

1

Early Language Development

Learning objectives

This first chapter focuses on why language is so crucial in young children's development. Effective language use gives babies and children power to have a say in what they want and need. To encourage their language development, early years practitioners need to optimise children's speaking and listening opportunities through everyday conversation and practical activities. Modelling language through meaningful communication is the key. This chapter offers knowledge and understanding of how, why and what to promote for optimum language learning situations and begins to look at the following three vital questions:



- > Why is language crucial to young children's development?
- > Why is it important to build relationship with the parents?
- > Why is knowledge important and how and why is it important to analyse knowledge?

Language is crucial to young children's development; it is the essential key for learning, for communicating and building relationships with others as well as for enabling children to make sense of the world around them. Your role in developing and encouraging language acquisition in children is therefore of the utmost importance. However, it is not solely the province of those working with young children, as it is also a concern of parents, carers, families and even policymakers. There is a need for practitioners to disseminate knowledge and good practice to these stakeholders. Those educating young children should be well qualified, but also knowledgeable and well informed about their role. The ability to reflect on and evaluate your professional role and its practical application when working with young children is fundamental. You need to develop and establish an occupational knowledge base that accounts for both professional and practical knowledge. Knowledge and articulation about how young children acquire language and develop into competent thinkers and language users is key to good practice.

Key Elements in Effective Practice

The Key Elements in Effective Practice (KEEP) underpin the professional standards for early years practitioners. These competencies are acquired through a combination of skill and knowledge gained through education, training and practical experience. Practitioners need to develop, demonstrate and continuously improve their:

- Relationships with both children and adults
- Understanding of the individual and diverse ways that children learn and develop
- Knowledge and understanding in order to actively support and extend children's learning in and across all areas and aspects of learning and development
- Practice in meeting all children's needs, learning styles and interests
- Work with parents, carers and the wider community
- Work with other professionals within and beyond the setting

These key elements will permeate this book through concentrating on communication, language and literacy.

An exciting journey

Young children's early years education should be a quality experience for all, be it in a crèche, playgroup, children's centre, nursery or reception class in a school, special educational needs (SEN) setting or with a childminder. The provision of a unified curriculum and equity of experience aims to meet the needs of parents and children in whichever setting they choose. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) brings together the Birth to Three Matters framework, the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (CGFS) and the National Standards for under-8s Day Care and Childminding in a 'single quality framework' for children from birth to the end of the school Reception year (DfES, 2007a). Each child and family are seen as unique, with differing needs and concerns. These are identified in the four key themes: A Unique Child; Empowering Relationships; Enabling Environments; Holistic Learning and Developments. The themes are linked to a key principle, each of which has four commitments. Children's development is presented through six phases. These overlap and acknowledge that there can be big differences between the development of children of similar ages (DfES, 2007a). *Practitioners plan to enable children to achieve the statutory early learning goals (ELGs) in six areas of learning by the end of the reception year:*

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication, language and literacy
- Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development

Language and communication contributes to all six areas and are key to learning and understanding. The EYFS stresses the importance of providing opportunities for children to communicate thoughts, ideas and feelings, and build up relationships with practitioners

and each other. It also affirms the importance of promoting positive relationships with parents and families. Key workers have an important role in establishing these and ensuring children feel safe, confident and independent. Promoting anti-discriminatory practice is also crucial and practitioners must meet children's needs in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion, home language, family background, special educational needs, disability, gender and ability. We will discuss these issues further in later chapters.

Children learn most effectively through being involved in rich experiences and practical activities promoted through play. Adults need to join in this play, both talking with and listening to the children, taking into account their interests and previous experiences. Children and their families should be involved in these processes. Children need confidence and opportunity to utilise their abilities in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes. As a practitioner you can record observations of children's play, learning and language achievements to determine if your provision is high-quality.

How do young children acquire their language? Studying and promoting young children's language development can be an exciting journey. Parents often amuse friends and family by relaying what their children say, yet how do children learn to make these amusing comments, how do they learn to communicate?

There have been several theories about how young children acquire language, but no one perspective on language acquisition tells the whole story. Why not read further about these perspectives in Appendix 1? Each emphasises one aspect or another and there is still a great deal to learn about how it happens and why. We feel the following ideas are the most important for practitioners. Young children acquire language through significant others by interaction in their immediate environment, through responding to sounds, sentences and experiences expressed by their parents, family and other carers. They begin by absorbing, listening and then imitating and practising. Their responses are reinforced by these significant others and patterns begin to emerge, even for the babies, as they try so hard to make sense of what is happening around them. Gradually they learn to reproduce sounds and words and establish an understanding of how language works, the structure and grammatical sense of putting these sounds and words together. It is generally held that children have an inbuilt language acquisition device (LAD) and/or a language acquisition support system (LASS) that enables this to occur.

Given minimum exposure to language, every child will acquire a sophisticated symbol system to serve its communicative needs. They gain an understanding about their own particular language and culture, but also knowledge and comprehension of the world around them. Some children will acquire more than one language, sometimes two or three at the same time, sometimes one after another. And among children as a whole, there will be an infinite variety of patterns of language use. Each new experience, whether as children (or adults) extends language skills in some way. Each new creation – a new word, a new way of expressing something, extends the system for the generations that follow. In turn, old ways are replaced with new and so it goes on *ad infinitum*. Such is the power that language offers to children, and such is the power they have over it.

Throughout the book you will glimpse scenarios and case study examples from young children growing up in a variety of linguistic and socio-cultural experiences, in worlds where their first language may not be the national language, in families that are promoting

their heritage language, as well as the host country's language, or where signing may be the first or additional language. Languages such as Punjabi, Hindi, Polish, Slovakian, French and Welsh will be mentioned, as well as, of course, English, the main focus of this book. So let us first consider how babies communicate.

Babies' communication

Many parents start communicating with their unborn child in the antenatal stage to cue their baby into their voices and the world around them. Babies cry to attract attention – in this way they communicate with the adults around them to get what they need. They have different cries for different purposes and parents soon get to know which cry means 'I'm hungry', 'I'm in pain', 'I'm damp' or, 'Come and play with me now!' Adults respond by meeting these needs and by talking to their baby. So from the very moment they are born children are introduced to the language of their parents. They reciprocate through making eye contact, by gestures, sounds and gurglings and in so doing soon begin to take part in conversations and so become communicators.

Cara was in her car seat at 6 weeks old when I first met her. I chatted to her using sentences such as 'Who's very beautiful then?', 'Aren't you a good girl?', 'Where are you going now?', 'Are you going out in the car with mummy?' As I type these sentences, I think I sound fairly ridiculous – after all what do I expect from a six-week-old baby – full sentences and answers to these questions – a proper conversation? In fact that is just what I did get – well I got 'ooos' and 'aaas'. Cara was already making vowel sounds and she was turn taking with me – until she got tired, closed her eyes and went to sleep, effectively dismissing me.

When adults hold conversations we take it in turns to speak. Through watching, listening and participating, young children subconsciously learn the conventions of turn taking. Here Cara is already cueing into this. As she gets older she will intuitively realise that patterns of intonation, pitch, speed and volume also play a part in turn taking, as do body language and gestures. She will realise that certain phrases also signal whose turn it is to speak.

Adults scaffold their baby's language by interpreting what they might say or need. Throughout these early years adults will support the baby's attempts at sounds and words, through prompting and repeating. They model appropriate language, providing words and extending the baby's contributions, offering them back in enhanced full sentences. Babies and young children listen avidly – collecting sounds and trialling these themselves.

As they get older babies gain more control over the muscles in their mouths, tongue, throats, lips and pharynx. They begin with vowel sounds, moving to babbling, gurgling and imitating language. The first words are bilabial sounds – 'mmmmm', 'dadadada', 'papapapapa'. It is therefore no surprise that many names for parents are similar in different languages – 'mummy', 'mama', 'maman', 'amma', and 'daddy', 'papa', 'abba'. Babies

cue into the sounds of their heritage language or languages of their parents from a very early age. Babies enjoy producing sounds. They will make long continuous repetitions of the same or similar sounds as they babble and gurgle – ‘A goi goi goi goi agoi goi goy!’ Fortunately babies don’t get tired of experimenting and they work extremely hard at their language acquisition.

When communicating and talking to their babies and young children parents will accommodate their language use to promote attentive listening, understanding and then reproduction of sounds, words, then sentences. Phonetics is the science of speech sounds. Sounds are produced or articulated through the passage of air coming from the lungs via the larynx into the mouth and the movement and positioning of the lips, the tongue, the teeth, and the soft and hard palate. Lips work together to make a wide range of speech sounds. The tongue is very flexible – it adopts many different shapes and positions, including three-dimensional ones. Consonants are made by closing the vocal tract whilst the vowels occur by air escaping unimpeded on the way through the mouth.

Phonology is the study of the sound system, which is the way in which sound is used to express meaning and an analysis of the variations that arise. Sometimes it can be difficult to tell what young children are saying. Even when their vocabulary and syntax are in place, precise pronunciation may take longer and adults have to interpret what is being said and the meanings that are intended. Parents and adults who spend most time with a child will be able to do this more effectively than someone who sees the child intermittently. It is important not to patronise young children. An example of this is:

ADULT: What’s your favourite car?

CHILD: A werrarri. [Meaning Ferrari]

ADULT: A werrarri?

CHILD: [*irritated*] No! A werrarri!

Young children’s early language development is exciting, interesting and can be amusing. What children say offers a window into their thinking. Figure 1.1 offers some early pronunciations from Miranda, aged 2 years and 6 months, which demonstrate some of the linguistic processes related to her pronunciation.

Motherese is the adaptation of simplified language by parents in order to communicate with their children. However, parents’ language is not absolutely identical in the sense that the father’s speech tends to be more direct and use a wider range of vocabulary than the mother’s. It may be more correct to use the term parentese, and it can be applicable to any adult carer, relative or friend. Indeed, older children may also do this when talking to younger children. They will perhaps use ‘baby talk’ or ‘talk down’ to them by using such vocabulary as ‘burny’ for hot or ‘puddycat’ for cat. Animal sounds are also favourites for being simplified; hence the phrases ‘gee gee’ and ‘bow wow’.

Eventually young children will start pointing to things around them and they are actually requesting the adult to supply the name of the object or person. They also will add intonation to help communicate to the adult what they need. As young children begin to ‘soak’ up the words, it is important to provide them with a rich language environment. As they progress from one word to two words, they add an operator to the name of the object or person, saying ‘baby gone’, ‘look doggy’, ‘hot daddy’. When young children

What was said	What was meant	Linguistic processes
Ah-dea	Oh dear	Learning pronunciation
Pollypop Wimmin pool	Lollipop Swimming pool	Common mispronunciations
Where Gackie gone? Where Affril gone?	Where have Jackie and Avril gone?	Difficult to pronounce some people's names
'brella	Umbrella	Not pronouncing the beginning of words
Daddy quashing me!	When hugging	'sq' is hard to pronounce
Side and seek; bide and keep; hide and keep	Sometimes hard to tell what she's saying. Adults have to interpret	Pronunciation developing with practice.

Figure 1.1 Examples of Miranda's pronunciation

omit words and talk in short phrases, it is known as telegraphese. Children will also begin to apply the rules of tenses as they gradually acquire them, which is why 'ed' is often added onto irregular verbs. The process of putting the words together to make meaningful sentences is known as syntactic learning, that is, learning to use grammatical rules. Figure 1.2 shows are some examples of Miranda's grammar use.

What was said	What was meant	Linguistic processes
Mine broken now Daddy got cup Tent's dark. Lantern on I back this on you	My biscuit is broken now Daddy has got my cup The tent is dark. Put the light on I am putting this hat back on your head	Telegraphese. Knowing the context helps the listener's understanding
My do it	I want to do it	Use of my often comes before use of 'I'
Kirsty tighted me	Fastening into car seat	Generalisation of past tense 'ed'
Me on bus; I wanna bus; Go bus dere; going now. I want blue one. I want to go on bus now	Egocentric, self-maintaining language to get what she wants, to go on the bus	See how the structure and language improves in each phrase
My's porridge	That's my porridge	Applying possession
Make ice cream for you I'm making ice cream for you	I am making ice cream for you	Corrects herself and uses a complete sentence with an auxiliary verb

Figure 1.2 Examples of Miranda's grammar

What was said	What was meant	Linguistic processes
Smack the door/naughty door Baby bit me It's got me	When she bumped into a door When she trod on her doll – it was the doll's fault When her foot got entangled	Personification endowing objects with life Egocentrism: something else's fault
Small Big Silver	Baby Daddy White	Underextension
Buses and trains All flies Dark colours	Are interchangeable Are spiders Are all black	Overgeneralisations
Not shirt. It top	Corrected Daddy when he talked about his top as a shirt, because shirts have to have buttons	Becoming very specific in her concepts
Dark in there	When she has sunglasses on	Literal understanding, making sense
Blue tea	Orange juice with a slice of lemon	Miranda's conceptualisation: creating meaning and making sense

Figure 1.3 Examples of Miranda's meaning making

Young children are not only acquiring vocabulary they are also learning about concepts and trying to make sense of the world. It often sounds as though they are getting things wrong, but listen carefully to see how children are interpreting what is going on around them. Underextension is the limiting of the meaning of the word to the child's own narrow worldview. For example 'car' may refer only to the 'family car' or slippers may only refer to 'daddy's slippers'. Overextension on the other hand is when a child is applying a wider meaning to the word than is usual in adult language, such as 'car' might refer to all road vehicles or 'cat' to all animals. This process of understanding concepts and putting vocabulary together to make sense and meaning is known as semantic learning. Some examples from Miranda are given in Figure 1.3.

Miranda's father had been concerned that she was slow to start speaking. However, at the age of 2 years and 8 months this little girl had become quite a conversationalist. She could sit at the dinner table all evening with six adults, holding conversations, alternating between talking to herself in monologues and demanding that the adults participate in role-play games. Her father feels that being surrounded and immersed in language makes a huge difference. At first it was hard for adults other than her father to understand her, but during the course of the next few months her pronunciation would become clearer, and her vocabulary and syntax would grow. She quickly developed into a competent language user.

There is a lot involved in this acquisition of language. Young children have to produce the sounds, learn the words and their meanings and put them together in a correct sentence structure. They also have to acquire the factors involved in social interaction; the social rules that affect the choices of language – the vocabulary; grammatical constructions; pronunciation; accent and dialect. This is known as the pragmatics of language use.

First attempts at language for all children go through the same phases of development. Gordon Wells constructed five stages of language development (see Figure 1.4), paying

Function What children are trying to do with their language	Meaning The states, events, relationships the children talk about	Structure The way in which language is put together: grammar	STAGE
Gain attention Direct attention to object or event To get something they want Make basic statements Make requests	Naming things Connecting objects and people: Mummy's car; There Nana; Ball gone Much meaning conveyed by intonation	Single words – look; more; there; want. These are called operators and convey whole of the meaning Name and operator: Look bird; Doggy gone; There Daddy	I
Asking questions – mainly where	Naming and classifying: constantly asking 'Wassat' Changing locations: people coming, going, getting up or down Attributes: hot; cold; big; small; Naughty doggy; It cold Mummy	Interrogative pronoun: Where book? 'A' and 'the' commence in front of nouns Basic sentences of noun and verb: Car gone; Baby drink Possession through the apostrophe begins: Jack's chair; Teddy's sweeties	II
Explosion of questions, often through intonation 'Play, Mummy?'	Talk about actions which change object acted upon: 'You dry hands' Use verbs like 'listen' and 'know' referring to events in past and sometimes in the future On-going actions: 'Me doing it'; 'Mark still in bed' Enquire state of actions such as if something is finished Talk about things changing	Sentence structure now: subject + verb + object + addition: 'You dry hands'; 'A man dig down there' Use of auxiliary verbs: 'I am going' Preposition + article + noun: 'in the cupboard'	III
Complex sentence use Make a range of requests Shall I do it? Can I have that? Make and ask for explanations. The 'why' question appears	Now conveys a wide range of complex meanings Use of abstract psychological verbs such as 'know'; expressing thinking and understanding Express meaning indirectly: 'Can I have?' replaces 'Give me' Expressing meaning appropriately in context	Can I have one? He doesn't want one? No longer need intonation to convey meaning. Now able to use auxiliary verbs: do; can; will References through sentence: 'I want the pen Grandad gave me'; 'I know you're there'	IV

Function What children are trying to do with their language	Meaning The states, events, relationships the children talk about	Structure The way in which language is put together: grammar	STAGE
Can now: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – give information – ask and answer varied questions – request directly and indirectly – suggest – offer – state and ask about own and other people's intentions, express feelings and attitudes 	Hypothetical and conditional statements: 'If you do that, I will . . .' Refer to past and future times specifically: 'after tea' Formulate conditions for something to happen: 'You've got to switch that on first' Talk about state of affairs Make estimations	Questions of what, when and what does it mean Invert subject and verb in 'When is she coming?' Can create complex sentences of several clauses Now greater flexibility in sentences; not just adding to length of sentence but can now structure meaning economically. More cohesive in their language use.	V

Figure 1.4 Five stages of language development

Source: Adapted from Wells (unpublished, 1986) and Language in the National Curriculum (unpublished, 1990)

attention to the function, meaning and structure of young children's early language acquisition. However he determined that it was important not to attach an age range to these stages. Children will progress through all these stages, but may have different rates of achievement according to their own personal development.

Children will undoubtedly understand more than they can express and demonstrate the meaning of in everyday language use. By the end of Stage V (5) a child's language is firmly in place with a vocabulary of several thousand words. It is evident that the opportunity to hear and use language for a wide range of purposes, audiences and contexts directly affects the rate and expertise of children's future language development.

The rest of this chapter focuses attention on key features of the process of language development by using the example of one particular child, Miranda. This is to demonstrate language development in action and promote both practical and professional knowledge and understanding. It provides a method for *what to promote*, *what to observe* and *how to record*.



A year's development at nursery – Miranda, age 2 years 6 months

This case study aims to demonstrate three things:

- One young child's language in the first three of her early years
- How to relate her language and experiences to the EYFS
- How to analyse these experiences and target future opportunities for development

Miranda started Robin House nursery in November 2004 when she was 10 months 3 weeks old. The nursery's first profile of Miranda, compiled through contributions from her mother, is shown in Figure 1.5.

Miranda Lawrence

Prior to starting nursery, Miranda came for visits with mum, which went well. She can sometimes get a little upset when parted from her parents but can easily be distracted and settled. Miranda is now feeling confident enough to go off by herself and explore the room, but likes to have an adult close by for reassurance and cuddles.

Miranda enjoys messy activities. She joined in with the floor painting session and she will play in the sand for long periods. Miranda is a lovely little girl who likes lots of cuddles.

I would like to tell you about my routine:

I tend to have a nap after lunchtime although I am difficult to get to sleep. I play with my toys best during the morning. In the afternoon I like more company. I like to look at books and have cuddles during this time and also play with my dolly.

Things that comfort me:

Music. Someone singing 'Somewhere over the rainbow' or the 'Bare Necessities' from The Jungle Book.

Looking out of windows and having things pointed out.

Looking at microwaves distracts me.

Source: DFES (2007)

Miranda's key worker undertook regular recorded observations of her achievements. A selection of these are outlined in the Figures 1.7 and 1.8:

- First year at nursery: themes and commitments
- Second year at nursery: working towards communication, language and literacy goals

Although her development was originally analysed according to the Birth to Three Matters curriculum, it is presented here with regard to the EYFS. This is done to demonstrate how you can undertake analysis with reference to the new curriculum. There are four themes within the Early Years Foundation Stage and how each of these incorporates the four commitments is shown in Figure 1.6.

The examples given in this case have been selected from a wealth of the nursery's observations. The focus is on communication and language development and it will be seen that there are strong connections across each of the four themes in relation to language. In order for observations to be useful, they need not only to be a record of achievement, but also to be analysed to ensure there is a holistic record of a child's development. It is also important to look for areas that need to be encouraged. Observations should be undertaken to record what a child is achieving in every day activities and when something interesting happens.

The following observations track Miranda during her first years at nursery from the age of 11 months to 2 years 6 months. In the Figure 1.7 her development can be seen through showing:

Themes	Commitments			
A Unique Child	Child Development	Inclusive Practice	Keeping Safe	Health and Well-Being
Positive Relationships	Respecting Each Other	Parents as Partners	Supporting Learning	Key Person
Enabling Environments	Observation, Assessment and Planning	Supporting Every Child	The Learning Environment	The Wider Context
Learning and Development	Play and Exploration	Active Learning	Creativity and Critical Thinking	Areas of Learning and Development

Figure 1.6: The four themes within the Early Years Foundation Stage

Source: DfES (2007)

- Aspects from the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Observation of the actual event, experience or activity
- Analysis of what is happening

The observations, analysis and targets demonstrate the importance of noting children's accomplishments and development to ensure they gain a depth and breadth of learning experiences. Whilst these are focused on the themes and commitments in the EYFS, the interrelationship to communication, language and literacy is evident within them all. The majority of observations demonstrate aspects of Miranda's interaction with others as she forms more social and confident relationships. In her second year she uses more verbal language to communicate with her peers and adults. Pay particular attention to these aspects as you look at Miranda's second year at nursery (Figure 1.8) and see if you can determine how they relate to communication, language and literacy.



Photo record with empathy doll: role-playing mum

Miranda's first year at nursery

Theme	Observation	Analysis
A Unique Child Child Development	Miranda spots a cat on the windowsill, points to it and exclaims, 'Cat'.	Using one word level language to convey simple meanings.
A Unique Child Inclusive Practice	Miranda is sitting on the settee looking at books.	Early reading, handling and enjoying books.
A Unique Child Keeping Safe	Miranda is playing with a doll's house when another child comes to take her doll. Miranda says, 'Mine'.	Demonstrating self-awareness, able to communicate feelings. Learning about boundaries and when to say 'No'.
A Unique Child Health and Well-Being	Miranda cuddles another child, who is upset.	Awareness of the needs of others. Shows empathy to others
Positive Relationships Respecting Each Other	Miranda is playing with a musical toy, which takes to play with another child.	Confident with her peers. Acknowledging others.
Positive Relationships Parents as Partners	Miranda chats and plays with an adult as they sing 'Row, row, row your boat'.	Playing with an adult, talking and communicating.
Positive Relationships Supporting Learning	Miranda smiles and laughs with delight while singing. The other children applaud her.	Confident as part of the group and when singing the core songs.
Positive Relationships Key Person	Miranda looks at 'Five Little Ducks' book with an adult. She points to a picture saying 'Duck' and 'Quack'.	Using words in context, associating pictures, meaning and onomatopoeia.
Enabling Environments Observation, Assessment and Planning	Miranda plays with cornflour; watching, catching and exploring its texture and smell.	Responding with her senses. Provide further and varied multisensory experiences.
Enabling Environments Supporting Every Child	Miranda joins in pretend play at the hospital.	Using gestures and actions. Developing relationships.
Enabling Environments The Learning Environment	Miranda climbs into the sand and uses her whole body to explore it.	Exploring the environment confidently.
Enabling Environments The Wider Context	Miranda takes care of the empathy doll, changing her pants on a mat.	Re-enacting familiar scenes, practising role-play situations and role-playing mum.

Theme	Observation	Analysis
Learning and Development Play and Exploration	Miranda takes clothes out of the washing machine. Puts a pan of play-dough in saying, 'Its hot, hot!'	Demonstrating awareness of potential danger. Being imaginative with materials and enacting familiar activities.
Learning and Development Active Learning	Miranda walks over the bridge unaided, climbs onto the step, then back down the steps backwards.	Exploring the outdoors with confidences, exercising excellent gross motor skills.
Learning and Development Creativity and Critical Thinking	Miranda squirts paint onto paper. Puts her hands in and makes hand print designs.	Confident using materials. Expresses creativity and shows initiative in her actions.
Learning and Development Areas of Learning and Development	Miranda soothes a crying child, stroking his hair and back, then putting her finger to her lips and saying, 'Shhh!'	Comforting another child, demonstrating care and affection. Acting responsibly.

Figure 1.7: How to analyse a child's communication and language: Model A

Figure 1.8 shows:

- Communication, language and literacy objectives
- Observation of what is happening
- Analysis of what it shows
- Future aspects for development

Miranda's second year at nursery

Communication, language and literacy: Objectives	Observation: What is happening?	What this shows	What could be done next?
Make up songs, rhymes and poems	Miranda asked to play with the drums during music time.	Communicating with adults. Experiencing music and rhythm.	Opportunities to express personal preferences.
Show an understanding of the elements of stories Know that print carries meaning	Miranda and Jaydee share the crib in the home corner and read together.	Showing self-assurance. Sharing and enjoying books and stories.	Develop book-handling skills.
Enjoy listening to and using spoken language in play.	Miranda pedals around a child shouting 'passing you'.	Learning to consider others.	Encourage communication about actions.

Communication, language and literacy: Objectives	Observation: What is happening?	What this shows	What could be done next?
Listen with enjoyment, and respond to stories, songs and other music, rhymes and poems	Miranda joins in as Lee plays music and sings along to the CD.	Expressing herself through song, gesture and movement.	Provide lots of music experiences.
Speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control and show awareness of the listener	As a parent left Miranda waved and said, 'Goodbye'.	Exhibiting the impulse to communicate with others.	More opportunities for interaction.
Sustain attentive listening, responding to what they have heard with relevant comments, questions or actions	Miranda completed a jigsaw, clapping at her achievement. She repeated the adult's, 'Well done, Miranda!'	Listening and responding to what others say, making meaningful responses.	Time for building communicative relationships.
Enjoy listening to and using spoken word and readily turn to it in their play	Miranda and Lee in the home corner pretending to drink from tins. 'Mine tea'.	Communicating and negotiating with others.	Promote time and opportunities for conversations.
Use talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking, ideas, feelings and events	Miranda saw someone wearing pink doodle shoes and correctly said 'same as Emily's'.	Being able to compare and classify objects.	Promote more times for finding out about others.
Interact with others, negotiating plans and activities and taking turns in conversation. Explore and experiment with sounds	Miranda moved the chairs into a row and enlisted the help of friends to go on 'choo choo train' with her.	Role-playing in groups. Moving objects to produce desired effect.	Offer materials for role-playing trains. Support onomatopoeia.
Extend their vocabulary, exploring the meanings and sounds of new words	Miranda made pancakes out of play-dough, tossing them in frying pan. 'Pancake fly'.	Making discoveries, developing competence, being resourceful.	Provide further opportunities for using imaginative language.
Attempt writing for different purposes	Miranda uses two brushes to make lines and patterns using the whole of the paper, concentrating hard and being careful.	Exploring and experimenting with colour and patterns, creating own marks and lines.	Provide signs and symbols to imitate.

Communication, language and literacy: Objectives	Observation: What is happening?	What this shows	What could be done next?
Use language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences	At teatime, Miranda feeds the empathy doll a cracker 'Teatime baby. Eat up.'	Developing caring skills. Links language to actions and role-play.	Promote new vocabulary.
Use a pencil and hold it effectively	Threads pasta to make a rakhi wristband, paints with a brush, draws pictures of family and builds a robot.	Developing motor skills, fine manipulation and hand-eye co-ordination.	Promote lots of manipulation experiences.
Speak clearly and audibly with confidence and control and show awareness of the listener	Miranda plays peek-a-boo with Nicko in sensory room giggling 'Your turn now!'	Seeking and experiencing closeness with others.	Allow opportunities for conversing and interacting.
Attempt writing for different purposes	Miranda joins Harry makes patterns in fork with play-dough: 'My's pattern good'.	Collaborative mark making.	Provide more mark making experiences.

Figure 1.8 How to analyse a child's communication and language: Model B

These observations have been condensed for ease of presentation as many more detailed accounts were recorded throughout Miranda's second year at nursery. This sample gives an idea of how to document achievements. The emphasis has been on her communication – on oral language development. Several of the literacy goals will need targeting in more detail in her subsequent years in the foundation stage. Miranda still has a long time to go before she has to achieve all the early learning goals at the end of her reception year. The tables illustrated in this case study offer you varied ways of recording accomplishments. You need to determine the most effective ways of observing, recording and analysing children's development and achievements, being aware of what to promote to create optimum language learning experiences.

At Miranda's nursery all observations, profiles, photographs, pictures and assessments are given to parents so that they have a full record of their child's life at nursery. This should be a two-way process and parents should have a role in contributing to these. Miranda's father is definitely very proud of his daughter and treasures these records.

The learning journey

So far we have demonstrated the observations and analysis of Miranda's language learning through short scenarios. There are other ways of recording young children's language learning through documenting their learning journey. North Yorkshire's EY services provide four stages of documenting children's learning:

- Describing how children learn
- Discussing what has been learnt
- Documenting the activities and learning
- Deciding what to do next

The emphasis is on dialogic talk about learning. They advocate looking at children's dispositions and motivation through recording the narrative, that is, telling a story of the context, relationships, concentration and persistence, using photographs and video to capture verbal and non-verbal communications. The focus is on the learning more than on the child's achievements, on what they are interested in and involving both the children themselves and their families and in this way; you will be able to plan for activities for children that will deepen their interest. It is also important to allow children to reflect on their own learning. Documenting learning with photographs will offer children the wherewithal for them to think and talk about what they are doing by engaging them in the narratives and dialogues. There are many further case studies and scenarios offered throughout the next chapters that will provide you with examples of how to celebrate each child's learning. They will also enable you to reflect on your own practice.

All children will be learning their first or additional language in the same way and will go through the same processes and phases irrespective of the targeted language. What is important to remember is though all follow similar patterns of development the age and rate at which they develop may differ. This can be influenced by different factors:

- Home environment and the time spent with carers who talk to children
- The number of language-rich experiences
- The learning of two languages simultaneously
- State of children's emotional well-being
- Intellectual development resulting from both environmental and genetic factors
- Physical health and whether children have any hearing, visual or speech impairments
- Premature birth, which may account for some language delay



Questions for reflection and discussion

- Think about your ability to reflect on and evaluate your professional role and its practical application when working with young children.
- How can you promote positive relationships with parents and families and inform them about their child's achievements?
- Think about recording observations of children's play focusing on their language achievements.
- Determine the most effective ways of observing, recording and analysing children and how to promote optimum language learning experiences.

Key points for practice

- Provide optimum experiences for young children's language development.
- Offer a language-rich environment.
- Model language through meaningful communication.
- Know how to support and promote effective development.
- Support and advise parents.
- Be aware of young children's family and cultural experiences.

Further Reading

Buckley, B. (2003) *The Children's Communication Skills – From Birth to Five Years*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Riley, J. (2006) *Language and Literacy 3–7*. London: PCP.

Sage, R. (2006) *Supporting Language and Communication: A Guide for School Support Staff*. London: PCP.

Useful websites

www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/EYFS/profile

www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/eyfs

www.earlylearningforums.co.uk

www.tactyc.org.uk

www.early-education.org.uk