



Transcript for the [video](#):

Supporting Oral Language Development in a Language-Rich Environment

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Voiceover (with music): What do you know about how children’s oral language skills develop? What are some of the things you do to encourage children to use their language skills, and how do you set up your classroom to ensure that children engage in rich language every day?

Supporting Oral Language Development in a Language-Rich Environment

Luz Ramos, Host: Oral language is the foundation for learning to read and write and is critical for supporting the development of children’s early literacy skills.

Dr. Theresa Bouley, Eastern Connecticut State University: Oral language is important for literacy development, because if children can develop the skills and the knowledge now, when they begin to read, they’ll be able to use that information.

Host: In a language-rich environment, children ages three and older should be building a vocabulary of at least twenty-five hundred new words each year. As their vocabulary pool develops, children need to know how to use these new words. To do this, they need to learn three rule systems of language: semantics, syntax, and phonology.

Host: Semantics relates to word meanings. When we present young children with words that are disconnected from experiences, the words have no meaning for them. But if adults can supply words that are relevant to the child’s experience, while the child is experiencing something, the words take on an instant meaning.

Child: Why does he have two things on him?

Teacher: Those are udders. That’s where the milk comes from.

Theresa Bouley: There’s a lot of research that shows that if children have good vocabulary, they’ll recognize those words when they see them, and they’ll have an easier time reading them.

Host: As children learn new words, they need to know how to use them in a way that makes sense. If you introduce a new word within a context, children are more likely to understand its meaning and use it correctly, themselves.

Teacher: Oh, is he giving you a vaccine? This is a vaccine for him?

Host: As children add new words to their vocabulary pool, they need to know how to put them together. This is called syntax. Syntax refers to grammar and the order of words in sentences. It's common for children to make syntactical approximations.

Child: Izmael, I already buy those.

Dr. Roberta Schomburg, Carlow University: There's a big difference between the way a three year old talks and the way a four year old talks and the way a five-year-old talks. Teachers begin to recognize how children put words together into making sentences. And they begin to recognize the kinds of errors that children will make when they overgeneralize a rule. For instance, saying, "I builded a big building." "Yes, you BUILT a great building." So that the teacher is then modeling back how, without correcting the child.

Child: Because he don't wanna go.

Teacher: He doesn't want to go for the walk, maybe?

Theresa Bouley: When children are reading and they hear themselves read, if they have strong syntax, they'll recognize, "Oh, that doesn't sound right," and then they'll go back and they'll self-correct or correct themselves. So syntax is really important for them, not just with their oral language, but it sets the stage for successful reading as well.

Host: By modeling proper syntax and producing a language rich environment, you can help children learn correct syntax with relative ease.

Host: The third rule system is phonology. Phonology relates to the sound system—or phonemes—of a language. Young children listen carefully when adults talk. As they listen, they are learning how to articulate the sounds they hear. This takes a lot of practice.

Child: I draw a faw.

Teacher: A frog, ok.

Child: No, a fwaw, like you drink out. Like a faw, like you drink out, you know, a hole and you drink out it.

Teacher: Oh, a straw!

Theresa Bouley: Some sounds are much easier to pronounce, like vowel sounds, because children aren't needing as much muscle development; the flow of air is very fluid. Consonant sounds are much more difficult to articulate, like /k/ or /r/.

Child: Noah, I'm the wocket. Noah, I'm the wocket. So you have to try to wun away from me.

Theresa Bouley: If children have good knowledge of the sounds, good use of phonology, they'll have a much easier time connecting those letters to the sounds and recognizing them when they're encoding or writing words, or decoding and reading.

So the three rule systems—phonology, semantics and syntax—are really important for teachers to focus on. But if children develop in each one of those areas, in terms of their oral language, they'll be able to use those skills and be more successful as future readers and writers.

Host: Some areas of language development that are most predictive of later written language success are expressive language, receptive language, listening comprehension, and unusual vocabulary or rare words. Expressive language has to do with how well children use language to express their wants and needs.

Child: Can I have one more try of that?

Host: Receptive language is how well children understand what others say to them in conversations.

Teacher: Alright, who's ready for some water? Alright, hold it with two hands, please.

Host: Listening comprehension is children's ability to understand and connect to stories that are read to them or songs that are sung together. Unusual vocabulary or rare words are words that are not typically used in daily conversations.

Teacher: I don't see the parts of your butterfly in your sketch. Where's the abdomen and the thorax?

Dr. Judith Schickedanz, Boston University (emerita): Some of the most interesting research on vocabulary development in young children has focused on adult use of rare words. The children who had the highest vocabularies were not just the ones whose parents used rare words, but parents who used what the researchers call semantic support. You use common ordinary explanations that a child can understand.

Teacher: That's called symmetrical. It means it has the same colors and the same designs on this side as it does on this side.

Judith Schickedanz: High level vocabulary only comes from hearing high level words. But it's not enough just to use those words, we must also provide explicit support.

Teacher (reading): “‘If you insist,’ said the hyena, laughing eerily.” Eerily is another word for, like, scary.

Host: One of the best ways you can foster children’s oral language development is to provide a language rich environment in your classroom.

Theresa Bouley: A language rich environment is just where there’s a lot of talking. Children are engaged in language use and language play with each other; teachers are moving around the room and using language, listening to children, encouraging children to talk with each other. They’ll ask children to explain things that they bring in, maybe items that they brought in for sharing or things that they’ve created. They’ll give children opportunities during group time to talk about or act out something that they’ve done in class. They’ll set up areas of their classroom that have two or three or four or more children so that there’s a lot of social interaction. And the teachers should be there to scaffold their language development and bring their abilities to the next level.

Host: One strategy for fostering a language-rich environment is using child-directed speech. When you use child-directed speech, you listen to what a child says, and then respond using language that is slightly above the child’s level of speaking in order to expand their language.

Child: Mine make a lot of lines.

Teacher: You’re making lots of lines because you’re moving it a lot of times.

Host: When you respond to children using child directed speech, you model more advanced vocabulary and appropriate syntax.

Another way to provide a language-rich environment is to engage in self-talk. In self-talk, you describe what you’re doing as you do it.

Teacher: I’m going to find my name tag: Miss Ashley. I’m going to put on my apron. Make sure I’m ready.

Host: Another strategy that is helpful for language learning is called parallel talk. With parallel talk, you narrate the child’s actions.

Teacher: I see you put the feet under the legs. I see you put the hat on top of the head.

Host: Self-talk and parallel talk provide you with an opportunity to connect actions to words children may not yet know. In language rich environments, teachers are careful to utilize these strategies and engage children in conversations throughout the day.

Judith Schickedanz (with music): One of the challenges in a preschool classroom is really knowing the key things that we know matter for literacy later on, and utilizing opportunities

that occur spontaneously or things children do in the context of our planned activities: joining with children in a conversation, and getting more out of the opportunities that are presented to us.