

Oral Language Development

Research has consistently shown that a child's oral language development is one of the strongest predictors of future academic success—often more so than early reading or writing skills. With this in mind, we place a strong emphasis on fostering language development in every area of our school environment.

A common misconception in our society is that because young children may not yet be fully verbal, we should simplify our language when interacting with them. This is especially evident in the way adults often speak to babies, using phrases like "ba-ba" instead of "bottle" or "woof-woof" instead of "dog." While this may seem intuitive, it actually limits children's exposure to the rich and complex language they need to develop.

Children under the age of seven have an exceptional ability to absorb all aspects of language—vocabulary, grammar, and syntax—effortlessly. Therefore, it's essential to provide them with clear, accurate, and rich language experiences from the very beginning. For non-verbal children, this means narrating your actions and describing their environment throughout the day. As your child's language skills grow, it's equally important to engage them in meaningful conversations—even if their responses are still developing. For older children, we should continue to expose them to a progressively richer vocabulary.

Tips for Supporting Oral Language Development at Home:

- **Speak directly to your child** in clear, complete sentences, even if they are not yet fully verbal.
- **Encourage turn-taking** in conversations. Listening to and acknowledging their responses, even if they're not fully clear, helps them learn the rhythms of communication.
- **Minimize environmental noise** to help your child focus on conversations.
- **Describe your child's daily experiences**—what you're doing, what they're seeing, and what's happening around them. This helps them build an understanding of the world and the language used to describe it.

Books, Poetry, and Songs: Powerful Tools for Language Growth

Reading aloud to children is one of the most important ways to introduce them to new vocabulary and concepts not typically found in everyday conversation. Not all books are created equal, however. Look for books that include **advanced vocabulary** and stories grounded in reality. These are more beneficial than books that rely solely on simplistic language or fantasy.

For early readers, **read-alouds** remain especially important. While their independent reading material may be limited in vocabulary, hearing books with more sophisticated language helps them expand their understanding. Children also thrive on **repetition**—so, if you find yourself reading the same book over and over again, remember that repetition helps solidify language skills.

Introducing **poetry** early in a child's development also enhances their language experience. Poetry exposes them to the rhythm and emotional power of language. Older children particularly enjoy the challenge of deciphering the deeper meanings of poems. Here's a poem from one of our favorite children's books, *When Green Becomes Tomatoes* by Julie Fogliano:

“enough already”
i whispered
to the clouds
(just loud enough
for the sun to overhear
but not enough to wake the rain)
“the strawberries are furious
and i think i just heard
even the roses sigh”

Singing songs is another excellent way to nurture language development. Through rhyming and repetition, children strengthen their **phonological awareness** (the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words), while also expanding their vocabulary.

In Summary

Oral language development is a foundational skill that supports all areas of learning. By providing children with a rich language environment—through direct communication, reading, poetry, and songs—we are helping them build the vocabulary, comprehension, and social skills they need for academic success. The more language-rich experiences we can offer, the better prepared they will be for the future.