

Chapter Six



Using Information, Communication, and Classroom Organization to Support Second- Language Learning

Early childhood educators may encounter a variety of second-language-learning situations in their classrooms, from one child who speaks a language other than English to an entire classroom of children who speak the same or a variety of different languages. Of course, no matter what the second-language composition of a classroom may be at the beginning of the school year, there may be a very different configuration by the end of the school year. Furthermore, one year may not look anything like the next.

Even so, there are some basic ingredients common to all early childhood classroom situations in which there are second-language learners. These commonalities make it possible for early childhood educators to plan effective classrooms for second-language-learning children. This

chapter presents information concerning the teacher's role in communicating with second-language-learning children and their families and in organizing the classroom to support second-language learning.

GATHERING INFORMATION ABOUT THE CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS OF SECOND-LANGUAGE-LEARNING CHILDREN

One of the first questions on an early childhood educator's mind at the beginning of the school year no doubt is, "Who are these children in my class?" Answering this question is complicated enough when there is a match between the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the teacher and the children; when this is not the case, the task of getting information about the children may be even more complicated.

Following are some rules for early childhood educators to use as guidelines when embarking on the process of getting information about children in an early childhood education classroom.

Rule #1: Do not make any assumptions about a child's cultural or linguistic background without getting further information.

This is clearly the starting point for any data-gathering activity and should apply equally to all of the children in a classroom. In the process of collecting information from the families, interesting and helpful characteristics may be discovered, such as other languages spoken or countries visited, that would otherwise never be known. In addition to identifying children whose families speak a language other than English at home, it is important to identify second-generation speakers of English (i.e., children whose parents are not native speakers of English, although English is the home language) and internationally adopted children (see [Chapter 11](#)), because both of these groups of children may have specific language-learning issues.

Rule #2: Decide what information is important to know.

If the primary interest is in collecting cultural and linguistic information, then there are certain categories of information that will be important as children move into the early childhood education situation. These categories include 1) basic demographic information, 2) linguistic practices in and outside the home, and 3) relevant cultural practices.

Basic demographic information includes information about where the child was born; when the child arrived in the community; what the family configuration is (including extended family); what, if any, religious affiliation the child has; and what the other child care

arrangements are for the child. Basic linguistic information includes the language(s) spoken at home, the family members who speak those languages, and the language(s) to which the child has been exposed, including when and where. Important cultural practices information includes child-rearing beliefs about discipline, toileting behavior, and separation problems; food preferences and feeding practices; and how children are expected to behave toward adults and in group situations. Further information might also be collected about culturally appropriate behaviors that diverge considerably from practices in early childhood education classrooms.

Rule #3: Plan how to get this information.

This type of information can be collected from formal questionnaires, trips to the library, or searches on the Internet and/or informal chats with parents or other cultural representatives. In many situations, there is an intake interview when a family applies for admission to an early childhood education program or during a home visit within the first few weeks of the school year. In either of these situations, basic demographic and linguistic information could be developed from questions asked at that time. If sitting down with the family to have questions answered is not an option, sending home a questionnaire with demographic and linguistic questions is a possibility, but one that does not always yield results. If a questionnaire is sent home without response, it may be necessary to have someone with the appropriate linguistic skills visit or call the family to get the answers.

Information on cultural practices may be more difficult to acquire. One good starting point for the early childhood educator is the library, where books on individual countries, religions, or linguistic groups might provide some insights and some relevant background information. Books or magazine articles also provide historical information that might be important in understanding why a particular family has recently arrived in the community. Internet searches may yield the same type of information and might be more up to date. Information developed along these lines should certainly be shared within the early childhood community and should be checked with cultural representatives.

Again, however, it is certainly helpful for an early childhood educator to have the option of asking parents about their cultural practices. As one Head Start teacher remarked,

On the home visit paperwork, we have a form that the office wants anyway. What country are you from? What foods do you eat? Do you celebrate any holidays? But those, they don't get down to the behaviors and the traditions, the taking off the shoes things. For me, it depends on the parent a lot; if they seem like they're the willing kind, I'll come out and ask them.

The early childhood educator may also consider asking the parents to include him or her in a community-wide celebration, which could provide important cultural information as well as let the parents know that the educator values their cultural traditions and is interested in knowing more.

Rule #4: Think about using a variety of ways to get this information.

Getting information from second-language families can be a challenge. One of the most basic hurdles is, of course, finding an effective way to communicate. Here are some suggestions.

First, face-to-face communication in the second language may be the most difficult for the parents. Face-to-face communication requires quick language processing and formulation of a response in real time. This takes a relatively high level of proficiency in a language. It is important to remember that if face-to-face communication is used in a language that is a second language for the parents, the questions may be difficult for them to understand and they may have difficulty putting together their answers. Therefore, if face-to-face communication is used, the same question should be asked more than once using slightly different wording to confirm that consistent answers are being given.

Second, written communications in the parents' second language may give them a chance to read and respond in a way that is less pressured than face-to-face communication. Reading ability in a second language may be stronger than speaking ability. Furthermore, written communications can be shared with other members of the same first-language community who can read and write the second language. Parents with low levels of proficiency may seek out a translator to help complete a questionnaire. For this reason, it is important to remember that a completed questionnaire may not represent the actual language abilities of the parents but may represent their ability to recruit translation help when needed.

Third, communications that can be arranged in the parents' home language (either oral or written) will likely be the most comfortable for the parents. Many programs have parent liaisons who are bilingual in English and one of the languages spoken by parents in the program. In this case, both written and oral communications can be translated into the home language, and responses can then be translated for the benefit of staff members who do not speak that home language. If a program does not have access to parent liaisons, it will be necessary to develop relationships with community members who can act as translators. Public schools, churches, community agencies, community newspapers, and even local grocery stores are good places to ask about translation services.

These same community resources may also be a good place to seek out cultural information as well (see also Williams & De Gaetano, 1985). Frequently, individuals identify themselves as cultural representatives and make themselves available to discuss the cultural differences that they have noticed between their home culture and the culture in their new community. If one of the parents in a classroom assumes such a role, it can make the teacher's job much easier. As the same Head Start teacher quoted previously told me,

Like Peilan...she's great at answering questions. She has been the life-saver in this room because...in the beginning of the year she didn't understand as much, but now she can translate back and forth between Mandarin and English—and that's just been wonderful.

[Appendix A](#) (see online materials) contains a sample questionnaire that can be adapted and/or translated for use in a variety of situations. Questions can be added or dropped, depending on the particular information that is needed. In deciding what information to ask for, teachers should think about its usefulness in the early childhood education context.

COMMUNICATING WITH SECOND-LANGUAGE-LEARNING CHILDREN

By collecting the kind of information that is requested in the sample questionnaire, teachers will have a better idea of the backgrounds of the children who are coming into or are already in their classrooms. But this information will be only a starting point when it comes to actually communicating with a child who knows little or no English. This section discusses ideas about how to communicate with second-language-learning children in ways that will help them understand and begin to use English.

Starting with What the Children Know

A common practice for the teachers I interviewed was for them to ask parents of children whose home language was not English to provide a few important words in their home language, so that the teachers could do some low-level communicating with the children in the first few weeks in the classroom. Words for *listen*, *bathroom*, and *eat* were very useful in this early period in the classrooms and helped the teachers and children feel connected. At the same time, by asking the parents to provide these phrases, teachers also deliver the message that they value the home language and are open to finding out more about how the home language sounds and is used.

A handy technique for collecting these words is to have parents tape-record them so that teachers can listen to them and practice them by playing them over and over. These tapes can

also be played for the children in the classroom so that everyone can learn words in another language. Furthermore, these tapes could also contain comforting messages from home that could be played for children with separation difficulties.

Starting Slowly

One of the features of the English-language classroom that I observed was that the teachers did not make immediate efforts to communicate with the second-language learners beyond a welcoming smile and greeting. In fact, they gave the second-language learners a lot of time to become familiar with the classroom situation before approaching them with questions or directives in English. Several times in the first few weeks of school, Marion even referred to Byong-sun in the third person (e.g., “Let’s give Byong-sun a chance,” “Let’s show Byong-sun how to pick this up”), including him by using his name without actually directing her speech to him. This approach established the fact that Byong-sun was being considered part of the group but that specific responses would not be required of him. By setting up such a low-demand situation, the teachers gave the second-language learners time to start the adjustment process in this new cultural and linguistic setting.

In fact, the language that the teachers used around the second-language learners in the first month of school was probably too complicated for them to understand anyway, because only 30% of the teachers’ communications involved simplified language. This language use was probably similar to, if not the same as, that which they used to address all of the children, including the English speakers, in the classroom. After all, in the first few weeks of school, the teachers did not know very much about many of the children in the classroom. So, their choice was to use talk appropriate for young children generally when addressing any of the children. For the second-language learners, this early exposure probably made it possible for them to begin at least to tune in to the sounds of the new language, even though they probably did not understand what was actually being said.

After the first month, however, the teachers switched to less-complicated language in an attempt to help the children begin to understand English. This reminded me of how adults in American culture speak to infants as though infants can comprehend sophisticated speech until the infants are old enough to actually start acquiring receptive abilities, at which time adults begin to simplify their speech to get their messages across.

This is not to say, however, that teachers should not be responsive to communicative efforts made by the second-language learners. In fact, the rule in the study classroom seemed to be to

always respond, even if the message from the child was not understandable. Just like the teacher mentioned previously who engaged in bilingual discourse with the Chinese brothers in Saville-Troike's (1987) study (see [Chapter 3](#)), the adults in the study classroom tried to guess the topic of the message and responded accordingly. For example, one day at the drawing table, Poram showed her completed project to Marion and said something to Marion that was unintelligible (i. e., her utterance sounded like a sentence, but it was not possible to understand what she had said). Marion replied anyway, "Oh, are you making that?"

Buttressing Communication

When the teachers in the study classroom started the process of communicating with the second-language learners in their classroom, they frequently "doubled the message" by using words along with some type of gesture, action, or directed gaze. For example, one morning two Japanese sisters, Kumiko and Kaori, arrived with a paper bag full of vegetables. They approached Rosa, who *pointed to the bag* and asked, "What's in there?" Kumiko opened the bag and showed Rosa what was inside. Rosa said, "How about feeding Ponytails [the guinea pig]?" and she walked to the guinea pig cage, *gesturing for the sisters to follow*. At the guinea pig cage, Kumiko began taking the vegetables out of the bag and handing them to Kaori to put in the cage. Rosa *named each vegetable as it was put in the cage*, "Another carrot, and lettuce."

On another occasion, after watching Leandro wander around the room for a while with a painting he had made, I said to him, "Do you want to put it in your cubby?" He started to go to the cubby area, then he stopped and *touched the paint* on the picture. It was still wet. He *showed me this*, so I said, "Shall I hang it up?" *indicating the line* strung up to dry paintings. He brought the picture to me, I hung it up, and he went to the block area. In this example, Leandro used nonverbal communication to indicate what the problem was with my first suggestion. My response about hanging the picture on the line was reinforced by indicating the location that I was talking about, because this was a special arrangement for hanging up pictures and I was not sure that Leandro would understand what I was saying.



One of the teachers I interviewed referred to this as using “body language” to help a second-language-learning child understand. I call this technique buttressing communication, because the additional information delivered by a gesture, an action, or a directed gaze adds another dimension that helps the child tune in to exactly what is being talked about, making it easier to get the message.

Repetition

Another technique that is used successfully when communicating with second-language-learning children involves using repetition. Saying the same thing more than once gives a child more than one opportunity to catch on to what is being said. If the repetition involves a single item, it may also provide an opportunity for the child to actually learn the word. For example, one morning at the drawing table, the following sequence occurred in rapid succession:

Marion to Jennifer: See how Sook-whan did her *hand*?

Rosa to Poram: Are you going to cut out your *hand*?

Marion to Jennifer: Look at that *hand*, Myong's right *hand*.

Marion to Miguel: Do you want to trace your *hand*, too?

Frequently, the teachers also emphasized the words as they said them and put them at or near the end of the sentence for better comprehension.

Talking About the Here and Now

One major feature of successful communication with second-language learners is that it is grounded in the here and now. Talking about what is right there gives the second-language learner a chance to narrow the field of what the conversation is about and focus on a more restricted number of options for response as well. As second-language learners begin to use their productive abilities, the context in which the conversation is held also helps the teacher understand what the child is talking about.

For example, one day, outside on the playground, I was sitting on a large rubber tire when Poram came to sit down next to me. Quickly, Poram discovered that the tire had writing all around it (Firestone and so forth). She and I started to name the letters and numbers. Poram had little difficulty with any of the letters, except the ones that were upside down, because of where we were sitting on the tire. Noticing that there was a problem, Poram gestured to me that the letters were in a strange position. I told her “upside down,” and she repeated it. The next time she had the same problem, she said, “Upside down.” She also stumbled over the number 8. After I told her what it was, Poram was able to identify it correctly later.

In this example, the fact that we were sharing the same physical space and could refer to the same information on the tire helped to make this a successful communicative experience for both of us, including my being able to provide some missing vocabulary items for Poram.

Expanding and Extending

Once children begin to demonstrate their developing capabilities with their new language, teachers can use communicative opportunities as ways of helping children expand and extend their language skills. In this technique, it is necessary to start with what a child already knows and work from there. For example, one morning when I sat down at a table where children were working with playdough, Sook-whan held up a round piece of playdough to me and said, “Cookie.” I replied, “Is this a chocolate-chip cookie? May I eat it?” Sook-whan nodded, and I pretended to eat the cookie. I then told Sook-whan, “That’s a good cookie.” Later, Sook-whan held up a cube-shaped piece of playdough and said, “Chocolate.” We followed the same procedure as before as I pretended to eat the piece of chocolate and commented on how good it was. This play routine used Sook-whan’s original utterance as a starting point and then

developed parallel verbal constructions to extend and expand her linguistic knowledge. This turned out to be successful both as communication and as play.

Upping the Ante

One of the difficult judgment calls that teachers have to make when communicating with second-language learners is when to be more insistent that the children get beyond the nonverbal techniques that they have developed and actually use language to get their point across. To push the process along, it is often necessary for a teacher to up the ante, insisting on verbal communication, for example, before complying with a request.

This was demonstrated one day when Miguel approached Marion with a suspender that had come loose. The following interaction occurred:

Marion: You're trying to tell me something.

Miguel: [No reply.]

Marion: Do you want me to do something?

Miguel: [No reply.]

Marion: Do you want me to do something with your suspender? Put it on my nose? [Starts to do so.]

Miguel: Red. [Showing her his pants.]

Marion: Yes, red...red what?

Miguel: Red pants.

Marion: Do you want me to attach this to your red pants?

Miguel: Yes.

Marion: Okay. I'll do that for you.

I found myself in just this same situation one day with Leandro. As I was leaving the art table, Leandro walked by, stopped in front of me, and pointed to his untied shoelace. I said, "What do you need?" He paused for a moment and said, "Please do my shoes." I said enthusiastically, "All right!" letting him know how pleased I was at his linguistic accomplishment.

Fine-Tuning

When communicating with second-language-learning children, teachers must always estimate what level of proficiency a child has achieved so that their language can be calibrated to that level. Of course, this task is very difficult, and many mistakes can be made along the way to successful communication. Fortunately, most communicative situations allow for a process of fine-tuning in which it is possible to reiterate a message in a form that might be more understandable. Not surprisingly, successful communication with second-language learners requires a lot of fine-tuning on the part of teachers.

For example, after lunch one day in early November, I found Leandro alone in the block area looking at a book. He had a pair of plastic glasses with him that he had been wearing off and on all day. I picked them up and said, “I like your glasses. Are they yours or do they belong here at school?” This complicated question did not get a reply. Then I said, “Do these come from school?” and Leandro shook his head and said, “House.” Then I said, “Are they from Halloween?” And he said, “Yes.” Slightly later, Leandro spotted a piece of candy in my pocket. He asked, “What’s this?” I replied, “Candy,” and he repeated, “Candy.” I said, “Sally gave it to me.” He said, “Halloween?” I answered, “Yes.”

By realizing that my first question was perhaps too complicated for Leandro to answer and by rephrasing it to make it simpler, I made it possible for Leandro to understand what I was asking. I then took a chance that he would know the term *Halloween*, as there had been a lot of talk about Halloween in the classroom. He not only knew what I was talking about but demonstrated how much he knew by turning the conversation around later and using the term to ask me a question. By fine-tuning my initiation, I was able to prolong a conversation that turned out to be very successful.

Combining Techniques for Communicating with Second-Language Learners

Although these techniques for communicating with second-language learners have been presented individually, they rarely appear separately from each other. In any attempt to communicate with second-language learners, teachers combine techniques and keep trying until they find out what works in any given situation. The transcript of my discussion with Leandro at the end of [Chapter 4](#) shows a variety of these techniques used simultaneously in my efforts to keep the conversation going.

Furthermore, although these techniques have been presented as relevant for communication with young second-language-learners, they are, in fact, very similar to techniques used to

communicate with first-language learners of a slightly younger age group. Marion, for example, talked about how similar the second-language children were to prelinguistic toddlers:

When I first started here I had a lot of children who really had no English at all, and then—since I'm comfortable with toddlers, toddler was one of my favorite periods with my own children and the use of preverbal communication—that was sort of the level on which I began things.

Intuitively, Marion discovered that she could use the same communicative techniques with her second-language learners that she had previously used with 18-month- to 2½-year-old first-language learners. Teachers who have worked with a younger age group will certainly recognize many of these techniques as being those that are needed to communicate successfully with toddlers. Imported into the second-language-learning early childhood classroom, they make it possible for teachers and second-language learners to communicate more quickly and with less frustration right from the beginning.

ORGANIZING THE CLASSROOM FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

How the classroom is set up can have a major impact on how comfortable and secure a second-language-learning child may feel there. As discussed in the previous chapters, there is a strong social component to a second-language-learning child's adaptation to the classroom. Classroom organization can be used to ensure that adaptation occurs more smoothly and more quickly.

Physical Setup: Providing Safe Havens

In observing second-language-learning children in early childhood education classrooms, I have often noticed that they choose to settle down to play in physical settings where manipulatives like LEGOs, puzzles, playdough, or small blocks are available. As the portrait of Byong-sun in [Chapter 2](#) shows, his first choice that morning was to go to the table where the LEGOs were available and to play there for quite some time, either alone or in proximity to another child, whom he ignored. The obvious advantage of these locations is that they provide an activity that a child can pursue without asking for help from anyone else or having to negotiate play with other children. As long as a space and some materials are available, a child can proceed to play without interference, eventually making a decision about whether to interact with other people.

In setting up a classroom for second-language learners, teachers can make sure that they are providing places in the classroom where second-language learners can feel comfortable, competent, and occupied. These areas, which I think of as safe havens, can provide the children

with a base of operations from which they can move into the rest of the classroom activities when they are ready.

Classroom Routines: Helping Children Become Members of the Group

The social aspect of the study classroom that proved most helpful for the second-language learners was the presence of a consistent set of routines for the children. These routines meant that, with a little observation, the second-language-learning children could pick up cues regarding what to do and when, using the English-speaking children as models, even before they could understand the language being used around them. The daily schedule of arrival, free play, cleanup, snack time, outside play, and circle time gave the second-language learners a set of activity structures to acquire (e.g., put jackets in a cubby, go to rug, find a place at a table for snack, help put toys away), which immediately allowed them to act like members of the group.

For example, one morning early in the school year, when Marion began to organize a soup-making operation at one of the tables, Sook-whan was standing nearby watching. Marion asked her, “Would you like to help, too, Sook-whan?” Sook-whan nodded her head. Marion then announced, “Okay, there will be five helpers.” Sook-whan sat down at the table as Marion named the five helpers, including Sook-whan.

In this example, Sook-whan is addressed by the teacher in a questioning tone that includes her name. This routine is similar in general format to routines that occur again and again in the classroom: The teacher begins to display particular types of materials for a project and invites children to engage in the project. From previous experiences, Sook-whan can guess that Marion has asked whether she wishes to join the group. Then, when she hears her name and sees the other children start to sit down at the table, Sook-whan does the same, indicating that she understands that she has been included. Even without knowing anything more than her own name, Sook-whan could look like she knew what was being asked of her because the situation was routine in the classroom.

Other researchers have observed similar situations with young second-language learners. In their case study of a 5-year-old Taiwanese boy acquiring English in a child care center, Huang and Hatch (1978) found that “Paul’s prompt non-verbal responses to verbal commands were frequently misleading. For example, on his second day at school, when the teacher...said, “Paul, would you like to sit there?” he smiled and sat down immediately” (p. 121). The researchers’ speculation was that

If he responded to any verbal cue at all it would be to “Paul.” More likely he saw the other children seating themselves and [the teacher] pointing to the chair as she spoke to him. His response was the expected one and could not be taken as evidence of sentence comprehension. (p. 121)

Because children are so good at using established routines to guess what an appropriate action might be in a given situation, it is only when a child guesses incorrectly that this strategy is fully revealed. One day in the study classroom, Naoshi and Rebecca were sitting side-by-side working independently with story pieces. I sat down next to Rebecca, who was having a difficult time setting up the pieces on the plastic stands. Naoshi, however, had figured out how to set up the pieces and was putting some together. Rebecca said to me, “I want to do what Naoshi did.” I answered, “Go ahead.” She said, “I don't know how.” I said, “Ask Naoshi to help you.” Rebecca turned to Naoshi and said, “Can you help me to do that?” He handed her one of the plastic pieces. She asked again, “How do you do it?” He gave her the plastic bag that still had one extra piece in the bottom.

In this example, Naoshi's best guess is that Rebecca has asked him to provide her with pieces that she cannot reach, a typical request in this situation; not actually understanding what she has said, he still responds with an appropriate, if misguided, action in an attempt to be helpful.

In interviews, both Marion and Rosa pointed to these routines as being an important aspect of the classroom, particularly for the second-language learners. (In the following interview, P is the author and M is Marion.)

P: What kind of patterns do you think you have established with the kids?...What helps the kids, particularly the second-language kids?

M: I think, one thing, the structure and rhythm of the day is fairly well set. We do have a definite routine...at the beginning particularly we try to be fairly consistent about the routine....

P: Does it surprise you...how quickly the kids seem to pick up on the routines and fit right in and, on the whole, not be confused and...?

M: Right, it really does.

P: It surprised me!

Rosa mentioned that in the beginning it was a lot of work to establish the routines in the classroom—she could not just stand back and “let it happen”—but, in the long run, it was worth the effort.

Just how powerful routines can be in helping children become members of a group occasionally becomes apparent when a routine changes without the child's being aware of the change. Snow (1983) observed just such an incident in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where a 5-year-old English girl, Nicola, attended a kindergarten classroom. Nicola seemed to be a fully functioning member of the class:

She participated in art projects, listened attentively during story reading, executed all the steps to the dance during music class. Her only failure came one day when the teacher announced, while passing out snack, “Today we're going to wait until everyone is back at his seat before we open our milk.” Nicola failed to observe this deviation from the standard routine, since she understood not a single word of Dutch, and she was soundly scolded for having disobeyed. Nicola had done such a good job of acting as if she spoke Dutch that betrayal of her ignorance was treated as obstinacy rather than poor language learning. (pp. 148–149)

Fortunately, most teachers of young children in second-language–learning situations are more sensitive than the teacher in this situation to the possibility of a child's not understanding verbal instructions. But Nicola's reliance on classroom routines as a basis for her activities, particularly in the absence of any understanding of the language being used, is quite typical of young second-language–learning children.

In setting up a classroom for second-language learners, teachers can capitalize on the helpfulness of routines. Early in the school year it may be desirable to have a strict schedule to get children oriented to a set of routine situations. Minimizing confusion and maximizing structure will help the second-language learners tune in to the classroom and feel more secure sooner. Allowing children to participate in activities in easily understood ways will help them join the social group and be exposed to more language.

Small-Group Activities: Ensuring Inclusion

In the study classroom, the teachers were always careful to include a mix of first- and second-language children in organized small-group activities. Whenever there was an activity underway, such as making pizza muffins or soup, teachers would invite groups of children to join the activity, particularly mentioning the names of the second-language–learning children so that they would know they were being included. This inclusionary policy had many benefits:

1. The invitation from the teacher made it possible for the child to join the group without having to negotiate entry.
2. Once included around the table, the child would be in social proximity to the other children, making interactions easier.
3. The child would hear a lot of language relating to the activity that was being pursued.

In setting up a classroom for second-language learners, teachers can use small-group activities as an ideal time to begin to get second-language learners involved. Small-group activities, under a teacher's direction, can help second-language learners begin the transition from more isolated to more coordinated play activities.

Social Support: Getting Help from the English-Speaking Children

In the English-language study classroom, the support that was provided to the second-language-learning children came almost entirely from the adults; the English-speaking children chose to play with English-speaking playmates in the classroom until the second-language-learning children began to communicate in English. This pattern developed, no doubt, because the English-speaking children probably believed that the second-language children's unresponsiveness to their social advances was meant as rejection rather than an inability to understand.

This meant that the second-language-learning children had to wait for months to acquire English-speaking friends and to get involved in activities such as sociodramatic play that are heavily dependent on language. Is it possible to get second-language-learning children into contact with English speakers more quickly? If so, would this enhance the acquisition of the second language for these children?

These questions were the basis for an intervention study by Hirschler (1991, 1994) in an early childhood classroom serving 3-, 4-, and 5-year-old Khmer-, Spanish-, and English-speaking children at the Demonstration School of the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. This school is based on a multilingual and multicultural model (Tabors, 1988). In this model, children's preliterate development in their first language is supported during language periods taught by native-speaking teachers. At other times of the day, however, the children join group activities that are conducted primarily in English. Hirschler believed that the English-speaking

children in this classroom could act as valuable language resources for the second-language-learning children if the English speakers could be persuaded to interact effectively with the second-language-learning children.

Recognizing that children are capable of modifying their speech to communicate with less proficient speakers (Shatz & Gelman, 1977), Hirschler (1991) designed an intervention in which she trained five English-speaking children in a variety of strategies for approaching and sustaining interaction with the second-language learners in the classroom. These strategies were ones that Hirschler developed from a review of the literature on input shown to be most beneficial for second-language learners. They are summarized in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Strategies for interaction used in training English-speaking children to communicate with second-language learners

- *Initiation:* Children were taught to approach other children, establish eye contact, and ask the children to play with them or with a particular toy.
 - *General linguistic aspects:* Children were taught to speak slowly with good enunciation.
 - *Reinitiation:* Children were taught to repeat the initiation if it met with nonresponse.
 - *Request clarification:* Children were taught to request clarification of a response by the second-language learner if the response was not understood.
 - *Recast/expansion:* Children were taught to repeat an utterance with slightly different wording when the second-language learner indicated a lack of comprehension through nonresponse, noncontingent response, or other nonverbal signs.
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From Hirschler, J. (1994, Winter). Preschool children's help to second language learners. *Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 14, 227–240; The Bilingual Education Teacher Preparation Program, Boise State University; adapted by permission.

To introduce these techniques, Hirschler (1991) and an assistant used role playing to model the desired behaviors before the entire group of children and then individually with the five children chosen for the study. All of the strategies were understood by the children, and all but recasts were successfully elicited during the training sessions. To remind the children of these strategies, each was equipped with a reminder bracelet and posters were placed in the classroom as well.

Interactional data collected pre- and postintervention indicated that rates of initiation to second-language learners increased from 2.5 to 3 times for four of the five children. Rates of turn-taking and utterances per turn also increased, as did language modifications. The overall effect of the training, then, was to increase contact between the English-speaking target children and the second-language learners earlier than would have been the case otherwise.

After the intervention, one particular English-speaking child took on a protective and teaching role with several of the Khmer speakers, consequently greatly increasing her interaction with them. In the example on the following page (Hirschler, 1991), Tiffany was showing Therry some shells on the science table.

Tiffany: O.K. have to smell this. O.K.? That don't smell, does it? Ha! That don't smell. That don't smell.

Therry: [Giggles]

Tiffany: Hear the ocean? Hear the ocean? Hear it? Oh, this one is loud! You can hear this one. Can you hear it? Wait, come here. Come here. Want to hear it? Look, hear this. Hear the ocean?
(p. 100)

In this example, Tiffany was functioning much like a teacher working with a second-language learner, using repetition and talk about the here and now to deliver her message.

By helping the English-speaking children understand that the second-language learners needed help and by providing information about how they might help, Hirschler made it possible for the second-language learners to hear more contextualized language than would have been possible if their only conversational partners had been the teachers in the classroom.

In these circumstances, the second-language-learning children did not have to wait until they could begin to produce English to be included in social groupings with their English-speaking peers. Hirschler (1991) speculated that “this benign form of social engineering could act as a catalyst to language development” (p. 125) for the second-language learners. She suggested that it would be useful to integrate “into the multi-cultural classroom, through discussion and group activities, the idea that some children are learning to speak English and there are ways that we can help them” (pp. 125–126).



In setting up a classroom for second-language learners, teachers can point out to English-speaking children that there are children in the classroom who speak a different language, that it will take time for the second-language learners to begin to speak a new language, and that there are some ways that the English-speaking children can help in this process. Teachers might even ask for volunteer helpers or buddies who could be partnered with second-language learners early in the school year to help reduce the isolation of the second-language learners and increase their contacts with English-speaking children. Rather than making the second-language learners feel different (they are already feeling different), this approach can help them feel more connected while giving English-speaking children valuable information about how to help other children.

CONCLUSION

The suggestions in this chapter related to classroom organization can be seen as ways of accomplishing a particular objective in a second-language-learning setting termed *lowering the affective filter* (Krashen, 1980). Because the social situation can be so difficult for young second-language-learning children, it is possible for emotional factors to override the language-learning process. By making second-language-learning children more comfortable in the social situation, teachers increase the likelihood that their communicative efforts—and those of the English-speaking children in the classroom—will begin to make sense to the second-language learners. By setting up a classroom environment that helps second-language learners feel secure and competent, teachers make the child's second-language-learning task that much easier.

Chapter Seven



Using the Curriculum to Facilitate Second-Language and - Literacy Learning

In the English-language classroom that I studied, there were no overt efforts made to tailor the curriculum to the second-language-learning children. Instead, as discussed in [Chapter 1](#), the teachers proceeded with a general developmental curriculum that included an activity period, during which children could be involved in free play or in teacher-directed activities; a storytime, when the children listened to books read aloud by the teachers; snack and lunchtimes, when children gathered at the individual tables in the room; an outside time, when children climbed on structures, rode tricycles, and played games; and a circle time, when all of the children gathered together with the teachers to sing songs and discuss events of interest. What was evident was that this structure, although fulfilling the developmental needs of the English-speaking children in the classroom, also made it possible for the teachers to incorporate many techniques that helped the second-language learners. This chapter discusses the ways in which the early childhood classroom curriculum can help second-language learners develop language skills and begin to develop literacy skills as well.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Many early childhood education classrooms are organized around principles characteristic of high-quality early education programs outlined in a position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1996). Furthermore, the NAEYC and the International Reading Association (IRA) have jointly issued a position statement detailing practices that have been shown to facilitate the development of reading and writing skills in young children (NAEYC, 1998). What are these principles and practices, and how do they relate to second-language-learning children's experiences in early childhood classrooms?

In summarizing the guidelines for early childhood professional practice related to “teaching to enhance development and learning,” the NAEYC position statement (1996) stated:

Adults are responsible for ensuring children's healthy development and learning. From birth, relationships with adults are critical determinants of children's healthy social and emotional development. At the same time, children are active constructors of their own understanding, who benefit from initiating and regulating their own learning activities and interacting with peers. Therefore, early childhood teachers strive to achieve an optimal balance between children's self-initiated learning and adult guidance and support. (p. 11)

How would these principles work for second-language learners? As mentioned in [Chapter 1](#), first-language learning occurs in the context of social interactions within the family. For young second-language learners, a similar context, in which understanding adults can fine-tune their language to the children's needs and other children can provide further input, recapitulates the successful environment for first-language acquisition. In both cases, it is the child's interaction with the environment that makes it possible for learning to take place. An early childhood classroom environment that does not allow the child the opportunity to interact freely and often with speakers of the second language will mitigate second-language learning; conversely, a classroom in which children are encouraged to engage in meaningful interactions with helpful others will facilitate second-language learning. This is just the type of classroom that is advocated by the NAEYC.

The joint position statement from NAEYC and the IRA (NAEYC, 1998) concerning reading and writing concluded,

[T]he picture that emerges from research in [the] first years of children's reading and writing is one that emphasizes wide exposure to print and to developing concepts about it and its form and function. Classrooms filled with print, language and literacy play, and writing allow children to experience the joy and power associated with reading and writing while mastering basic concepts about print that research has shown are strong predictors of achievement. (p. 5)

The joint statement also included the following comments:

Children who are learning English as a second language are more likely to become readers and writers of English when they are already familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in their primary language. In this respect, oral and written language experiences should be regarded as an additive process, ensuring that children are able to maintain their home language while also learning to speak and read English (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Including non-English materials and resources to the extent possible can help to support children's first language while children acquire oral proficiency in English. (p. 4)

What this means is that a high-quality early childhood classroom serving second-language-learning children needs to include strategies for home language use in the classroom, as well as playful ways for second-language learners to begin the process of language and literacy development in their new language. The remainder of this chapter focuses on some strategies that have been found to be effective in promoting first- and second-language and -literacy learning in the early childhood education classroom.

ORAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

There are many opportunities throughout the day in a developmental classroom when curriculum planning can facilitate oral language development for second-language learners.

Activity Time

Activity time in a developmental classroom is frequently the time when children are most actively involved in exploring and learning about their environment. In many classrooms, it is during this time that children are engaged in hands-on activities that introduce them to materials, concepts, and vocabulary that help them expand their understanding of the world. In many classrooms, it is also during this time that children are given the opportunity to develop their social skills in interaction with other children around play themes that they develop. In each of these types of activity structures—either teacher-directed or child-initiated—there are opportunities for language to be used in helpful ways with second-language learners.

Teacher-Directed Activities An extremely useful technique utilized by teachers when working with young second-language learners is to provide what I call *running commentary* or what others have called “event casting” or “talking while doing.” This takes the form of the teacher explaining his or her actions and the actions of others as an activity unfolds. The

advantage of this use of language is that it is directly connected to the objects that are present and the actions that are being performed. This technique can provide children with vocabulary items as well as syntactic structures in English.

For example, one morning Byong-sun was participating in a pizza-making operation with Marion and some of the other children at one of the tables. Marion gave Byong-sun some sauce to put on his pizza muffin. Next, she provided the grated cheese and said, “We have to put the cheese on. Would you like to put the cheese on? Andrew put cheese on his. Jessica put cheese on hers. Now you are putting cheese on yours.” In this example of running commentary, Marion is combining buttressed communication—talking about the cheese as she is handling it—with repetition. The repetition of the word *cheese* helps it stand out as a particular item among the other sounds that Byong-sun is hearing Marion use. Furthermore, she is providing a minilesson in pronouns for Byong-sun by varying only the subject (i.e., Andrew, Jessica, you) and the matching possessive pronoun (i.e., his, hers, yours) in each rendition of the sentence while keeping all of the other elements in the sentence the same.

Child-Initiated Activities Although the English-speaking children in this classroom were slow to initiate conversations with the second-language learners, they did eventually begin to be helpful communicators when the second-language learners were able to demonstrate some ability in understanding English and using some formulaic phrases. When this happened, the children often spent activity time in free play activities that gave the second-language learners a chance to hear much *context-embedded language*—language related to the immediate situation—particularly in the course of sociodramatic play.

For example, one morning in December, Leandro was successfully involved in a long play sequence that he initiated by taking up residence on a small platform area built into the loft and declaring, “Here my bed.” First Andrew responded by saying good night, then Jessica gave him a good-night kiss, saying, “Good night, sweetheart” before leaving the area. Then Myong arrived on the scene, and Rebecca, who had been playing with a telephone nearby, told her, “Leandro's sick.” Myong replied, “I got some medicine.” At this point, Joanna came by. Seeing Leandro in bed, she said, “Good night.” He answered, “No, sick!” “Oh, you're sick. Who's the doctor?” Joanna asked. Myong responded, “I'm the doctor,” and she went to the dress-up area to find the proper attire for her role, coming back with a long white coat and a white apron. Joanna helped her get the coat on and tied the apron around her waist. As this was going on, Rebecca reassured Leandro by telling him, “The doctor will come soon.” Joanna then suggested that Myong might need some paper so she could write down her prescription for Leandro. Myong

went off to find paper and a marker. Leandro got out of bed to follow her, but Rebecca told him, “Stay in bed. You're sick. Stay in bed.” Leandro climbed back into bed.

Then Myong came back and helped Leandro get arranged in bed. Rebecca said, “He needs a shot.” Myong started to give Leandro “an examination” while Rebecca went into the house area to get a shot. When Rebecca came back Myong said to her, “Take the medicine, okay?” and Rebecca said to Myong, “Here's the shot.” Then Rebecca said, “He needs a shot right in his tummy,” and both girls hovered over Leandro administering the shot. While this was going on, Rebecca commented to Leandro, “You're sick,” and Myong commented, “I'm a good doctor.”

After giving Leandro the shot, Myong asked Rebecca about what had caused his condition. Myong asked, “How did he get sick?” Rebecca replied, “Someone made him sick and he had to go to the doctor.” Myong continued to work on Leandro, declaring, “He has the rash.” Rebecca, however, announced that Leandro was well, and Myong and Rebecca began a new play sequence about going to the swimming pool, leaving Leandro to languish in his bed alone.

In this play sequence, words like *doctor*, *shot*, *medicine*, and *sick* are repeatedly used in the context of the play, giving Leandro a great deal of exposure to these words. An indication of the effectiveness of this type of play for vocabulary acquisition came after Rebecca and Myong had left Leandro alone. At this point, Leandro got out of the bed and went over to the telephone Rebecca had been using. He picked up the telephone and said, “Hello, doctor! Doctor!” Then he put the telephone down and picked up the coat that Myong had been wearing. He announced, “Me's doctor” as I helped him put on the coat. Although he no longer had an audience (other than me) for this play, it was clear that Leandro was beginning to develop the necessary vocabulary so that he could adopt another role in future play sequences.

Book-Reading Time

One of the most challenging times for teachers with both first- and second-language children in their classrooms may be book reading. Trying to keep all of the children engaged in listening to a book being read aloud can be difficult when only some of the members of the group may actually understand what is being read. For this reason, particular attention must be paid to developing a book-reading time that works for all of the participants. Here are some suggestions for teachers:

1. *Keep it short.* Second-language-learning children cannot be expected to sit for long periods of time listening to material that they are not able to comprehend. To keep the book-reading time from becoming an endurance contest, teachers should choose books that can be

presented in a reasonable amount of time. If the book is long and/or the group attention span is short, teachers should consider purposely stopping part way through and, after eliciting what the children think might happen next, putting the book away to be finished at a later time. This technique helps children develop anticipation for book reading, keeps them interested, and helps them focus on the story line of the book. When the reading recommences, it will also be an opportunity to recap what happened in the story up until that time, giving children a reason to “stay tuned.”

2. *Consider small-group book reading.* When teachers sit down with a book and a small group of children, they can tailor how the book is presented and decide how to respond more carefully to the questions from the group. On some occasions, teachers can choose to have a small group that includes both English-speaking and second-language-learning children in the group. At other times, only English speakers or only second-language learners might be included, so that the presentation can be fine-tuned for that particular audience.

3. *Choose books carefully.* Presenting a book to a group of children requires preparation. Different children's books lend themselves to different types of presentations, and teachers should be aware of the possibilities of each book before it is read to the group. Any book used in the classroom should be carefully reviewed for content, vocabulary, length, and special features, including cultural sensitivity.

There are many types of books for young children. Everything from alphabet and naming books to sophisticated renderings of fairy tales are available. The selection of a book should be made with the interests and understanding of the children in mind, as well as the integration of the material with other activities going on in the classroom. Information detailing types of books for young children can be obtained from sources such as *Children and Books* (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991). Local librarians are, of course, also excellent resources for choosing books for particular audiences.

Predictable books are of particular interest for use with second-language learners because they feature highly repetitive and simplified text that makes it easy for second-language learners to become engaged with them. Books like the “Spot” series (Hill, 1980) can provide scaffolded text, making it easy for children to respond to them when they are read aloud.

4. *Talk the story, rather than read it.* If the illustrations and story in a particular book are appealing, but the children being read to are not likely to understand the text, teachers can modify the story by telling a version of it in a way that the children will understand. Of course,

with often-read books, some children may know the text by heart and want the “real” version. This would be a good moment to explain that sometimes it is necessary to do things a little differently so everyone in the class can understand the story.

5. *Read books more than once.* Multiple readings of books help children get more information from them each time they listen to the story. Vocabulary that was not understood the first few times may become more accessible with repeated readings. Each time through the book, different aspects should be highlighted so that the presentation will keep the children's interest high.

6. *Encourage children to “read” to other children.* Once children become familiar with a book, they can then become readers of that book to other children, particularly second-language learners. Again, it is not necessary that they have the text exactly right. What is important is that they can convey their interest, excitement, and understanding of the story to another child. A second-language learner may feel more comfortable asking for clarification or definition from another child than in a larger group with the teacher.

Snack and Lunchtimes

Mealtimes in early childhood education classrooms are usually times when teachers are involved in many management activities. Just getting the food onto the table and not on the floor takes a lot of work and patience. Snack and lunchtimes, however, can also be thought of as important times for adults and children to have conversations that can help second-language learners.

One day in a Head Start classroom (Smith, 1996), a teacher was sitting with children during lunch. The following interaction occurred:

Teacher: Do you know what vegetables these are?

Child: No.

Teacher: What's the green vegetable?

Child: B-b-broccoli.

Teacher: Broccoli. What's the orange vegetable?

Child: Carrots.

Teacher: And what's the white vegetable?

Child: Fish.

Teacher: No.

Child: Flower.

Teacher: Cauliflower.

Child: I said that, but I didn't say cauliflower.

Teacher: That's a long name.... It's a long name to remember.

Child: I know what that's called—cauliflower.

By taking the time to help this child develop and confirm vocabulary related to the food being eaten, the teacher was able to turn an ordinary event into an opportunity to learn. Although this interaction occurred between a teacher and an English-speaking child, it is the type of exchange that could also be useful for a second-language-learning child as a participant or as a listener.



I observed how conversations among a group of children might also work to help second-language learners. One day, Naoshi, Supat, and Andrew were eating lunch at the same table. As Naoshi poured out his drink for lunch, he showed it to me and announced, “Cocoa.” Then he turned to Andrew to show him his drink, announcing “Cocoa” again. Then he pointed to Andrew's drink and said, “Cocoa.” Andrew replied, “No, this is milk.” Then Naoshi pointed to

Supat and said, “Cocoa.” Andrew said, “No, his is probably apple juice.” Then Andrew showed Naoshi his Thermos and said, “This is in here milk.” Naoshi said, “This is [pause] cocoa!” Then Naoshi said, “Milk cocoa.” Andrew repeated, “Milk cocoa?” As lunch continued, Andrew took items out of the paper bag he had brought from home. The bag had ink stamps on it for decoration. Twice Naoshi asked, “What’s this?” pointing to an object on the bag. Andrew told him “spider” and “giraffe.” Naoshi had a pile of orange sections in front of him on the table. He began to count them out loud, “One, two, three,” and then, pointing to his mouth, he said “Four.” Andrew looked over and saw only three sections, so he said, “Three orange pieces.” But Supat, who had not said anything up until this point, understood what Naoshi was doing. He told Andrew, “That was four and he ate one.” Later Naoshi further refined his orange-section-counting technique (after eating another section) by counting “One, two” on the table, “three” pointing to his mouth, and “four” pointing to his stomach.

In this sequence, Andrew and Supat are something of a captive audience for Naoshi, who takes full advantage of their presence to collect data on English vocabulary and grammar as well as to demonstrate his knowledge and conversational skills.

In many early childhood classrooms, children’s names are taped to chairs, and children find their chairs to sit in for snack and lunch. By placing chairs in particular configurations, it is possible for teachers to promote interactions of these sorts at mealtimes by placing sociable English-speaking children with second-language learners, making it easier for second-language learners to get into conversation with English-speaking peers.

Outside Time

Most early childhood educators think of outdoor activities as chances for developing gross motor skills and cooperative game playing. Most of the outdoor activities I have observed do not require a great deal of language use, which may well be the reason that this time is such an important time for second-language learners. In other words, outside time might well be a time when second-language learners can demonstrate physical competence without being put at a linguistic disadvantage.

Furthermore, outdoor games that have highly routinized rules can give children a participation structure that is obvious and easy to get into. Many large-group games have repetitive linguistic features (e.g., “Duck, Duck, Goose”), which are easy for second-language

learners to key into and start using themselves. An effective method for using outdoor games as a time for second-language acquisition would be to partner second-language learners with English-speaking children and have them work cooperatively throughout a game.

Establishing social and play relationships with other children during outside activities may make it easier for children to develop social and play relationships with these same children inside the classroom as well. Teachers who are alert to the possibilities of partnering children socially could use outside time as an ideal opportunity for getting English-speaking children and second-language-learning children together.

Circle Time

In many early childhood classrooms, circle time is a time when all of the children and adults come together, often sitting down in a big circle on a rug or enclosed area. Various activities occur at circle time. Some of the most common are taking roll and noting who is or is not in class, talking about the day of the week and the weather, talking about the schedule for the day and/or upcoming events, asking the children to make choices for activity time, singing songs, and perhaps doing exercises together. If the classroom curriculum is organized around themes, these themes are often introduced at circle time.



Circle time in a classroom with second-language learners can be organized in a way that will make the time particularly useful for them. First, as in other areas of classroom organization, it is important for teachers to keep to a certain routine during circle time. By calling the children's

names, then talking about the calendar, and then discussing the weather report, teachers can help second-language learners predict the sequence of events and their required response.

Second, teachers should include songs and movements with highly predictable components and should introduce the words of the songs first without music so that the second-language-learning children have an opportunity to catch on more quickly. In addition, giving children many opportunities to return to their favorite songs also reinforces their learning. Frequently, second-language learners “find their voice” or “go public” for the first time in their new language as they are singing songs during circle time.

Third, the introduction of theme material during circle time should be kept short, simple, and as visual as possible. By being explicit about the vocabulary involved, teachers can also provide second-language learners with the necessary words to participate in the activities around the theme material.

Fourth, children should be allowed to respond to teachers’ questions in unison or on a voluntary basis at circle time. By calling on a second-language learner to respond in front of the entire class, teachers may well render even the most confident child speechless. For example, at circle time one rainy morning in November in the English-language classroom, Marion called on Naoshi to ask him what might get wet on a rainy day. Naoshi made some motions with his hands (a typical circle time response), so Marion asked the question again, and Joanna tried to help by making raining motions and touching Naoshi's hair, asking, “Did your hair get wet?” This time Naoshi shook his head (another typical circle time motion). Marion interpreted this as a negative response to Joanna's question and scaffolded the situation by suggesting *umbrellas* as an answer as she held up an imaginary umbrella. This brought the sequence to a successful conclusion, but what was clear was that Naoshi was not yet ready to respond in this high-demand situation. Letting him offer an answer along with the other children or letting him indicate that he had an answer before calling on him would have made it a much more comfortable situation for Naoshi.

THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PRESCHOOL

As mentioned previously, most developmental early childhood education classrooms have a variety of goals for the children enrolled in them, including social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. This chapter's discussion thus far has emphasized that a general developmental curriculum offers many opportunities for teachers and other children to help in the second-language-learning process. These suggestions highlight how second-language

learning can be accomplished in the context of a developmental classroom, without requiring a restructuring of the classroom curriculum to incorporate them.

It is possible to imagine, however, a classroom in which language acquisition is the main goal guiding curriculum planning and classroom activities. In fact, just such a classroom has been developed at the Language Acquisition Preschool (LAP) at The University of Kansas (see <http://www2.ku.edu/~splh/Clinics/LAP.html>). This school, now affiliated with the local school system, serves typically developing children, children with specific language impairments, and children for whom English is their second language (Bunce, 1995; Rice, 1991; Rice & Wilcox, 1990, 1995). The LAP classroom shares many of the features of other developmental early childhood settings, providing activities that are aimed at the development of social skills and school readiness. What differentiates the LAP classroom from others is an emphasis on language development throughout the curriculum, the presence of a variety of children with limited language skills but age-appropriate social and intellectual skills, the consistent emphasis on verbal activities, and the encouragement of verbal interactions among the children.

Beginning with the premise that language is learned in socially interactive settings and that children construct their linguistic systems from the language they hear from adults and more capable peers, the creators of LAP have developed the following intervention strategies to facilitate language development.

1. *Provide opportunities for language use and interaction.* First, LAP teachers provide rich and interesting activities. The curriculum is based on an integrated approach in which a specific weekly theme is used to structure many of the activities for the week. For instance, during a week for which the theme is vacations, props for dramatic play, art activities, storytime, group time, and music selections all relate to the theme, with options including everything from taking an airplane trip to singing the “Mickey Mouse” song (see Bunce & Watkins, 1995). These activities are meant to engage and interest the children and get them involved in interactions related to the activities.

Second, LAP teachers concentrate on allowing quiet times when they are not talking to provide an opportunity for children to initiate conversation about what they find interesting. As Bunce and Watkins (1995) wrote,

A language-facilitating preschool classroom requires teachers and aides who are comfortable being quiet; if adults in the classroom constantly fill up the language “space,” there is little incentive or opportunity for children to participate in verbal interchange. Quiet moments in a classroom are not negative. On the contrary, they provide time for reflection and they encourage child initiations. (p. 45)

Third, the teachers in the LAP classroom arrange the environment so that not all materials are readily accessible, to encourage children's efforts at interaction. "In brief, the idea is to provide opportunities for children to learn and practice requesting materials or assistance when they need it" (Bunce & Watkins, 1995, p. 45).

2. *Provide focused stimulation on particular language features.* The teachers in LAP develop plans that include targeted sounds, words, or forms to be used with particular children. These forms are then modeled in comments or statements made during conversations with the children, and the children are encouraged but not required to repeat the models. These forms are usually ones that the children have not yet produced themselves. Furthermore, teachers recast forms that children do use to maintain their meaning, but change their form to another, grammatically altered form. Finally, teachers recast their own utterances, repeating an idea in a different way, to provide several structures for children to compare.

3. *Develop routines to help children connect events and language.* Several of the routines used by the teachers at LAP are the same as ones that have been mentioned previously. These include establishing familiar daily routines such as arrival time, circle time, and snack time so that children can anticipate what is coming next and prepare themselves to participate (see *Classroom Routines: Helping Children Become Members of the Group* in [Chapter 6](#)) and using event casting (running commentary) to describe their actions or the actions of the children during these events (see *Teacher-Directed Activities* in this chapter).

One activity in the LAP classroom, however—sociodramatic play—is handled quite differently. In the classroom I studied and in many classrooms I have visited, sociodramatic play is most often initiated by the children and facilitated by the teachers (i.e., teachers provide materials and often contribute ideas to ongoing play as Joanna did in the sick-in-bed sequence discussed previously, but, on the whole, sociodramatic play is developed by the children themselves). As I noted, however, this means that second-language-learning children are often not included in sociodramatic play until they have been in the classroom for a considerable period. In fact, in the English-language classroom there were *no* observed instances of verbal interactions by the second-language-learning children in the house area during sociodramatic play until December. As Garvey (1977) pointed out, sociodramatic play imposes particularly high demands on children's linguistic abilities.

In the LAP classroom, the teachers have taken this aspect of the curriculum and made it the centerpiece of their planning, calling it scripted dramatic play. As Bunce and Watkins (1995)

explained, “Scripted play is a valuable intervention procedure because it provides opportunities for verbal communication within a meaningful context” (p. 48). Rather than merely providing materials, the teachers at LAP initiate the scripted dramatic play by introducing the roles and the props available for the play, as well as giving background information in a discussion or demonstration prior to the play activity. Each day, the teachers introduce a new activity that exposes the children to a variety of information, vocabulary items, and language routines related to each script (see Bunce, 1995, for further information about these techniques and activity guides from LAP). In this fashion, the children in the LAP classroom are exposed to and participate in a particularly rich and supportive language environment.

4. *Stimulate social interaction between children.* In a technique that is the mirror reflection of Hirschler's (1991) training of English-language children to interact with the second-language learners at the Demonstration School (see [Chapter 6](#)), LAP teachers help children interact with each other by redirecting their requests for help by suggesting that they seek help from another child. When a child asks a teacher to intervene with another child, the teacher provides the child with a model of how to initiate the interaction; for example, by saying, “Ask Shauntaye, ‘May I use this truck?’” If a teacher sees that a child is interested in joining an activity but has not made any verbal request to be included, she might suggest, “Ask Larry, ‘May I have some playdough?’” In this way children are provided with a model phrase and the necessary vocabulary, and, because the teacher remains nearby to mediate the communication, usually experience a successful start to further social interaction.

As mentioned previously, many of these strategies are, of course, already in common use in other early childhood classrooms. At LAP, however, these techniques have been brought to the forefront of the curriculum effort, whereby they provide the framework for daily planning and for interaction between teachers and children. By highlighting the use of these techniques for language facilitation, the teachers at LAP have been able to help children with language impairments make significant progress within the context of the classroom while providing an optimum environment for typically developing English-speakers as well as second-language-learning children.

LITERACY DEVELOPMENT FOR SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNERS

There are five types of activities that early childhood educators are likely to use to help prepare young children for the challenges of reading and writing:

1. Activities that target letter recognition (alphabetic principle)
2. Activities that emphasize the sounds that make up words (phonological awareness)
3. Activities that show how books look and how they work (book and print concepts)
4. Activities that emphasize words and their meaning (vocabulary)
5. Activities that encourage telling stories, explaining how the world works, or building a fantasy world (discourse skills) (Tabors, 2002)

Let's think about how each of these types of activities might work with second-language learners.

Children develop alphabetic knowledge when teachers use activities that target letter recognition. These activities can be anything from singing the alphabet song, to identifying the first letters in children's names, to having children work with magnetic letters to begin using invented spelling. Simultaneously, teachers can help children develop phonological awareness by pointing out the sounds that words are made up of and how those sounds relate to letters of the alphabet. Concentrating on sounds in words that are highly familiar and important to children—like their names or names for objects in the room—will yield the best results. Using rhyming text in songs and poetry will also help children key into how when one sound in a word changes, it changes the meaning of the word.

Learning about the English alphabet is clearly useful for second-language-learning children, and it is something that they can begin quite early in their exposure to English. Furthermore, any activities that help English-speaking children develop phonological awareness in English will also be helpful for second-language-learning children. In fact, I found that the second-language learners in the study classroom concentrated on watching people speaking English to see how the sounds of English were formed with mouth, teeth, and tongue. Consequently, teachers who help children in the classroom “tune in” to the sounds of English will be helping both English speakers and second-language learners.

Book and print concepts are developed when teachers talk to children about various aspects of how books work. Book readings can include information about where the front and back of a book are, what kinds of information can be found on the cover (the title, the name of the author, the name of the illustrator), where the print is on the page, how the print is read, what a sentence looks like, and what different kinds of punctuation mean at the end of sentences. Including these types of information as part of the book reading process helps children who do not have a lot of book reading experience begin to understand the ins and outs of books.

What about book and print concepts for second-language learners? Here I think teachers need to think carefully about what these children can understand in the book-reading situation and plan accordingly. As mentioned in [Chapter 6](#), one technique for effective book readings with second-language learners involves developing more small-group book readings with particular groups of children so that the information provided during the session can be tailored to the group. As the children gain more understanding of English, they can be involved in more extensive discussions of book and print concepts.

Words, words, words, words. The more words children know, the more words they will have available to connect to the letters and sounds that they will meet in print when they begin to read. Teachers help children develop their vocabulary by intentionally presenting new words for children to learn as part of *every* activity in the classroom, by using and explaining new words in conversations with children, and by reading new words to children and helping them understand their meanings. Children should be learning 6 to 10 new words *a day* in the early childhood period. If they are spending time in early childhood classrooms, then the talk they hear and are involved in there needs to include lots and lots of new words.

Developing a vocabulary in English is, of course, one of the first jobs for second-language-learning children. In my research, I found that the study children would often pick up objects from around the classroom and bring them to someone to have them say the word for the object in English. Teachers who are aware that second-language learners need to learn lots of words in English will make sure that they are thoughtful about helping them understand what words mean. So, a classroom where the teacher is aware of the vocabulary needs of the children and is always explaining, defining, or showing children what a word means will be a supportive classroom for both English-speaking and English-learning children.

Finally, the talk that children hear and are involved in should help them develop more advanced discourse skills as well. What does this mean? We think of discourse skills as being able to use language in structured ways to go beyond the basics of conversation—for example, to tell a story about a past event, or to explain how something works, or to build a fantasy world with words. Teachers encourage the development of these types of linguistic structures when they ask open-ended questions such as, “What did you do over the weekend?” or “Why do you think the stone sinks in the water?” or “What did your baby do when you put her in the carriage?” But asking the question should not be the end of the interaction, just the beginning,

because teachers need to support children's efforts to use language to answer these sorts of questions, extending the conversations so that children develop the ability to sustain the interaction for a number of turns.

Given that English-speaking children are still developing these skills during the early childhood period, it should not be surprising that these higher-level skills in English are the most difficult for second-language learners. I found in my research that the area of the classroom where the English-speaking children used their discourse skills to the greatest extent was the sociodramatic play area, and it was not until the spring of the year that *any* of the second-language learners participated in play in this area. Apparently, they knew that they didn't know enough English to be effective participants in that type of play earlier in the school year. However, teachers who are aware of second-language learners' proficiencies and their need to develop discourse abilities can make sure that they have conversations with them, as well as with English speakers, that begin the process of building more sophisticated structures in English.

But are these language and literacy activities the only ones that can be meaningful in a classroom with children from diverse language backgrounds? What about the home languages and literacies of the second-language-learning children? Can they be incorporated into the classroom as well in ways that would be socially useful and cognitively challenging for all the children? The answer is "Absolutely." Not only *could* activities related to the home languages and literacies of the second-language-learning children be included, but they *should* be included. Why? For two very different but complementary reasons:

1. *This addition to the curriculum will be socially useful.* For the second-language-learning children, the inclusion of their home languages and literacies in the classroom curriculum provides them with the opportunity to be the experts and builds pride in the languages and cultures of their families. For the English-speaking children, the inclusion of other languages and literacies in the classroom curriculum provides them with insight into the capabilities of their classmates and their classmates' families and clues them into why these children may not be using a lot of English in the classroom right away.
2. *This addition to the curriculum will be cognitively challenging.* Both groups of children benefit from comparing languages and literacies in ways that help them develop metalinguistic awareness, which is the ability to think about how language works.

So, what would teachers need to do to follow this recommendation? Although many languages use an alphabet that is the same or similar to the one used in English (e.g., Spanish, French), many other languages are alphabetic but with different writing systems (Arabic) or are not alphabetic at all (Japanese). Finding out about the different writing systems represented among the languages of the children in the classroom can be a complicated job, but engaging parents or knowledgeable others in conversations along these lines—and then making that information available to the children—can be a very worthwhile activity. Labeling objects in the classroom using different colors for each label in a different language can help children see what different languages look like when written down and can help them begin the process of understanding that different languages look and sound different but that they are all used to talk about the world.

Of course, as soon as different languages are brought into the classroom, children will notice that the languages have different sounds. Often children can mimic the sounds of a language that they have heard even before they have begun to acquire any actual facility in a language. I call this learning the tune before learning the words of the song. For children to understand that these sounds represent meaningful messages to the people who use them, it is important to have speakers of different languages (parents or others) come to the classroom to read stories, sing songs, or present an activity in those languages. If there is a match between the language of the visitor and some of the children in the classroom, this will give those children a chance to be the experts and help their classmates to grasp what is happening.

Introducing books written in different languages will raise all children's awareness of the different forms that books can take. Finding books that are written in different scripts (e.g., Bengali, Chinese) or that are read from the back to the front (e.g., Hebrew) and having speakers of these languages demonstrate how these books are read emphasizes for children the variety of languages and literacies in the world. If printed books are not available and if there is enthusiasm for a parent involvement activity, it would be wonderful to have books written and illustrated by parents in their home language that would become part of the classroom library.

Children will be much more aware of the importance of words if they learn new names for the objects and concepts that they already have names for in one language. For the English-speaking children, this process will teach them that all languages use words as the building blocks for communication. For the second-language learners, this will make them the experts in providing names in their home language while they are acquiring new names in English. I would suggest that there be an even-up trade in the word department: Every time a second-language

learner wants to know a name for an object or concept in English, the trade-off would be to find out what that word would be in his or her home language. In this way, everyone in the classroom becomes a language learner.

In terms of discourse, I think it would be a good idea to concentrate on storytelling in different languages. This discourse form is nearly universal, although the way that storytelling is structured may be a bit different from culture to culture. For storytelling to be engaging in a language that some of the children don't understand, it will probably be important to have pictures or visuals of some kind to accompany the story or to have a plot line that the children already know. Again, the children who already speak the language in which the story is being told will be the experts and can act as the interpreters (but not the translators) of the story for their classmates. If they can take active roles in the storytelling, that will be even more exciting and affirming for them.

FACILITATING SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

The model of the classroom that works best for second-language-learning children that emerges from this chapter and [Chapter 6](#) is one in which the adults in the classroom provide opportunities for children to engage in useful and purposeful first- and second-language and -literacy interactions with sensitive interlocutors, both adults and peers. To achieve this goal, teachers should consider providing the following types of opportunities in their classrooms:

1. A routine and consistent organizational structure in which activities happen at regular intervals and in predictable ways
2. A curriculum that brings the home languages of the second-language learners into the classroom
3. A language- and literacy-rich environment in which teachers use techniques that help second-language learners understand, and then begin to use, their new language and literacy skills
4. Discussions with, or perhaps training of, English-speaking children in the classroom to help provide socially appropriate partners for second-language-learning children

5. A variety of organizational and curricular modifications (e.g., small-group inclusion, safe havens, voluntary sharing at circle time, engaging book-reading sessions, cooperative games, appropriate first- and second-language and -literacy activities) that will help second-language-learning children feel more comfortable, included, and competent

By providing an environment that includes these opportunities and by encouraging children to take advantage of these opportunities, early childhood educators can help individual second-language-learning children make progress at the rate and in the way that best fits their social capabilities and cognitive strengths.

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