

Language Scaffolding Introduction

This Language Scaffolding strategy has been developed to help you expose young children to a wide variety of vocabulary words, and to encourage you to use every opportunity during the school day to build language skills. Owens (2001) noted that the best time to build children's language is within the first five years of life. The more words and language structures that a child is exposed to, the more he or she will be able to understand and use these words in grammatically correct phrases and sentences. In addition, children who have a well-developed vocabulary are more likely to become good readers. One of our goals, as prekindergarten teachers, is to ensure that all children have a strong foundation in language and vocabulary that will contribute to reading success in elementary school. Language Scaffolding is a strategy that promotes oral language skills.

In this booklet, you will find that each language-building activity is paired with a daily classroom activity and vocabulary words associated with that activity. By making a conscious effort to use these vocabulary words and language activities, you will be helping to foster vocabulary and language development in your children.

You may proceed through the activities, beginning with an activity that you are either unfamiliar with, or one that you think your children may benefit from the most. Regardless of how you choose to move through the activities, the idea is that you will continue to use previously-learned activities as you introduce new activities.

Activities for Promoting Language in Preschoolers

The following activities can be used in any preschool setting to facilitate a rich language environment and to promote communication development. The activities can be used throughout the day, and can be embedded into daily routines:

[Encourage Peer-to-Peer Conversations](#) – Encouraging peer-to-peer interactions gives children the opportunity to interact and converse with one another. For example, if a child comes to you and says, “I want the red crayon,” you could redirect the child to the other child who has the red crayon. You could say, “Ask Brett, ‘May I use the red crayon when you are finished?’”

[Promote Choice Making](#) - There are many times throughout the day when you can offer choices of two or more objects to children. Some of these choices include materials during play activities or foods during snack time. Children are most likely to make a choice when a preferred object is presented with a non-preferred object. During snack time, you can offer a choice by saying, “Would you like the raisins or goldfish?” Then encourage the child to verbalize his/her choice. Keep in mind that children are more likely to communicate their desire for preferred objects.

[Narrate Events](#) – Narration is like being a commentator for a sports event heard over the radio. Your role as narrator is to talk about everything that the child is doing as if you were describing it to someone who is not in the room to see it. The goal of narration is to pair the child’s play and actions with the appropriate language. As a child repeatedly hears the words that go along with what he/she is doing, that child is more likely to use more productive language about his own play. For example, if children are in the block area, you can narrate by saying, “Look how Jimmy is taking the red block and placing it on the very top of the tower. Oh no! I think it’s going to fall! Crash!! The tower fell to the ground.”

[Present Vocabulary with Pictures or Objects](#) – Pair actual objects (when possible) or pictures of objects with new words. Children are more likely to learn the meaning of a word or the function of an object when the actual object/picture is present. In this way, children can pair what you say about the object (auditory input) with what the object looks like (visual input) and what the object feels like (tactile input). For example, while holding the broom in the housekeeping center you could say, “This is a broom. We can use it to sweep up dirt from the floor.”

[Use Specific Language](#) – When talking to children, you should be as specific as possible with the language you use. You should avoid using general, non-specific words (e.g., that, there, and it). For example, rather than saying to a child, “Can you please put *that* over *there*?,” be specific and say, “Can you please put the *book on my desk*?” This way, children will hear the names of objects over and over. The more children hear a word being used correctly, the more likely they will be to use that word properly on their own.

Activities for Promoting Language in Preschoolers (Cont.)

Create Silly Situations - During a daily routine, set up a situation that is silly or out of the ordinary. The implementation of this activity is most effective when used during a familiar routine. For example, during morning circle, you can ask the children to get their blankets and go to their spots for nap time. This creates an opportunity for the children to explain the absurdity of the situation! When you create a silly situation, you are encouraging children to verbalize an explanation which contributes to language development.

Provide Opportunities Where Help is Needed – There are times when you can set up situations so that children will need to ask for assistance which is likely to encourage communication. Presenting attractive materials that require assistance to operate can encourage children to communicate their need for help from adults and peers. For example, during outside play, you can give a child a bottle of bubbles with the top screwed on too tightly. If the child wants to blow bubbles, he or she will have to ask for your assistance in opening the bottle. Keep in mind that some children may not have the language skills to ask for help. Therefore, it may be necessary for you to model how to ask for help. For example, if you notice a child becoming frustrated because he or she wants to blow bubbles but is unable to open the bottle, you might say, “It looks like you are having difficulty opening the bottle of bubbles. Would you like to ask for help?”

Model Desired Responses – You can use modeling to demonstrate to children a sound, a word, or language form that they do not yet produce on their own. Modeling can also be used to demonstrate to children what it is they are expected to say or do. You can model appropriate behaviors and language by taking the first turn in a game, correcting an incorrect word pronunciation, or by having a child repeat a grammatically correct sentence. For example, if a child points at a picture of a star and says, “Look! It’s a tar!,” you may reply, “Yes, I see the star. Can you say ‘star’?” This encourages the child to pronounce the word correctly.

Alter Routines – Altering routines is purposely creating a circumstance where something is out of the ordinary. One way to implement this activity is by not giving the children all the materials they need to carry out a familiar activity, which gives children the opportunity to make a request. This is an effective prompt for language when the cues are obvious. For example, during a painting activity, you can provide the children with smocks, paper, and a paintbrush, but “forget” to supply the children with paint. This would give the children the opportunity to request the paint. Please keep in mind that the children must be familiar with the routine before it is altered.

Expand Child’s Response – Expansions occur when an adult fills in the missing features of something a child has said, along with repeating the child’s utterance. For example, if a child says “ball,” the adult may expand on that by saying, “Yes, I see the small red ball.” In this way, the adult is acknowledging what the child has said and exposing him or her to more descriptive language. When an adult expands on a child’s utterance, the adult should *always* include the word or words the child said in his or her original utterance.

Encourage Peer-to-Peer Conversations

Daily Activity: Outside Play

Vocabulary:

Sand

Slide

Swing

Catch

Throw

Wagon

Playground

Safety rules

Monkey bars

Jogging

Bench

Jump rope

Jungle gym

Gymnastics

Cooperate



Encourage Peer-to-Peer Conversations - When a child complains that he wants to use a specific toy that another child is already using, such as a shovel, give him the words to use and encourage him to ask the other child for the toy. “May I please have a turn with the shovel?”

Promote Choice-Making

Daily Activity: Dramatic Play Center

Vocabulary:

Sink

Broom

Stove

Oven

Refrigerator

Microwave

High chair

Cupboard

Faucet

Iron

Chef

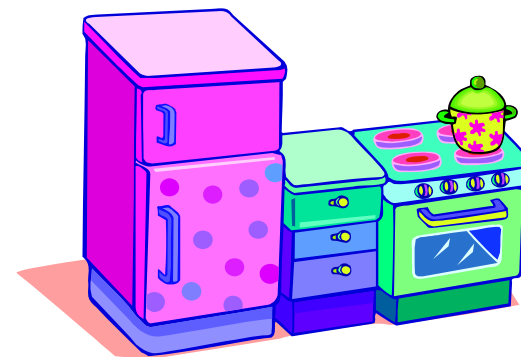
Recipe

Freezer

Burner

Utensils

Gourmet



Promote Choice-Making – The teacher can ask a child, “Do you want to cook your brownies in the *oven* or in the *microwave*?” The child should be encouraged to answer, “I want to cook my brownies in the (*oven/microwave*).”

Narrate Events

Daily Activity: Dramatic Play Center

Vocabulary:

Tie

Dress

Dress up

Skirt

Make-believe

Pretend

Costume

Mask

Gown

Role play

Mask

Mirror

Drama

Jewelry

Relatives

Appearance

Veterinarian



Narrate Events – As the children are pretending to be veterinarians, talk about what you see them doing as if you were narrating their play. For example, “I see Hanna listening to the puppy’s heart. I like the way Bradley is helping to hold the puppy while Hanna examines it.” The teacher can also narrate her own actions. For example, as you model using dress-up clothes, say everything as you do it: “Today I want to wear the princess dress. First, I’ll put the dress over my head. Now I need some help with the zipper on the back. Amy, will you help me with the zipper?”

Present Vocabulary with Pictures or Objects

Daily Activity: Art

Vocabulary:

Color

Draw

Paint

Paintbrush

Chalk

Smock

Artist

Watercolors

Stencils

Pastel

Easel

Canvas

Sketch

Landscape

Primary color

Secondary color



Present Vocabulary with Pictures or Objects - As you introduce a painting activity, show the children the actual objects as you introduce the materials they will use. “Today we are going to paint. We need to wear a smock to protect our clothes (show smock). Clip your paper onto the easel (show easel). It will keep our paper upright so that we can paint easily.”

Use Specific Language

Daily Activity: Music & Movement



Vocabulary:

Stop	CD player
Go	Tape player
Listen	Instrument
March	Composer
Music	Lyrics
Clap hands	Pitch
Sing	Rhythm
Dance	Melody
Beat	Tempo

Use Specific Language – When passing out musical instruments to the children, be specific about naming the instruments as you give them to each child. In addition, when having the children put the instruments away, be specific about naming the musical instrument as well as its location, “Sarah, put the *tambourine* on the bottom shelf.”

Create Silly Situations

Daily Activity: Circle Time & Reading

Vocabulary:

Read

Story

Cover

Title

Pages

Pictures

Author

Puppet

Raise hand

Illustrator

Describe

Beginning

Fiction

Non-fiction

Vocabulary

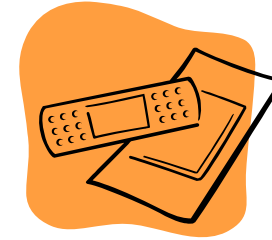
Illustrations



Create Silly Situations - Using a book the children have seen before and are familiar with, hold the book upside down and begin reading it to the children. Wait for them to notice, point out, and comment on what you're doing wrong!

Provide Opportunities Where Help is Needed

Daily Activity: Hygiene & First Aid



Vocabulary:

Soap

Sick

Scrub

Rinse

Nurse

Tissue

Band-Aid

Medicine

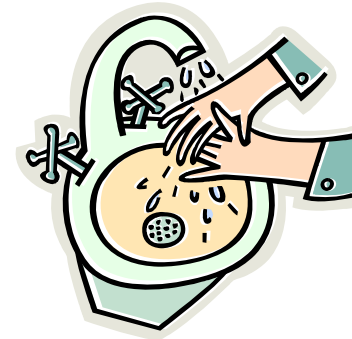
Sunburn

Clinic

Emergency

Medication

Prevention



Provide Opportunities Where Help is Needed – Leave the tissue box unopened in your classroom. When a child comes to you with the unopened box, encourage him/her to ask for help opening the box. One way a child might ask for help in this situation is by saying, “Can you please help me open the box?” You can also do the same with an unopened soap bottle in the bathroom.

Model Desired Response

Daily Activity: Calendar & Weather

Vocabulary:

Today	Cloudy
Tomorrow	Windy
Yesterday	Date
Calendar	Days of the week
Year	Season
Months	Holiday
Before	Lightning
After	Temperature
Weather	Decade
Sunny	Humid
Rainy	Overcast



Model Desired Response - When you ask a child, “What day is tomorrow?,” and the child replies with “Tomorrow Thursday,” you can model the correct response as “Tomorrow *will be* Thursday.”

Alter Routines

Daily Activity: Meal times

Vocabulary:

Fork

Spoon

Knife

Plate

Bowl

Chew

Napkin

Hungry

Manners

Hand (pass) out

Menu

Dessert

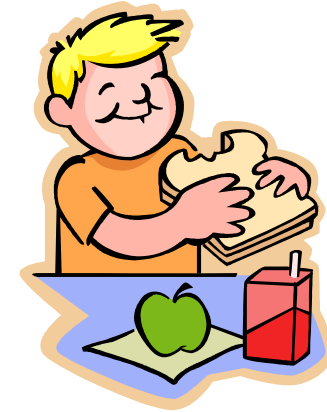
Vegetable

Delicious

Nutritious

Cafeteria

Appetite



Alter Routines – When providing children with their food and drink, “forget” to give them something that they will need, like cups for their juice or spoons for their ice cream. Wait for the children to comment on what you’ve “forgotten” to give them!

Expand Child's Response

Daily Activity: Math

Vocabulary:

Shape

Circle

Square

Triangle

Rectangle

How many?

Numbers

Long

Short

Measure

Pattern

Add

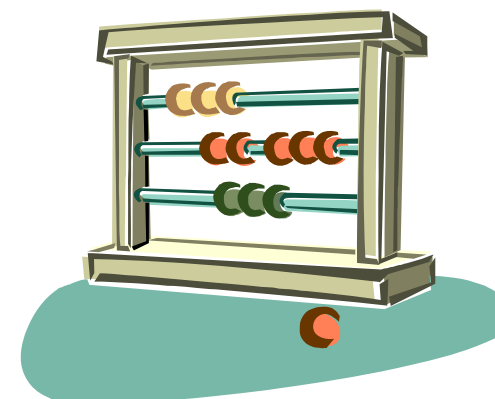
Subtract

Cube

Pyramid

Diagonal

Curve



Expand Child's Response – When working with children on counting, you might ask, “How many ladybugs do you have?” If a child responds with just the number (e.g. “three”), you could expand that utterance by saying, “You’re right, you do have *three black-spotted* ladybugs.” Always make sure to include the child’s response (“three”) when you expand his/her utterance.