CHAPTER 13

Language Assessment and Instruction in the Classroom

Changing models of service delivery are impacting the way that children are identified for educational services. There is greater emphasis on classroom-based methods of identifying children with language and communication disabilities. In this chapter, we will examine classroom-based approaches to the identification of language and communication difficulties and instruction that addresses those difficulties. The goal is to enable teachers and speech-language professionals to be able to collaborate in the identification and remediation of language and communication difficulties in children.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe methods for identifying language and communication difficulties.
2. Identify classroom-based methods that can be used to enhance language skills in children across different ages and ability levels.

Teacher Perspective

I taught an eighth-grade student last year who was classified as communication impaired. Although he had been maintaining "D" averages for most of his schooling, no teachers had referred him until the eighth grade because he was never "a behavioral problem." He would simply sit in class and look at the teacher, and the teacher would assume he was paying attention and learning. On his tests, he would frequently mix up words from the questions and turn them into a sentence, and he had difficulty recalling information from novels. As I started working with him more, I noticed he had few friends, rarely spoke in conversations, and was picked on for his shy behaviors. In conversations, he would usually repeat what I had just said instead of responding to me, and he had trouble following directions. Once I referred him and he was eligible for services, he finally received the language therapy he needed for his expressive/receptive skills and more support in the classroom. I learned that although he struggled with language, he excelled greatly at anything and everything visual—I taught him the lattice method of multiplication, and he could duplicate what I had done after only seeing it done once! As he received more support, he became much more confident, and his other teachers told me he started talking to them more. He participated in sports during recess, and he stood up for himself when his "friends" would try to make fun of him. At the end of the year, his father asked me what magic I was using on his son! It was so nice to see the academic improvements but also, more importantly, the social changes in my student as a result of giving him what he needed.

(Eighth grade, co-teacher)

Parent Perspective

My daughter has childhood apraxia of speech, and when she was about 18 months old, I started to get concerned that something might not be right. Most people assured me that she would grow out of it and that I should not be concerned. Instead I followed my gut and called early intervention for her. She qualified for services and started speech therapy within the next 4 to 6 weeks. She continued to receive these services until she turned 3, at which point she entered the local school district and received services there.

Even with services, she still had difficulties acquiring verbal communication. She started with American Sign Language and acquired approximately 8 to 10 new signs in about 2 months, but no new words. I realized that she was a child with a capacity for communication and could express her needs and wants, but for some reason, verbal language eluded her. That is when she was seen by a neurologist who gave her a diagnosis of apraxia. My point is, we cannot assume that children will "outgrow" speech and language difficulties. If I had not contacted early intervention and started her in speech therapy, I can't imagine the kind of deficit she would have now going into kindergarten 2 to 3 years behind her peers with no support.

In my case, I compared her with her peers. When I saw her interact with other children her own age, I saw that she would want to play and interact with other children, but never spoke, even when they encouraged her to do so by asking questions or otherwise requesting her attention. I realized that if she wasn't able to interact with them in the same way that they were able to interact with her, then she was probably exhibiting a significant delay. It was then that I requested a referral to New Jersey Early Intervention, which I had to fight for. Her doctor did not seem concerned since she didn't show any signs of autism, so the doctor assumed that she was fine, which is yet another example of someone assuming that she would "outgrow" it.

Language Assessment in the Classroom

Changes in education service deliver models, including the Response to Intervention (RTI) model, and the inclusion of children with exceptional learning needs in general education classrooms place a greater responsibility on the classroom teacher to identify and teach children with all kinds of disabilities, including those with language difficulties. After all, in most cases, it is the classroom teacher who sees the child most often, in many different settings, interacting with a variety of communicative partners. Teachers can help identify children at risk for language-learning disabilities and help focus assessment on specific areas of concern. In addition, classroom teachers can observe children's use of language in the classroom. Ideally, classroom teachers should be collaborating with speech-language specialists to identify language and communication difficulties and plan appropriate instruction, but school schedules and caseloads often make comprehensive planning difficult.

In Chapter 7, we mentioned the changes that the RTI model has brought to the identification and treatment of students with learning disabilities. This model uses universal screening of students to identify those who are falling behind their peers as well as a tiered system of intervention that starts with the use of evidence-based instruction in the general education classroom and proceeds to more individualized, intensive intervention for those children who do not respond adequately to less intensive instruction (Ehren & Nelson, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). The Response to Intervention Action Network website provides more information and lots of resources that can be used to implement RTI in the classroom.

In this chapter, as well as the next chapter, we will use the RTI model as the framework for discussing the identification of students with language difficulties as well as instructional methods that can be used to enhance language skills. Even if your school has not adopted the RTI model, elements of the model, such as early identification of learning difficulties and levels of intervention, can be useful for any classroom.

In this chapter, the focus will be on classroom-based methods that can be used to identify and provide tier 1 (whole class) and tier 2 (targeted) interventions for children with language difficulties. In Chapter 14, we will discuss more intensive and specialized methods of assessment and intervention that can be used with students who do not show

adequate improvement from tier 1 or tier 2 instruction or whose language impairments are so significant that they required specialized instruction.

Classroom-Based Observation

The formal assessment of language and communication is primarily the responsibility of speech-language specialists. They play an important role in determining whether or not the child meets the criteria for receiving services and for identifying best practices for delivering those services. But classroom teachers play an important role in identifying children at risk for language impairments and in planning and implementing instruction that will help students improve their language and communication skills. Classrooms provide a rich environment for the use of language. Children have to understand and follow directions, ask questions, participate in discussions, interact with their peers, and use language skills for reading and writing. All of these functions present opportunities for assessment of language skills. Nelson (1989) suggests that teachers observe the child's ability to use the various language rule systems (phonological, morphological, and so on) in all modalities demanded by the curriculum (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and thinking).

In addition to simply observing children in their classrooms, teachers can gather informal, classroom-based information about language use in many other ways—for instance, by participating with the child in answering questions at the end of a chapter. In this way, teachers can evaluate the ability of the child to understand text, to paraphrase, and to formulate a response. Other possibilities are to ask the student to retell a story or explain the steps in solving a math problem. Each of these activities can yield important information about the child's ability to understand and use language in the classroom.

Of course, teachers and other education professionals have limited time and opportunities to observe children and assess their performance. The use of checklists can be helpful to provide a framework for the observation. Catts (1997) developed a checklist to help teachers identify children at risk for reading disorders based on their language skills. Another example of a checklist is the one developed by Olswang, Coggins, and Svensson (2007), which was designed to assess the social communication of school-age children. An excellent resource that contains checklists for a number of language skills was developed by the Tennessee Department of Education. You can find this guide by going to the department's website. Type "special education evaluation and eligibility" into the search bar, click on the first result "Special Education Evaluation & Eligibility," click on "Resource Packets–Questions & Answers–Instructional Guidance," and then click on the "Speech and Language Impairments: (Languages) Resources Packet" link.

Classroom-based assessment can be useful both for determining the child's current status as well as looking at performance over time. As such, it is consistent with the RTI model of continuous assessment for identification of learning problems.

Language Elicitation Tasks

Sometimes observation of the child in the classroom is not sufficient for assessing language skills. Opportunities for observation may be too limited, or the use of some language structures may be too infrequent to be useful. As an alternative, it may be useful to structure a language elicitation activity in a way that will prompt a certain kind of response. Let's say, for example, that you have noticed that a child seemed to have difficulty understanding and/or using the past tense (*-ed*) ending. There may not be a lot of opportunities to observe the child's use of this structure in the classroom. So you might want to use a task that prompts the use of *-ed* endings—for example, by showing a brief video of a cartoon character fishing and then asking questions about what the child saw. The responses should be mostly in the past tense.

One widely used method to elicit specific language responses is imitation. Using this technique, the examiner says a sentence and asks the child to repeat it. To prompt the use of the present progressive ending, the examiner might say *The girl is riding a bike.* The idea

behind the use of imitation tasks is that children will be able to repeat only those language structures that they have already mastered. Imitation can be a useful way to quickly assess the child's knowledge of a particular language structure, although the usefulness of this technique has been found to vary from child to child (Fujiki & Brinton, 1987). Imitation tasks can be useful but they should be used in combination with other measures of language use, such as those that follow.

Other language elicitation tasks use a variety of activities that can be fun for the child while yielding valuable information about language skills. Here are some examples.

Morphology. Berko (1958) developed a classic task that requires children to complete a sentence that describes a picture. For this task, the examiner prompts a response by saying *This is a wug. Now there are two of them. There are two* _____. The child has to fill in the blank. By using nonsense words, this task is able to assess the child's knowledge of morphological rules.

Kirby and colleagues (2012) developed an informal assessment of morphological awareness. The children were asked to complete the ending when given a series of words such as run/ran and walk/walk _____. The tester said, "I am going to ask you to figure out some missing words. If I say 'push' and then I say 'pushed'; then I say 'jump,' so then you should say _____?" If the child did not respond correctly (jumped), the experimenter explained how push and pushed were alike, and then how jump and jumped were alike the same way. There were 5 practice items and 20 test items.

Syntax. Owens (2010) gives two suggestions for eliciting negatives. He calls the first "The Emperor's New Clothes." The examiner makes an untrue statement (*Oh Shirley, what beautiful yellow boots*), which should prompt the child to respond with a negative (*I'm not wearing boots*). Owens calls the second technique "Screw-Up." The examiner makes a statement that does not match the action (*Here's your snack*—said as the examiner hands the subject a pencil). The subject should respond by saying *That's not a snack.* These examples show the creativity that teachers and others can apply to elicit specific syntactic structures. For example, to elicit the use of possessives, one could say *Who does that book belong to?* as a way to prompt the response, *It's Jack's book.*

Semantics. Howell, Fox, and Morehead (1993, p. 281) present several ways to elicit vocabulary knowledge. One suggestion goes as follows:

Target word: *drill*

Directions: "Select the words which make sentence 2 most like sentence 1."

Sentence 1: We need drill on our skills.

Sentence 2: If we want to get better at our skills we should
- . . . study them.
- . . . put a hole in them.
- . . . do them a lot.

Apply Your Knowledge 13.1: Elicitation Tasks



In this activity, you will develop your own informal language elicitation tasks.

Ecological Assessment

Ecological assessment examines the child's behavior in the context of environmental demands and expectations (McCormick, 2003) rather than comparing children to population norms. Ecological assessment is often used to evaluate students with severe

disabilities because normed tests may not be useful with this population and functional goals may be of great importance.

The basic idea behind ecological assessment is to intensively evaluate the functioning of the individual in the real environments in which he or she must function. The results of this evaluation become the basis for functional intervention goals for the child and guide needed adaptations in the environment. McCormick (2003) has identified 10 steps in the ecological assessment process:

1. Get to know the student.
   - Identify the resources and supports available at home and in school.
   - Identify the student's strengths.
   - Develop goals for (and with) the student.
2. List activities/routines in a typical school day.
   - Observations and/or interviews can be conducted.
3. Prioritize activities/routines and develop a broad goal statement.
4. Observe and record the behavior of a nondisabled peer and/or conduct interviews to determine the key behavioral expectations for each activity/routine.
   - Nondisabled peers are observed in order to understand what skills the student with disabilities needs to perform the target task.
5. Observe and record the behavior of the student from initiation to completion of each activity/routine.
6. Compare the behavior of the student with expectations for each activity/routine.
   - Note when the student does not meet expectations to determine skills to be learned.
7. Highlight language and communication skills.
8. Try to ascertain why key language/communication behaviors are not demonstrated.
   - The student may not recognize what he or she is supposed to do or say (strategy deficiency).
   - The student may be unable to perform the skill.
   - The student may be unmotivated to perform the skill.
   - The student has never learned how to perform the skill.
   - The physical environment makes it difficult for the student to perform the skill.
9. State the language/communication objectives for each activity.
10. Develop an individualized instructional plan for each objective.

Ecological assessment can be a complex and difficult approach to assessment, but it can yield very useful results, especially for students for whom test norms may not be relevant. There is an inseparable relationship between assessment and instruction in the ecological approach (see Box 13.1).

Universal Screening

Earlier in this chapter, we mentioned the use of universal screening as an element of the response to intervention (RTI) model. In practice, this means that teachers use a formal assessment instrument with the entire class to identify their current level of performance and periodically repeat the assessment to monitor student progress. Those students who fall behind the rate of progress of their peers become candidates for tier 2 (targeted intervention) or tier 3 (intensive intervention).

Two measures that can be used to identify elements of language are the Preschool Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) and the Phonological Awareness and Literacy Screening for Preschool (PALS-PreK). The IGDI (see the My IGDIs website) assesses language and literacy skills in children ages 3 to 5. The test includes three subtests that specifically address language issues: Picture Naming (Oral Language); Rhyming (Phonological

Box 13.1 Example of an Ecological Assessment

Tricia is an 8-year-old student with cerebral palsy and mild cognitive disability who is placed in a regular education classroom. She is supported by a classroom aide.

Following a meeting with Tricia's classroom teacher, her aide, her parents, and Mrs. Kline, a special education teacher assigned to consult with the regular classroom teacher, it was determined that one of the priority goals for Tricia would be requesting food in the cafeteria. (Steps 1, 2, and 3)

Step 4
Observations of Tricia's peers indicate that, in most cases, they are asked by a cafeteria aide to make a verbal response to indicate their choice.

Steps 5 and 6
Observation of Tricia by Mrs. Kline indicates that Tricia responds to the verbal prompt from the cafeteria aide by pointing. If the aide is not sure what Tricia wants, she points to various choices until Tricia nods her head.

Step 7
The language/communication goal for Tricia is for her to make a verbal request in response to the cafeteria aide's verbal prompt.

Step 8
Mrs. Kline has determined that several of the common choices that Tricia needs to make are not currently available on her augmentative communication device.

Steps 9 and 10
Requesting food choices is established as an instructional goal for Tricia. Common menu choices are added as options on her communication device and practiced with the classroom aide. Tricia is given several opportunities to practice this skill in the cafeteria with the cafeteria aide when her peers are not in the cafeteria. Her classroom aide observes and collects data on Tricia's performance of this goal.

Awareness), and Alliteration (Phonological Awareness). The PALS-PreK (see the PALS-PreK website) measures children's phonological awareness skills with three subtests: Beginning Sound Awareness (recognition of alliteration), Rhyme Awareness, and Blending.



This video about the IGDI instrument provides a description of its elements and some examples of children completing the assessment. What are some of the skills assessed with this instrument?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzsAwt2UrzM

Another popular screening measure is the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). DIBELS is a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. The measures are designed to be short (1-minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS (sixth edition) consists of seven measures (or indicators), three of which can be useful for identifying language skills: Initial Sound Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, and Word Use Fluency (which includes assessment of vocabulary and oral language). The first two indicators specifically relate to phonemic awareness.



Watch this introductory video about DIBELS to better understand how the assessment works. What skills does the DIBELS oral reading fluency subtest evaluate?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2GywoKm2pI

Screening instruments are one example of formal assessments. We will examine some additional formal assessments of language in the next chapter.

Summary

Identifying children who are experiencing difficulties with language is an important first step in helping children succeed academically and socially. We discussed four methods that teachers can use to identify language difficulties: observation, language elicitation, ecological assessment, and universal screening. Having identified children with language difficulties, the next step is to provide instruction that will help them enhance their language skills.



Check Your Understanding 13.1

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

Language Instruction in the Classroom

We know from numerous research studies that young children with language disorders are much more likely to have academic, social, and language difficulties later in life than are children with typically developing language (Clegg, Hollis, Mawhood, & Rutter, 2005; Law, Rush, Schoon, & Parsons, 2009). If these children do not receive language intervention, their language disorders are likely to persist (Johnson et al., 1999; Law, Garrett, & Nye, 2004).

Fortunately, there is increasing evidence that early instruction that focuses on improving communication skills can significantly enhance both language skills (e.g., Gallagher & Chiatt, 2009; Law et al., 2004) and the academic success of children, especially in reading (Moats, 2001). For this reason alone, it would be important to provide instruction in support of enhanced language and communication skills. But there are other reasons to intervene as well. Language is a critical skill for classroom interaction. If students are to fully participate, they must have the language and communication skills to understand classroom instruction and to ask and answer questions. Moreover, social skills are as important as (some would say more important than) academic skills in success during and after the school years.

Although there are a number of good reasons to provide language instruction, many children still do not receive the instruction they need. One explanation is that some educators still rely primarily on intervention provided by specialists as the major source of language and communication instruction for children. The term **intervention** suggests that this service takes place after a period of time in which the individual has been exposed to research-based instruction. But some children have limited (or no) exposure to such instruction. Moats and Lyon (1996) note that many teachers lack the depth of understanding of language and language instructional approaches that is necessary in order to deliver effective instruction. These teachers may not recognize the language and communication needs of their students. Even if they do recognize the need, they may not be able to provide effective instruction. Another reason is that instruction, when it occurs, may focus on the wrong skills. Despite a trend in the field of speech and language away from a primary focus on speech sound disorders to a broader view of the role of speech and language for communication and literacy development, school speech services are still often focused largely on helping young children improve their speech. Even when instruction is well planned and delivered effectively, it may not be sufficient for some children. They may need more focused and intensive instruction that can best be provided through intervention. Since intervention is a costly and limited commodity, it is important that it be delivered only when necessary and to those who need it most. The classroom is the primary locus of instruction in language and communication for most students. In this section, we

will identify techniques that can be used by teachers to enhance the language and communication of their students in the regular or special education classroom.

Enhancing Classroom Interaction

One of the most important things teachers can do is to teach in ways that will enhance the language and communication of children in their classroom. Increased opportunities for the use of language in the classroom will give children practice in the use of language skills. Unfortunately, sociolinguists who have carefully observed classroom interactions have found that teachers usually dominate the conversation, ask a lot of questions that require minimal responses (one-word answers), and initiate most of the interactions (Cazden, 1986). As a result, in the typical classroom, children are rather passive recipients of communication rather than active partners in such interaction. Even worse, many teachers actively discourage interaction between students and even between the student and the teacher. Of course, there is a limit to how much interaction can be tolerated, but if language learning is an important goal, some interaction should not only be tolerated but also encouraged. Without the chance to interact, children with language-learning difficulties will have little opportunity to develop crucial language skills.

Fortunately, it is possible to enhance classroom communication. After examining research on classroom language intervention, Dudley-Marling and Searle (1988) developed four recommendations that teachers can use to enhance the language-learning environment: (1) the physical setting must promote talk; (2) the teacher must provide opportunities for children to interact and use language as they learn; (3) the teacher needs to provide opportunities for children to use language for a variety of purposes and for a variety of audiences; and (4) the teacher needs to respond to student talk in ways that encourage continued talk. Let's look at each of these suggestions in more detail.

- *The physical setting must promote talk.* Dudley-Marling and Searle (1988) note that many classrooms are organized to discourage interaction. Individual workstations, carrels, and widely spaced rows are all designed to help students concentrate, but they also have the effect of reducing interaction. Certainly, there is a need for concentration, but many students also need opportunities to interact with their peers. Providing large tables where groups can work, learning centers, and interactive classroom displays can give students opportunities to interact in the classroom.
- *The teacher must provide opportunities for children to interact and use language as they learn.* Teachers can structure classroom conversation around academic tasks. For example, children reading a story about fishing can be encouraged to share their previous fishing experiences with the group. Teachers are sometimes reluctant to let students engage in these kinds of conversations because students may stray from the topic. If this happens, students can be redirected back to the topic. Remember, communication is a goal for many students, and conversation is not an off-task behavior. Other examples of using instructional activities for language interaction are encouraging the students to say aloud their strategies for solving a math problem or having them read a story to the class.
- *The teacher needs to provide opportunities for children to use language for a variety of purposes and for a variety of audiences.* Teachers can encourage class decision making and problem solving and provide opportunities for discussion and sharing. Teachers can provide opportunities for students to talk to each other, to younger children (through cross-age tutoring), and to adults (parents and visitors).
- *The teacher needs to respond to student talk in ways that encourage continued talk.* Teachers often ask questions in ways that give students little opportunity to respond. When students do reply, the teacher may not respond in ways that encourage further interaction. Dudley-Marling and Searle (1988) give an example of a teacher discouraging interaction:

  S: Boy, you should have seen the neat stuff at the circus.

  T: Really, James, you shouldn't say "neat stuff."

The authors suggest that this interaction could have been turned into a longer communicative interaction if the teacher had said something like, *Oh, you had a good time at the circus?* Teachers should be careful not to dominate the conversation, and they should follow the child's lead in setting the conversational topic. One simple but effective strategy for increasing interaction is to pause several seconds for a response to a question. Teachers generally wait less than 1 second for a response. Longer wait time increases the likelihood that students will respond (Rowe, 1986).

The techniques considered so far for enhancing language and communication skills are useful in nearly any classroom. But there are some strategies that are more effective in particular classroom environments or with children at certain ages or developmental levels.

Preschool Classrooms

Language and communication development should be a major goal in preschool classrooms. Teachers of preschool children usually include many activities to involve their students in such interaction. For example, Watson, Layton, Pierce, and Abraham (1994) describe a preschool program for children with language disorders that incorporates instruction in emerging literacy skills into activities that most teachers of preschool children will recognize. These activities include:

1. *Circle time.* When the bell rings, children get their mats and bring them to the circle. Children must recognize their names in order to get their mats. After an opening song, children discuss the job chart that has jobs listed in print, supplemented by pictures. When there is a song, the words are written out on a poster board and the teacher points to the words as they are sung.
2. *Story time.* Books that follow a classroom theme (animals, communities, etc.) are selected. As the teacher reads the story, each child is asked for some kind of response. In addition, there are opportunities for choral responding. Because repeated readings help children improve their comprehension skills, the story is reread at least three times in a week.
3. *Story-related group activity.* The teacher uses follow-up activities to reinforce concepts from the story. Children may role-play parts from the story or make puppets to represent characters from the story.
4. *Literacy-rich centers.* Watson and colleagues (1994) describe three literacy centers that are used in their classroom. At the *art and writing center,* children draw pictures related to the "story of the week" and tell about their picture. The *role-playing center* contains dress-up clothes, dolls, and toys that the children can use to act out action from the story or from their own scripts. During free time, the children can go to the *book and library center* to look at books and listen to tapes.
5. *Snack time.* Often snack time is integrated with the weekly theme. Snack packaging may be used as reading material for the child.
6. *Gross motor play/outdoor activities.* Even during gross motor activities, there are opportunities to practice literacy skills. When teaching exercises, the teacher also introduces the written word (e.g., *arm, body*).
7. *Closing circle.* This provides a final opportunity during the day for children to recall and talk about their experiences. When children are given printed materials to take home, the child is told about the purpose of the message, reinforcing the idea that print has a purpose.

Although the preschool classroom provides many opportunities for language interaction and instruction, it is important that teachers and other professionals know how to maximize these opportunities to enhance language skills. Ostrosky and Kaiser (1991) suggest seven strategies that they believe will increase the likelihood that children will show

an interest in their environment and make communicative attempts, and that will increase the likelihood that the adult will prompt the use of language.

1. *Use interesting materials.* Provide materials and activities that children enjoy. Children's preferences can be identified through observation during free playtimes and from parents' reports. Rotating materials from time to time will keep the children interested.
2. *Place items out of reach.* Place some desired items in view but out of reach in order to prompt requests by the children. During snack time, for example, the teacher can place a cookie on the table out of reach from the child. If the child reaches for the cookie, the teacher can prompt the child to make a request or, if the child is nonspeaking, ask the child to point or use his or her communicative device to request.
3. *Provide inadequate portions.* Provide children with small or inadequate portions of a material, such as blocks. When the children need more, they are likely to make a request.
4. *Give children opportunities for choice making.* Children can be prompted to make a choice by being presented with two objects and asked to make a choice. For example, during snack time, the child may be asked to choose between a cookie and fruit. For children who are nonspeaking, pointing may be accepted. For other children, a verbalization may be required.
5. *Provide assistance.* Creating a situation in which the children will need assistance provides communicative opportunities. A windup toy or an unopened bottle of bubbles may provide opportunities for children to request adult assistance.
6. *Use sabotage.* A "sabotage" is created when children are not provided with all the materials they need to complete a task. For example, students may be asked to cut out pictures and paste them on a chart but are given no paste. Alternatively, in a group setting, each child may get some, but not all, of the needed materials. In order to complete the project, they will have to request materials from their peers.
7. *Use "silly" situations.* Children may be prompted to communicate by creating silly or absurd situations. For example, during circle time, the teacher may hold a picture upside down or place a weather symbol on the calendar instead of the date.

Each of these techniques is designed to increase communicative interaction. However, in many cases, the goal is to move beyond interaction to more adult forms of communication. When materials and activities are carefully selected and adults are aware of and use effective techniques for enhancing communicative interaction, the preschool classroom can be a rich environment for language learning.

Elementary Classrooms

Language development does not stop when children enter school. Earlier in this book, we reviewed research that described continuing growth in language development during the school years (Chapter 6). This growth occurs in nearly all aspects of language. At the same time, students are continuing to develop their reading and writing skills. What can teachers and other education professionals in elementary classrooms do to support and extend language learning—oral and written?

As we have noted earlier in this book, there is considerable evidence that phonological-processing abilities are related to initial success in reading. Many reading programs include activities to develop phonological skills, but many students need more practice on these skills than is generally provided by most basal reader series. Teachers can provide assistance by helping students identify words that begin with the same sound (not necessarily the same letter), pay attention to rhyme, and practice dividing words into parts and putting the parts back together to make words.

A number of approaches for improving phonological awareness were discussed in Chapter 7. In general, these techniques have helped children improve both their phonological skills and their reading success. In addition, some structured programs for improving phonological skills such as the *Ladders to Literacy* program (Notari-Syverson, O'Connor, & Vadasy, 2007; O'Connor, Notari-Syverson, & Vadasy, 2005) have been used successfully to teach phonological skills in the elementary and preschool classroom (Institute for Education Sciences, 2007).

Reading success requires more than just phonological awareness. As children progress in reading, other language-based skills, such as vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, play an important role. Narrative (storytelling) skills (an aspect of pragmatic language) are important for both reading and writing.

How teachers present information in the classroom can have a significant impact on student learning. This is the conclusion of a study by Lapadat (2002). Second-grade students were asked to listen to taped lectures that varied in the pace of the delivery (slow to fast) and the amount of redundancy in the lecture (high or low). Lapadat found that students with greater language ability learned more, no matter how the lecture was delivered. Presentation style, however, did matter. Overall, slow-paced instructional language was positively related to learning, but students attended less to it than to fast-paced talk. For most students, slow-paced, nonredundant instruction seemed to work best. However, students with special needs learned best when instruction was faster paced. Perhaps the lesson for teachers from this research is to understand that the pace of a lesson matters considerably. Although the optimal pace may vary for different learners, teachers need to be aware of the effect of their instructional delivery on their students' learning.

Secondary Classrooms

During the secondary-school years, language continues to grow and develop. Development in advanced syntactic skills, in vocabulary, and in subtle communicative skills is characteristic of the secondary years. Children with speech and language difficulties do not necessarily outgrow their problems. Instead, as they respond to the demands of the secondary setting, their problems may surface in new ways. Lecturing, note taking, and independent research projects pose difficult challenges to the student with language difficulties. Despite their need for continuing support, many secondary-age students with language and communication impairments fail to receive the supportive instruction that they need to be successful (Starling, Munro, Togher, & Arciuli, 2011).

An instructional approach that has been used with success with secondary-age students is **learning strategies**. Many students lack an efficient strategy to use when they encounter unknown words. The learning strategies approach helps students recognize and use a strategy. For example, the DISSECT strategy was developed by Lenz and Hughes (1990) to help secondary students decode words. Students are taught to follow seven steps that require them to use context clues, break words into their constituents, and use additional resources when needed. The seven steps of the strategy are as follows:

D: *Discover* the context. Students are reminded to use the context as an aid to identifying the target word.

I: *Isolate* the prefix. Students are instructed to find and separate the prefix and then try to say the word.

S: *Separate* the suffix. Students are instructed to find and separate the suffix and then try to say the word.

S: *Say* the stem. Once the prefix and suffix have been removed, what remains is the word stem. Students are now told to try to identify the stem.

E: *Examine* the stem. Students are taught to use the "rule of twos and threes" to identify the stem. That is, if the stem begins with a vowel, students pronounce units of two letters. If the stem begins with a consonant, students separate and pronounce units of three letters.

C: *Check* with someone. If students have followed the first five steps and still do not recognize the word, they can check with a peer, teacher, or someone else.

T: *Try* the dictionary. Another (perhaps preferable) alternative is to check the dictionary.

In one study, DISSECT was found to significantly reduce the oral reading errors of eighth-grade students with learning disabilities after only 6 weeks of use (Lenz & Hughes, 1990). In addition to improving word identification skills, strategy instruction has been used successfully to enhance the development of a variety of language-related skills, including metalinguistic skills (Starling et al., 2011), written expression (Ellis & Lenz, 1987), and reading comprehension (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Kazdan, 1999).

The continued development of semantic skills, especially vocabulary, is also essential for academic success at the secondary level. Vocabulary skills have been found to be related to reading comprehension (Elleman, Lindo, Morphy, & Compton, 2009) as well as to overall reading level (Scammacca et al., 2007). Research on vocabulary instruction for secondary-age students has found that systematic instruction on vocabulary can improve vocabulary learning (Kuder, 2016). The most effective instructional methods include mnemonic instruction, morphemic analysis, direct instruction, and multimedia instruction. In several studies, Michael Kennedy and his colleagues (Kennedy, Deshler, & Lloyd, 2015; Kennedy, Thomas, Meyer, Alves, & Lloyd, 2014) found that when secondary-age students with disabilities used podcasts that included multimedia resources, the students learned new vocabulary faster than when the standard drill and practice methods were used.

In addition to its role in academic success, language is an essential part of social competence as well. There is considerable research and clinical evidence that language skills play an important role in successful social interaction (Brinton & Fujiki, 1993). This is true for children at all ages, but, since social skills and social acceptance are such a crucial part of adolescence, the use of appropriate social language may be of even greater importance for secondary-age students. The social skills that adolescents develop and practice are essential for success in school as well as in life outside of school.

Teachers can support the development of social interaction skills by providing opportunities for interacting with a variety of communicative partners during many different activities. Formal reports and presentations are one type of activity. These provide opportunities for teachers to give feedback on pragmatic skills such as introducing a topic, taking the audience's perspective, elaborating on a theme, and providing an appropriate conclusion.

Although these are important skills for students to acquire, even more critical may be the opportunities for peer interaction. Group activities provide teachers with opportunities to observe their students in interaction with peers, model appropriate interaction, and assure that all students are given the opportunity to participate. Taking the time to set ground rules for interaction and discussing what the teacher has observed during group time can be as important as the content that the groups are assigned to complete. A review of research found that peer tutoring had a moderately large effect on improving the social and behavioral skills of both elementary and secondary-age students (Bowman-Perrott, Burke, Zhang, & Zaini, 2014).

Language skills continue to play an important role in learning at the secondary level. Unfortunately, in many cases, students with language and communication difficulties fail to receive the instruction they need at the secondary level. The result is that some students continue to fall behind their peers and do not reach their potential. It is important for teachers and other education professionals to recognize the importance of language skills for the academic and social growth of secondary-age students and to attempt to enhance these skills in their students.

Instruction for Students with Significant Disabilities

Academic expectations for students with moderate to severe disabilities are higher than ever. Changes in federal and state policies as well as research into instructional methods for these students have significantly raised the bar for this population (Knight, Browder, Agnello, &

Lee, 2010). Increasingly, students with significant disabilities are receiving some or all of their academic instruction in general education classrooms. Because language and communication skills play such an important role in reading, writing, and speaking, it is important to consider how to enhance the language and communication of children with significant disabilities in the classroom, whether it is a general or special education classroom.

Classroom-based language instruction for students with significant disabilities is similar to instruction for other students in many ways. For example, using naturally occurring opportunities throughout the school day to model and teach language skills, using peers to prompt language from students with significant disabilities, systematic instruction in specific language structures, and instruction in phonological awareness should all be part of instruction for this population. In other ways, language instruction may be quite different. For example, many of these students will be using an augmentative or alternative communication system (such as a voice output communication device or sign language). These require that teachers and peers learn how to communicate effectively with the student. Most students with significant disabilities will need more intensive instruction in order to achieve skill objectives. That means instruction that is delivered more frequently, with more examples and more opportunities for practice.

Recently, the author was asked by a local school to work with the staff to identify principles for teaching language and communication skills to students with significant disabilities. This is the list that we developed:

- **Use typical development as a framework for instruction:** Although children with significant disabilities do not always follow the typical developmental sequence, typical development can still be a good guide for planning an instructional sequence.
- **Teach functional skills:** It is possible and preferable to teach developmental skills in functional ways. Suppose, for example, you want the student to learn to identify nouns. Using items that the child needs for classroom success (e.g., pencil, paper) would be a functional application of this skill.
- **Develop clear and measurable objectives:** This principle should apply to all students, but it is critically important for students with significant disabilities. Progress is often slow and in small increments for this population. If objectives are carefully written, it is possible to measure success and know when it is time to move ahead.
- **Consider the student's sensory strengths and weaknesses:** Some students with significant disabilities have sensory disabilities that make it difficult for them to learn through listening or seeing. These need to be considered in planning instruction.
- **Use age-appropriate methods and materials:** Although it is not always easy to find appropriate materials for students with significant disabilities, it is important to try to find or create such materials. For example, using a television schedule may be a great way to teach sequencing skills.

Until recently, it was often assumed that individuals with moderate to severe disabilities were unable to acquire useful literacy skills. At best, perhaps they could learn a few "survival" words that would help them in an emergency. But that view has changed rapidly. Today there are greater literacy expectations for this population and better outcomes for many. In addition, there is now a growing body of research that indicates that these goals are achievable (Allor, Champlin, Gifford, & Mathes, 2010; Cooper-Duffy, Szedia, & Hyer, 2010; Erickson, Hatch, & Clendon, 2010).

Koppenhaver and Erickson (2003) described an approach to enhancing the language and literacy skills of students with severe disabilities in a preschool classroom. None of the children used speech. The authors worked with the teachers to use natural opportunities in the classroom to foster language and literacy skills. For example, they created an electronic writing center in the classroom that used a (previously unused) computer and a basic children's writing program. To enhance reading skills, they added a variety of reading materials to the classroom, including books with sound effects, wordless picture books, books on tape, and touch-and-feel books. Reading was also integrated into regular

classroom activities. For example, at the beginning of each day, the students took attendance by identifying pictures of their classmates. Nametags were added to the pictures so children would become familiar with the written form of their names. The children were also given increased opportunities for language interaction. As an example, during drawing activities, the teachers were encouraged to describe what the children were drawing. The authors reported that, as a result of these and other activities, the students showed much greater interest in reading and writing.

As technology advances, new techniques and devices have emerged. Blischak and Schlosser (2003) reported on research studies that have found that speech-generating devices and talking word-processing programs can be useful for enhancing the spelling skills of nonspeaking students. Lee and Vail (2005) developed a program to teach sight words to 6- and 7-year-old students with moderate to severe disabilities. The program combined a multimedia presentation with a constant-time-delay procedure. When a task direction (i.e., "Click the word _____") was presented in the intervention program, a participant was given 5 seconds to initiate a response. Using this procedure, the children in the study were able to successfully learn the target words.

One of the key ingredients to improving literacy skills for students with significant disabilities is to increase the intensity of instruction. Increasing the intensity of instruction has been found to lead to significant improvements in literacy skills for students with significant disabilities. In one study, Allor and colleagues (2010) taught teachers to use the following strategies:

- **Present fast-paced lessons:** Activities focusing on letter sounds and words were very short, ranging from 1 to 5 minutes.
- **Move quickly from one activity to the next.**
- **Use appropriate pacing:** Pacing within activities was as quick as possible, while allowing students adequate processing time.
- **Promote automaticity:** Teachers gradually reduced processing time until student responses became quick and automatic.
- **Use behavior management techniques to decrease time off task:** Teachers developed routine prompts to quickly remind students to stay on task, and they reinforced on-task behavior.
- **Spend less time on clearly mastered skills:** Allow more practice time for skills not mastered.

There are undoubtedly significant challenges to teaching students with significant disabilities. But higher expectations for these students means that more of them will be expected to achieve language and literacy skills that will enable them to be successful in school and in life after school. Intensive instructional methods, clear and measurable outcomes, and technology are helping practitioners meet the needs of this challenging population.

Teaching Specific Language Skills

Although increasing communicative interaction in the classroom is important, many students can benefit from instruction in specific language skills. Most children acquire the essential elements of their first language without direct instruction. They simply learn to understand and use the elements through a process of trial and error (or, more formally, "hypothesis testing"). But, when children come to school, they are expected to identify the elements of language in order to develop literacy (reading and writing skills). Additionally, some children come to school with more limited acquisition of the basic language rules. For both of these reasons (learning to identify language elements and further developing language skills) teachers and other school professionals may want to help children develop their knowledge of the elements of language. That instruction can be delivered in whole-class lessons to all students (tier 1) or to individuals or small groups who have been identified as needing targeted instruction (tier 2).

A variety of professionals may be called on to deliver tier 2 services, including the classroom teacher, a special education teacher, an instructional assistant, and/or a speech-language specialist. Tier 2 instruction is designed to replicate instruction delivered in tier I; therefore, special strategies are usually not used. Instead, the goal is to deliver more focused instruction in small groups. Let's look at some examples of instructional methods that can be used to teach specific language skills.

Phonology. Gillon (2000) studied the effect of phonological awareness training on 91 children aged 5 to 7 years old. The subject sample included 61 children who had been previously identified as having delays in the development of phonological awareness. The remainder of the children had no identified language disorders. The children were divided into one of three groups: a phonological awareness intervention group, a "traditional" language-intervention (articulation therapy) group, and a minimal intervention (control) group that received a monthly consultation from a speech-language pathologist. After several months of instruction, the children in the intensive phonological awareness instruction group had made significant gains in phonological awareness and actually reached the level of their typically developing peers. This, and other studies (e.g., Blischak, Shah, Lombardino, & Chiarella, 2004; Seger & Voerhoeven, 2005) indicate that phonological awareness training can enhance the phonological skills of children with delays in the development of those skills.

The Florida Center for Reading Research is an especially rich source for activities for teaching phonological (and other) language skills. Classroom-based lessons by grade level are available for skills such as phoneme segmentation, phoneme blending, syllables, and many other areas. Another source for phonics and rhyming activities is the Kids Learning Station website. The Florida Assessments for Instruction in Reading (FAIR) website includes lots of activities for teaching language and literacy skills. Go to the FAIR search tool to access the activities.

There are numerous apps available that are designed to help children develop their phonological and phonemic skills. Here are a few examples:

ArtikPix	Flashcards and matching activities for phonological development
Articulate It	Picture cards with audio model of every phoneme in English
Speech Trainer 3D	Provides demonstration of speech sounds with illustration of position of mouth, lips, and tongue
Say It Again	Uses a "Bingo" game format to hear and practice sounds
Speech Stickers	The child chooses one of the five character stickers, and the teacher/therapist places it on the screen and repeats the sound the character makes
ABC Phonics Rhyming	Both versions use a matching game format to help children identify words that rhyme



Watch this demonstration of the features of ArtikPix. What kind of methods does this app use to teach articulation skills?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d01ZVwsnM8E

Morphology. Connell and Stone (1992) studied the use of a computer-based program to teach 3- to 5-year old children with language impairments to recognize morphological rules under two instructional conditions: modeling (listening to a morpheme being used) and imitation (in which the participant both heard and was prompted to repeat the morpheme). Results indicated that the children with language learning disabilities did much better when taught in the imitation condition than in the modeling condition while the typically developing children did well under both conditions. This study suggests that children with language-learning difficulties can learn better when they are actively involved in instruction.

Based on their review of evidence-based practices to teach morphology, Kirby and Bowers (2012) suggested several instructional practices for teaching morphology, including:

- **Word detective:** Encourage students to search for examples of word patterns (such as addition of the "ing" ending) in class texts.
- **Word sums and word matrices:** Present words that might be related by a base (e.g., interrupt, corrupt, eruption). Have students identify a common base and test their hypotheses using word sums (e.g., inter + rupt, cor + rupt, e + rupt). Then construct a word matrix around this base.
- **Data banks of morphemes:** Create a sticky note morpheme chart in the class, adding affixes and bases as you encounter them.
- **Color-coded morpheme cards:** Students can use one color for prefixes, another for suffixes. As new base words are introduced, have students create corresponding white cards to use in conjunction with their affix cards.

Here is another idea to teach morphology. It is called "Flip-A-Chip" (Mountain, 2002). For this activity, the teacher (or a student) writes syllables or other word parts on each side of four poker (or other plastic) chips. For example, the chips might read, "pro," "re," "duce," and "voke." When the student flips the chips, he or she reads the word parts and says the complete word ("revoke" or "reduce"). The author followed up this activity by having the students fill in the blanks in a paragraph with the words they had created with the chips. The author reported that the students loved playing this "game" and improved their vocabulary skills as well.

Roots to Words (see the Tap to Learn website) is an app that helps children identify word roots and their meaning. The words are organized in categories (e.g., numbers, people, shapes). When the user taps on a category, the meaning of the root (morpheme) appears at the top of the screen (e.g., *tri = three*). This is followed by sample words that include the root (e.g., _____angle) and the definition.

Syntax. Eisenberg (2013) identified several evidence-based practices for teaching syntactic skills based on previous research. These included the following:

- **Explicit instruction:** Drill and practice on specific skills.
- **Imitation:** Presenting the child with sentences in the correct form and asking the child to repeat the sentence.
- **Partial imitation:** Presenting a model from one source (such as a picture) and then asking the child to describe a similar picture.
- **Modeling:** The child listens to a set of models while looking at the pictures before being asked to talk about the same set of pictures.
- **Corrected practice:** Prompting the child with a stimulus such as a picture or a sentence fragment; for example (showing a picture of a horse and rider), "Look at the girl. What do you think she is going to do?" If the child makes a grammatical error, the instructor models the correct form and asks the child to repeat it.

Here are some additional suggestions to directly teach syntactic skills:

- **Play the "WH" Twenty Questions game:** The teacher shows the group a bag containing an object. The students must guess what the question is by using "wh" questions (e.g., what, where, who, why).
- **Use a "Mad Libs"–type activity:** Have students dictate (or write, depending on the developmental level of the class) a story. Then the teacher (or a student) can blank out a class of words (for example, all of the nouns). Meanwhile, the students are generating a list of nouns that can be placed in the blanks in the order in which they were listed.

Some additional, web-based games for building sentence skills can be found at the Cookie.com website.



Watch this video of a speech-language specialist working with a child on identifying and using adjectives. How does the specialist help the student apply her knowledge of parts of speech?

Many apps have been developed to teach grammar/syntax skills. Here are two examples:

Sentence Builder	Enables users to drag and drop words from a given sentence into their correct order, building grammar and comprehension skills.
Preposition Builder	Helps elementary-aged children learn the correct use of prepositions and learn how prepositions can change the meaning of a sentence.

Semantics. Several methods for improving the vocabulary knowledge of students with vocabulary-learning difficulties have been developed, including mnemonic strategy instruction (such as the keyword method; Terrill, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 2004) and semantic mapping (Harris, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2011).

The keyword method uses a three-step process to aid the learner in vocabulary:

Step 1: The target word (e.g., *forte*) is recoded into a word that the student already knows that is acoustically similar word to the target (e.g., keyword = *fort*).

Step 2: An interactive picture is created that contains an action related to the keyword to illustrate the meaning of the target word (e.g., there could be a picture of a fort with guns firing with the sentence, *The guns of the fort were loud.*).

Step 3: The student is prompted to state the meaning of the target word (*forte* means *loud*) using the keyword (*fort*), the action depicted, and the description.

The word mapping strategy used by Harris and colleagues (2011) includes four steps:

Step 1: Break words into their morphemic parts (prefix, suffix, root).

Step 2: Attach meaning to each word part.

Step 3: Make a prediction about the meaning of the unknown word based on the meaning of the parts.

Step 4: Check the dictionary for the definition.

There are also many apps that are available to teach vocabulary and categorization skills to students across different age ranges. Here are two examples:

Category TherAppy	Teaches categorization skills using words and/or pictures
Shape Puzzle	Jigsaw puzzle word-learning game for children

Pragmatics. All students need to have effective communication skills in order to interact with their peers, work in groups, participate in classroom interaction, and negotiate and resolve conflicts with peers. Teachers and other educators can help children develop better skills in communicative interaction, but research has found that they rarely intervene, and when they do, their responses may reduce rather than increase interaction. For example, teachers were reported to primarily use directives (e.g., "You and Michael play together") rather than using less directive statements that would help the children learn on their own ("Teresa can help you tie your shoe") (Kempel, David, & Hysmith, 1997).

Goldstein, Schneider, and Thiemann (2007) identified three methods for teaching pragmatic language skills that have been demonstrated to be effective for both students with and without disabilities. The three methods were as follows:

1. **Peer-mediated methods:** This approach uses peers to engage children who are having difficulty with social communication in communicative interactions. An essential aspect of peer-mediated methods involves teaching the peer how to effectively engage

their partner in conversation. One version of a peer-mediated method is called "Stay-Play-Talk" (Goldstein, English, Shafer, & Kaczmarek, 1997). Students were encouraged to *stay* with their partners during classroom activities such as snack time, *play* with them as appropriate, and *talk* with them during play.

2. **Sociodramatic script method:** Often called "social scripts," in this approach, students are pretaught language for specific situations. This can involve conversation starters, responses, and ideas to connect conversations or change the topic. For example, for a trip to a fast-food restaurant, children might be provided with a script that includes how to request food items. The script might be accompanied by pictures that illustrate some of the items.
3. **Text and graphic cueing:** The best-known application of this method is social stories. Originally developed by Carol Gray, social stories provide a narrative description of a situation that includes four types of sentences:
   - Descriptive: Tells where situations occur, who is involved, what they are doing, and why. Example: "At recess, there are many children playing with the ball."
   - Perspective: Describes the reactions and feelings of the student and of other people. Example: "When I take the ball without asking, it makes the other children angry."
   - Directive: Tells student what to do. Example: "When I want to play with the ball, I will ask the other children first."
   - Control: After the social story is read, the student writes sentences to help him or her remember the information from the social story (often considered optional). Example: The student may respond, "It can make other children angry if I take the ball without asking."

In addition, there are many apps that have been developed for teaching social-communicative skills. Between the Lines (Hamaguchi Apps) is designed for older elementary school students and up, who would benefit from practice interpreting vocal intonation, facial expressions, perspective-taking, body language, and idiomatic or slang expressions. Conversation Builder (Mobile Education Store) was designed to help elementary-age children learn how to have multiexchange conversations with their peers in a variety of social settings.



This video provides an introduction to the Conversation Builder app. How can the teacher customize conversations with this app?
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJw03l_mXec



Check Your Understanding 13.2

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

Summary

In this chapter, we described techniques that can be used by teachers to enhance the language and communication of their students in the regular or special education classroom. We began with methods that could be applied in any classroom for all students (tier 1). Then, we focused on methods that could be most useful in specific types of classrooms. Finally, we explored methods that could be used to teach specific language skills either to a whole class or to specific students who need targeted instruction (tier 2).