

CHAPTER ONE



Getting started: people, places, play and planning



The aim of this chapter is to show how all aspects of the pre-school environment are relevant to the successful development of children's language and communication. It outlines how to use people, places, play and planning for the benefit of all children in your setting.

The chapter outlines

- ▶ **People** – the role of the practitioner, 10 key strategies, golden questions and adapting adult speak
- ▶ **Places** – creating an environment to support language and communication
- ▶ **Play** – the Early Years Foundation Stage and language-rich activities
- ▶ **Planning** – sample pro-forma

People

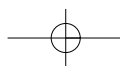
The role of the practitioner

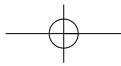
The ability to communicate well with each other is the most important skill that children will learn. In the pre-school the most important resource is the people. It is vital therefore that they are equipped with the skills and know-how to carry out their role effectively.

The adults, be it practitioner or parent, should be aware of how the quality of *their* language and experiences offered influence a young child's language.

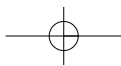
On the following pages and throughout the book there are strategies to support practitioners in recognising and fostering their role as model, sympathetic listener and facilitator of a young child's developing communication and language skills.

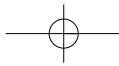
Below there is an outline and explanation of '10 Key Strategies for Practitioners', a list of open-ended 'golden question' and tips on how adults can adjust their language to best meet the needs of all of the children in their care. Through regular use these ideas will become embedded and will improve the early years' practice of those working with babies and young children.





The 10 Key Strategies for Practitioners





The 10 Key Strategies Explained

1. Modelling

This means that the practitioner says the word or phrases that the child wants or needs. In doing so the practitioner 'models' the correct version.

2. Commenting

This means that the practitioner talks about what she or the child is doing as they are doing it, something like a running commentary. This allows the child to hear vocabulary and language in the context of a real situation.

3. Expanding or extending

This is as it suggests taking something that the child has said and expanding upon it. So a single word 'Drink' becomes 'You want a drink?' In this way language is modelled and extended to encourage the child to move on to the next step.

4. Repeating back

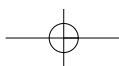
This means that the practitioner listens to what a child says and then repeats it back to the child, making any necessary corrections without drawing a child's attention to them. This allows the practitioner to check that they have understood what the child has said and also gives the child the satisfaction of hearing their own language acknowledged.

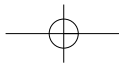
5. Asking open questions

Generally questioning is best kept to a minimum. When questions are used they should be as open as possible – which is harder than you think! Open-ended questions or *golden questions* have many possible answers and can lead to interesting conversations with young children. (Twenty examples of 'golden questions' to use in your pre-school are given on p.00 below)

6. Playing with words

This means singing songs and saying rhymes but also using spontaneous opportunities to play with words. Children appreciate the sound of words that rhyme, tongue twisters, alliteration or silly sentences, even if they don't fully understand every word.





7. Turn taking and waiting time

A pause also indicates that you may be waiting for a response and helps to establish the idea of turn taking which is essential in developing conversation and social skills. Practitioners should try not to rush in when a child hesitates. Many use the three-second rule –when asking a question or seeking a response from a child – wait for three seconds before speaking again yourself. This gives the child time to think and compose a response.

8. Using verbal prompts and giving choices

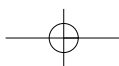
If a child is finding it hard to remember a word or phrase practitioners can prompt them with the first sound of the word or the first couple of words of a phrase. This is often enough to jog the child's memory, allows the child to complete the word or phrase themselves and gives a sense of achievement. Alternatively a child can be given two choices which are modelled to them 'Would you like milk or juice?' In this way the child does not have to think of the word as well as say it.

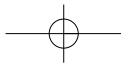
9. Using visual prompts and gestures

Much of this comes naturally – we often point, pull faces or gesture to enhance or emphasise what we say. Body language also plays a part in conveying meaning. In using these practitioners can support children's understanding.

10. Adjusting your language

Using simple, less complex sentences at an individual child's level is another way for a practitioner to ensure that they are understood and of modelling clear language. (See the diagram on 'Adult Speak' below.)





20 Golden Questions

What would happen if ...?

I wonder ...?

What do you suppose ...?

How did that happen ...?

What do you think about ...?

Tell me about ...?

What would you do ...?

How can we ...?

How did you ...?

Tell me about you're ...?

What else can you do with the ...?

How does that feel?

Is there any other way to do this?

Why does it ...?

Tell me what it looks like.

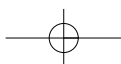
Tell me what it sounds like.

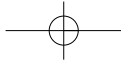
What do you think is happening?

How do you do that?

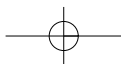
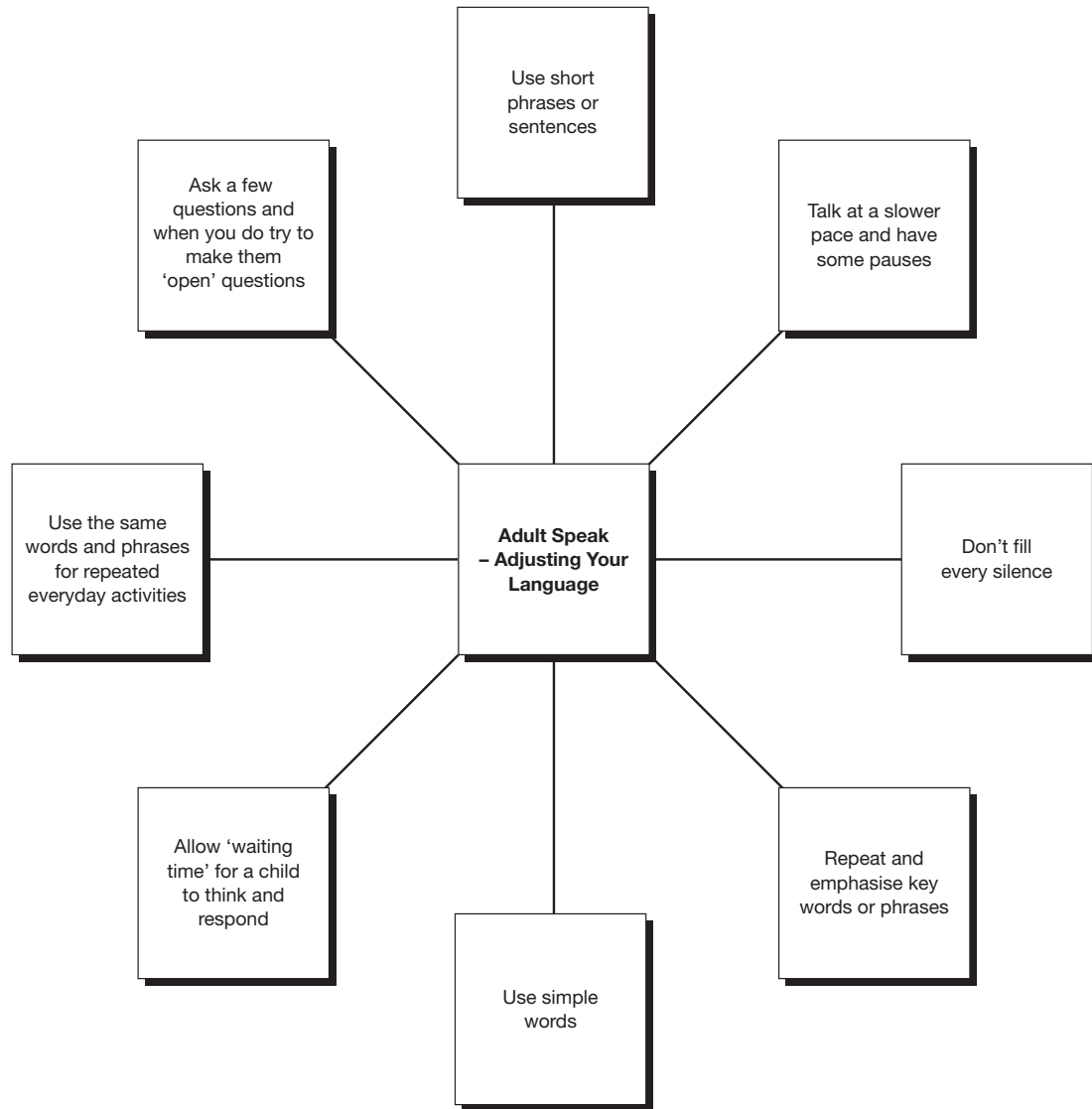
What should we do next?

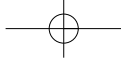
How does that work?





Adult Speak – Adjusting Your Language



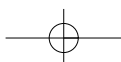
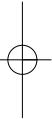
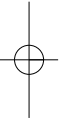


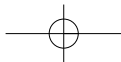
Places

In addition to practitioners having strategies at their fingertips it is also important to create an environment which supports communication and language development. It should be the intention of every practitioner to create a stimulating welcoming, language-rich environment.

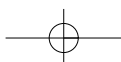
Every child, to be educationally successful, needs a language-rich environment, one in which adults speak well, listen attentively, and read aloud every day. (Boyer, 1991)

Below are some ideas to help you achieve this.





Creating an Environment to Support Speech and Language Development



Play

All pre-schools offer countless language opportunities for their babies and children. Practitioners who offer a wide and varied curriculum can be assured that they are meeting the language needs of most of the children who attend the setting.

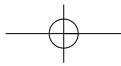
By becoming aware of how much language permeates the whole early years curriculum practitioners can develop an inbuilt ability to make the most of the language potential of *any* pre-school activity.

The Early Years Foundation Stage recognises that children learn holistically, that is they learn lots of things at the same time in their own unique way. It follows then that specific language activities need not be the only way to develop a child's language and communication skills.

The key to providing a language-rich curriculum is to make the most of every learning opportunity. Through regular practice practitioners can develop the skills needed to turn every activity into a language opportunity.

All early years practitioners know that children and babies are learning all sorts of things all of the time. Children do not define their learning by curriculum headings. None of the six areas of learning can be delivered in isolation from the others – each are equally important and dependent on each other.

Examples of language-rich curriculum activities can be found at the end of each of Chapters 2–7. The activities outlined – and indeed all pre-school activities – can be enhanced by using the planning sheets outlined below. These will be particularly helpful when planning for children who may need additional support in developing their communication and language skills.



Speech and Language Activity Planner

Touch Tour

Target child / children

Notes

Language possibilities and objectives

- ▶ New keywords

- ▶ Language to model

- ▶ Will listening skills be developed?

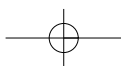
- ▶ When will this happen?

Points to remember:

- ▶

- ▶

How the activity went and what was noticed/next steps



Speech and Language Activity Planner

Touch Tour

Target child / children With Sam

Language possibilities and objectives

▶ New keywords

window, garden, trees, flowers

▶ Language to model

'through the window'

'on the grass'

'beautiful flowers'

▶ Will listening skills be developed?

Yes. Throughout the tour, I will look at Sam's face and wait for a response.

▶ When will this happen?

Throughout the activity.

Notes

Ask Mum for some key words in home language to use with Sam

Sam seems to listen intently to my voice, he responds by cooing and smiling

Points to remember:

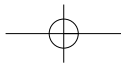
▶ *Dress up Sam warmly when going outside as he is susceptible to the cold weather*

▶ *Write down the French words given to me by Sam's Mum for future use*

How the activity went and what was noticed/next steps

Sam seemed to repeat some of the words I was using especially 'grass' and 'window' Remember to tell his Mum and put on records. Sam bounced up and down when I used the French words!





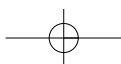
DEVELOPING PRE-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE

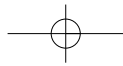
Planning

Below you will find a 'Speech and Language Activity Planner' pro forma and a sample completed planner. This can be useful for:

- ▶ analysing activities to make the most of their language content;
- ▶ planning for developing specific language skills;
- ▶ planning for individuals who may need extra input or those who have an IEP (Individual Education Plan).

It is recognised that practitioners spend a great deal of time on their planning. Through planning practitioners learn to embed good practice into their everyday work. We would suggest that the Additional Speech and Language Activity Planner is used as a tool to develop practitioners' own skills and to help them reflect on their choice of activities





Further reading

Dukes, C. and Smith, M. (2006) *A Practical Guide to Pre-school Inclusion*, Hands-on Guides Series, Paul Chapman Publishing.

Tassoni, P. (2005) *Planning, Play and the Early Years*. Harcourt Heinemann.

Whitehead, M. R. (2007) *Developing Language and Literacy with Young Children*, 3rd edn, 0–8 Series. Paul Chapman Publishing.

