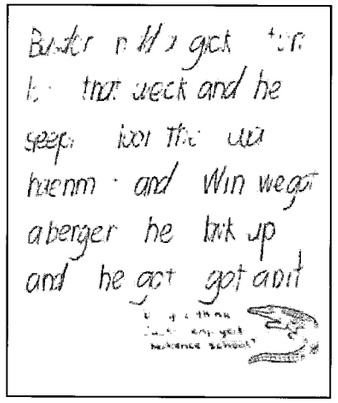


Storytime!

Storytime at the centre is always popular. The children will often ask for favourite books to be read over and over again. Lots of props are used to bring stories to life and quite often the carers will make up their own stories to tell the children.

Using Symbols: Written Language

From birth children are surrounded by print and will eventually realise that certain marks they see in the environment and in books represent spoken language. Learning oral language involves attaching words (verbal symbols) to mental images of objects or actions. The written word 'chair' is the written symbol for the spoken word 'chair'.



Initially children will play with cursive and print-like marks in imitation of written language. Children will look at and 'read' books, using pictures to guide their story or recalling the story from previous readings. Children develop a holistic understanding of written language, i.e. they become aware that written words have some specific meaning. They will recognise written words in the environment and relate them to a specific object or place. A good example of this is signs for fast food outlets or services stations. A child will say '*McDonalds'* without actually being able to read the word or distinguish the letters. Most children could not read these words if they were shown them in conventional print.

Children learn that written words have meaning by experiencing written symbols in their own environment. For example, mother writes a shopping list; reminder notes are placed on the 'fridge door; list of names and telephone number are next to the telephone; the TV guide lists program names and times etc.

Children gradually become aware that words are made up of sounds, and that sounds can be represented by letters, or groups of letters. They also realise that groups of letters make up a word and groups of words make a sentence. Children learn that words must be separated by spaces and that letters for a word run from left to right and be in a particular order to make sense.

Connecting Letters and Sounds

Children will firstly make the connection that letters represent sounds; however, in the English language many words are not spelt the way they sound and many letters can represent more than one sound. Initially children will use only the most noticeable sounds when writing a word, for example *'BK'* for *'Be careful'*; *'I lik llee'* for *'I like lollies'*.

Young children will often try to link the written word with the size or shape of the object being represented. For example a child might think that the word 'dog' should be bigger (more letters) than the word 'mouse' because dogs are bigger than mice.

Recurring Principle

When children first begin to produce writing it is usually long lines of squiggles or repetitive symbols. Children have made the connection that written words have the same marks made over and over again.

Generative Principle

Children become aware that words consist of a series of different symbols – these can include some recognisable letters but usually consists of a range of invented symbols. Children will often begin writing with known letters, such as letters in their own name, and will use these in various combinations to represent words. Often children will write letters by accident and when these are printed out to them they will incorporate these 'new' letters into their writing. Beginning writers will often combine both upper case and lower case letters.

Pre-Writing Skills

Children must learn to combine letters to create words, to move from left to right and to put a space between each word. Often children will simply string all of the letters together and when they run out of space will simply start a new line, but not necessarily with a new word. The ability to recognise and reproduce shapes is integral to writing. The ability to copy shapes follows a sequence. This knowledge reinforces the inappropriateness of expecting children to be able to produce letter shapes before they are ready. Generally children progress through the same sequence in relation to drawing lines and basic shapes: vertical line, horizontal line, circle, vertical/horizontal cross, right oblique line, square, left oblique line, triangles.

Source: Adapted from Beery, K.E. (1989). **Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration.** Modern Curriculum Press.

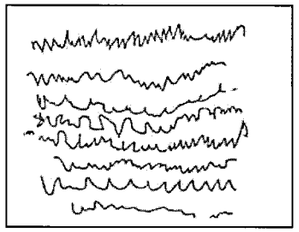
Fine Motor Skills

Writing is a fine motor skill involving muscle and bone development as well as co-ordination. Some of the developmental factors necessary for writing include:

- muscle tone and joint stability
- arm strength
- motor planning

- ability to isolate individual finger movements
- ability to separate the functions of the two sides of the hand
- grip and pinch strength
- fine motor co-ordination
- the development of a dominant hand
- the development of a mature grip.

Stages in Children's Writing Development

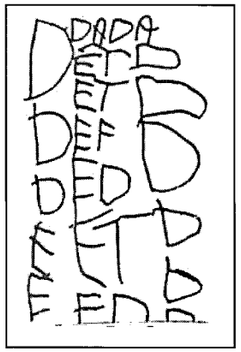


The process of learning to write is highly personal. No two children will develop in exactly the same way. However, there are some common characteristics that can be identified in the process.

Scribbling

Begins with first contact with pencil/crayon and paper. Children begin to make marks on paper and show an interest in the marks. Children may label marks. Scribble gradually becomes more controlled and recognisable drawings begin to emerge.

Distinguishing Pictures from Print



By about three years, marks representing 'writing' appear. These marks are quite different from the marks representing pictures.

Writing Approximations

Children try to reproduce forms that look like writing. They have some idea of how 'words look' and may ask adults to 'read' their words. They are also aware that writing proceeds in lines or columns or lists.

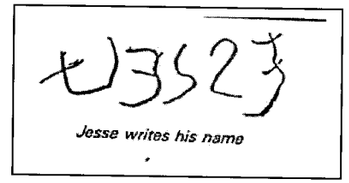
Print Practice

Children may make strings of letters and fill pages with letter forms and patterns of letters, giving them a sense of achievement and mastery. By four to five years children often begin experimenting with writing their own name. They need quite complex skills to be able to reproduce a word. They need to be able to read/recognise their name, know the shapes of the letters and that letters proceed from left to right in a particular sequence.

Alphabetic Writing

Children begin to realise there is a relationship between the spoken and written word, that certain marks represent a spoken sound, syllable or word. They may be more interested in the letters of the alphabet. A major step is when a child realises their choice of letter depends on the sounds those letters represent. The child may ask, '*How do you write "sh"?*'

Reversals or Mirror Writing



Some children may write some letters or whole words reversed or upside down. This can be a result of immature internalising of left and right or lack of a dominant side. They may not have reached the understanding that letters must be oriented in a particular way and sequence to make meaning.

Practice, Practice

Writing is a challenge for young children and their attempts to accomplish this difficult skill should be encouraged and praised.

Promoting Prewriting Skills

There are many ways of promoting prewriting skills besides sitting children at a table and drawing or 'writing'. Remember preschoolers need thick pencils, brushes or Textas and large sheets of paper. Movement is a good way to teach children about shape, direction and other concepts needed for pre-writing. Here are some ideas and activities for promoting writing skills:

- Anticipate various forms of emergent writing and encourage children to write in their own way.
- Encourage the use of lower case letters (except for beginning of names); parents often teach children to print in block capitals. Children who are just beginning to read and write often do not believe that it means the same if it is written differently.
- Encourage children to start letters at the top.
- Encourage children to develop an anti-clockwise circle (they will naturally draw clockwise).
- Draw in the sand. Children can trace over shapes you draw.
- Make sandpaper shapes and letters for children to feel.
- Offer music and movement experiences involving shapes and directions, for example waving scarves in big anti-clockwise circles.
- Incorporate shapes into obstacle courses.
- Offer a wide variety of 'pencil and paper' activities; for example many children who are reluctant to 'draw' really enjoy using thick black Textas at an easel covered with large paper.
- Play 'spot the shape' – this can be much enjoyed if done in darkness with torches.

It is important to remember 'readiness' plays an important part in pre-writing skills. Children must be able to co-ordinate eye and hand movements and have sufficient fine motor control to hold a pen. Children must also show an interest in writing – just any other developmental area, reading and writing readiness will occur at different times for different children.

Chapter Summary

The acquisition and development of language is a complex task and is influenced by physiological and environmental factors. The child's family and culture play a critical role in how language develops and how the child uses language as part of the socialising process.

Children with poor language skills are among those more likely to have poor educational outcomes and are more likely to be at risk of school failure. From kindergarten onwards, the child is in an environment that relies on the transmission of 'knowledge and skills' through verbal and written instruction.

Children who are not functioning at an age-stage appropriate level in their language development are at risk of not reaching their maximum educational potential. Children whose home language is not English can also face a range of challenges in becoming competent users of the dominant language if they are not supported in developing and maintaining their home language.

In order to be literate children must be immersed in a language and print-rich environment and supported by carers who promote literacy as a key to lifelong learning.

Think About

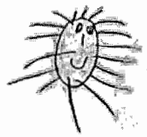
1. Think about the range of daily interactions between children and carers in group settings. How can carers ensure that these interactions are meaningful to each child?

2. While the debate continues in relation to language development it is clear that the family are the critical factor in attaining age appropriate language skills.

Discussion

1. Consider the key functions of language as identified earlier in this chapter. Try to group the functions according to their use in early childhood settings. For example, is it likely that language is used more often to 'convey rule' or 'develop social skills'? Discuss the implications of how language is used in children's services in relation to children's language development.

2. Read the scenario 'Speaking English' and discuss how you might go about explaining to the family the importance of maintaining the child's home language.



Speaking English

A young Ethiopian family, after one year of living and working in a small Australian community, found themselves speaking only English to their children. When questioned by friends as to why this happened, the family responded with:

Mother: 'We feel uncomfortable speaking in our own language. People look at us funny.'

Father: 'My boss told me I should only speak English to my children.'

Mother: 'I worry about my children suffering at school. I don't want the other children to make fun of them. Children can be so cruel at times. It can be confusing you know. My oldest child's teacher said we should speak English at home so that the children learn. But at the child care centre they tell me it is important to speak our own language at home so that the children can speak both languages. I don't know what to do. I worry for my children. I want them to be happy and to fit in. it is hard enough that they have different-coloured skin. They must be able to speak like the other children.'

Activities

1. Listed below are statements made by children of different ages. Write a response showing how the carer could extend or scaffold the children's language.

Two-year-olds:

a. Hears dog barking and says '*doggie*'

b. Tips water on self, looks down at wet clothes and says *'w'*

c. Crying because another child has taken her toy, *'naughty'*.

Three-year-olds:

d. Approaches carer and points to shoelace, which is undone.

e. Stand with arms folded, frowning, lips pouted when asked to help pick up blocks

f. Cries because painting has been ripped by another child.

Five-year-olds:

g. Two children are fighting over a book. Ollie hits Mia and Mia retaliates. The book tears.

h. Stands with head bowed, saying '*Mika won't be my friend!*'

i. Four children are sitting at a drawing table, Alec reaches across and scribbles on Sally's work. *'There, now mine is better then yours Sally.'*

2. Select two books suitable for toddlers and two books suitable for preschoolers. Develop props for each book. Present your book and props to your peers as though you were reading to a small group of children.