



Communication and Language in Early Years

About the AUTHOR

Fiona has taught Early Years and Key Stage 1 in London, Singapore and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. She is now the Deputy Head Teacher at Cookham Nursery School, which is one of the three Federated Maintained Nursery Schools in the Borough.



‘Every early education setting should prioritise communication and language. The quantity and quality of interactions matter.’

Ofsted Best Start in Life, October 2024

Below are listed three great approaches for supporting communication and language development, researched by the Education Endowment Foundation as useful reminders of how we develop our children’s communication skills. A longer detailed version can be found [here](#).

1. Teaching and modelling vocabulary

This is the intentional use of specific words to build a child’s vocabulary and to encourage them to use words in the right context. Vocabulary instruction that explicitly draws pupils’ attention to words, their meanings and their features is a very effective strategy. Shared book reading is a great way to implement this.

Other strategies include -

- ★ Name and label things that children are using, looking at, playing with.
- ★ Show and explain things in simple terms – use a running commentary about what a child is doing e.g “you are stirring the pan with the big wooden spoon! You are pouring the soup into the bowls. Baby Bear will love that soup!”
 - ★ Repeat words regularly.
 - ★ Reinforce important words by emphasising them in the sentence.
 - ★ Extend children’s comments by adding one or two words to what they said.
 - ★ Comment on what a child has said to show you have listened.

Click [Here](#) for a useful video showing a practitioner teaching & modelling vocabulary to a group of 2 – 4 year olds.



2. Interactive Reading

When children actively engage with a story, they become familiar with it and talk more about the book. Their participation enhances their oral language skills. For instance, discussing characters, predicting plot developments, or sharing their favourite parts of the narrative supports a deeper understanding.

This active engagement encourages critical thinking and helps children connect the themes of the story to their own experiences. By participating in storytelling activities, children also learn new vocabulary, sentence structures, and gain confidence in expressing their thoughts and opinions. Overall, these interactions lay a strong foundation for future reading comprehension and communication skills.

The EEF videos [Fish Eyes](#) and [Don't wake the Bear](#) show how stories can be shared.

3. Teaching through Collaborative Talk

By integrating language purposefully into interactions and encouraging children to partake in engaging and challenging activities, educators provide opportunities for children to hear, apply, and experiment with language. Collaborative talk helps children share ideas, justify their reasoning, and build upon each other's contributions.

Problem-solving scenarios can be particularly effective in promoting discussion, as they naturally require explanation, negotiation, and teamwork. Through consistent and meaningful exchanges, practitioners can re-cap previous learning, explain new concepts, demonstrate techniques, pose suggestions, ask questions, make connections between ideas, evaluate processes, and encourage children to recall past events. These dynamic conversations lay the groundwork for deeper understanding and meaningful language development.





Communication and Language Webinars from Ofsted

Ofsted has published a series of short [webinars](#) that include the content from their curriculum roadshows on communication and language.

The webinars explain why this area of learning is so important, what a good curriculum should look like to support development of communication and language, and the ways that children make progress through knowing and remembering more.

Reflective Questions:

'What is one new insight/ strategy about supporting early communication that I learned and how can I apply it in my setting tomorrow?'



'Thinking about a specific child in my group, what specific gaps do they have in their speech, language and communication and what might be my next steps to support them?'

Resources and Further Reading:

- Department for Education (2024) Best start in life: a research review for early years from Ofsted [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years>
- <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/early-years-evidence-store/communication-and-language>
- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/blog/the-power-of-play-to-boost-early-language/>
- <https://literacytrust.org.uk/programmes/early-words-together/early-words-together-two/fun-videos-support-your-young-childs-language/>
- Article by Professor Charles Hulme about research into the word gap for disadvantaged children <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/learning-and-development/view/oral-language>

Feedback:

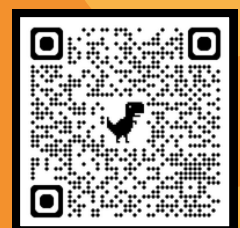


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For more information on Communication and Language please access [The Thames Valley and South Central Early Years Stronger Practice Hub](#) or email admin@tveysph.org for more details and resources.

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