



Preparing for Literacy



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Language acquisition is complex and needs to be interactive

The noticeable increase in children starting nursery with speech and language concerns continues to grow. When parents come to look around Highfield Nursery School, looking for their child's first introduction to education, speech and language concerns are never far from the conversation. Parents often are the first to notice concerns, but often don't know what to do or how to help their child.

The 'Preparing for Literacy' guidance is clear and has helped to focus staff training within the nursery school. The three strands of the guidance cover communication and language, early reading and early writing.

During staff training, the team at Highfield discussed whether it is the number of words children hear (quantity) or the kinds of words we use and interactions we have with children (quality) that make the biggest difference to their language development?

We know children who hear lots of vocabulary from their parents have faster vocabulary development, but now evidence increasingly suggests that quality may be more important than quantity.

Language acquisition is complex and needs to be interactive, but the more we talk to children about the things that interest them and that we alter the complexity to their developmental level, the more successful the language development. When advising parents, this can often mean talking to children about the day to day activities and making connections by connecting new words to meaningful contexts. I remember having a conversation with my then, 2-year-old daughter about the difference between honey bees and bumblebees in the garden one sunny afternoon. This conversation was led by her focus of interest, was in a meaningful context and broadened her understanding of the subject – evidenced by the depth and repeated return to her interest in bees over the coming months and years.

As many as 60% of children have a language delay or language difficulties

Studies suggest that between 5 and 8% of children in England and Wales are likely to have language difficulties. In areas of disadvantage, this can double. The clear evidence of the 30-million-word gap in children from disadvantaged backgrounds (compared to children from professional families) by the age of 5 years old needs to be addressed.

As many as 60% of children have a language delay or language difficulties when starting nursery school, so this clearly needs to be the focus for all staff within the nursery.

The EYFS statutory educational programme says that

'...The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial... Through conversation, story-telling and role play, where children share their ideas with support and modelling from their teacher, and sensitive questioning that invites them to elaborate, children become comfortable using a rich range of vocabulary and language structures.'

The ShREC approach

The ShREC approach is a clear way to support practitioners to build meaningful, back and forth conversations with children, developing both the quantity of language the children are exposed to AND the quality of the conversation. The practitioner is actively listening to the child, responding but also expanding the conversation and exposing the child to an interesting range of vocabulary. By showing an interest in the child and what is being said during both child-initiated and adult-led activities, the practitioner can develop a broader, richer vocabulary of developing complexity.

By ensuring the team have access to high quality, evidence-based research during our staff meetings and ensuring everyone understands the part they play in the importance of their daily conversations with children, of showing an interest in their ideas, small world play, we are all making a dent in the 30-million-word gap and preparing children for their next stage in education.

If you would like to find out more about how to support communication and language in your setting, please sign up to join our webinar on Wednesday 7th June by following this link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/UsN04MSy3s>
Or using this QR code

HIGH QUALITY INTERACTIONS IN THE EARLY YEARS
The 'ShREC' approach

The aim of the ShREC approach is to provide early years professionals with a simple, memorable set of specific evidence informed strategies that can be embedded into everyday practice.

"When done well, high quality interactions often look effortless but they are not easy to do well."
EYF Guidance Report, Preparing for Literacy

Sh
Share attention
Be at the child's level. Pay attention to what they are focused on.

R
Respond
Follow the child's lead. Respond to their non-verbal and verbal communications. You could make a brief comment on what they can see, hear or feel.

E
Expand
Repeat what the child says and build on it by adding more words to form a new sentence.

C
Conversation
Have extended back and forth interactions. Give children time to listen, process and reply.

This resource supports the 'Preparing for Literacy' guidance report

Preparing for Literacy | EEF (educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk)

East of England Early Years SPH -
Early Communication webinar

