

Supporting children's talking listening, reading and writing at home



Speaking and Listening

This resource will look at some ideas as to what we can do, at home in particular, to support learning by building these skills for children.

Speaking and Listening are two of the equal components of the Australian Curriculum and the NSW English Syllabus K-6.

‘Children ... need to talk, and to experience a rich diet of spoken language, in order to think and learn. ... talk is arguably the true foundation of learning.’

Alexander (2006) p.9

The spoken language children have when they arrive at school usually presents ‘phenomena in a continuous flow’ (Rossbridge & Rushton 2010 p.9). This shows in their early writing, with ‘and then ...’, ‘and then ...’ solving the problem of how to continue a story or a retelling. Most children come to school able to carry on a conversation with their peers and with the adults they come in contact with.

As well, the average Australian child starts school with a vocabulary of around 5000 words. This vocabulary has been collected from interactions and experiences from home and the talk around them. Children have an amazing capacity for learning.

Parents and teachers have reciprocal roles in developing the spoken language skills of our children.

It is the work of learning in school to develop more academic, more written-like use of the language as students progress through the grades.

It is the work of parents and carers to provide opportunities, activities and support that children can bring to their learning.

‘Children construct meaning not only from the interplay of what they newly encounter and what they already know, but also from interaction with others.’

Alexander (2006) p.11



Opportunities at home

Home and community life can provide many opportunities for talk and interaction with others.

- Family gatherings and visits for talk with both immediate and extended family members
- Excursions to parks, National Parks, the zoo, the beach/lake/river, different museums, light shows, exhibitions, performances, festivals and local celebrations, as well as more formal commemorations such as ANZAC Day ceremonies
- Activities around creating things, such as planning menus, cooking, building, fishing, household repairs, planting trees/vegetables and gardening
- Household jobs such as decluttering, sorting through photos, grocery shopping, visiting the library, purchasing sporting equipment
- Reading to and with each other and talking about the characters, events and predictions in imaginative texts; checking out the characteristics of vehicles, fishing or camping or sporting gear in brochures and magazines
- Getting about - walking or riding to the skate park, shops or park or to the Saturday match, exploring along riverside tracks, making use of National Parks. Talk about what you see. Let the children talk about what they can see and hear, and what they think about the places you go. Try to minimise the necessary but limited questions about gear and picking up time.
- Playing games outside with a football of any type, flying kites, paper plane flying contests, playing with Frisbees – check out ‘disc golf’ [here](#)
- Playing games inside – I am a great fan of board games, playing cards, UNO and jigsaws, as these provide social development, conversations, and the chance for children to shine as they build their skills. Jenga is loud and fun. Be prepared to lose graciously – remember that capacity to learn.

In these activities there will be continuous building of vocabulary within its appropriate context; each requires interaction with a range of people, and the chance to reflect and repeat and extend the activity.



Which language?

Talk contributes to overall development of knowledge and understanding of language and how it is used. While Standard Australian English is the language of the classroom and eventually of academic success, this success will be assisted by the benefits of talk – and reading to and with the child - in any language.

Use of the home language ensures children are able to concentrate on their understandings and conceptual development. They will bring these to school.

Asking questions

Questions from adults are often ‘loaded’ or anticipating a particular response. For example, people ask about school, like what the child is learning, the teacher’s name and what s/he is like, and the favourite subject. These are areas that can be touchy – children are usually assumed to dislike school, so the questions are loaded even before the conversation starts.

Often subject areas are not clearly delineated in the daily timetable, and students can have several teachers with whom they come in contact every day. So they are not easy to answer.

Suggestions:

- Try ‘What are you doing?’ ‘Tell me about your drawing?’ ‘How is the homework going?’ What do you think that part of the building/machine/whatever is used for?’ Clearly, these are easier when in a context.
- Have a context for questions, such as ‘I noticed Ms Bloggs had the soccer ball out today. What was that about?’
- Questions shouldn’t be an interrogation, or a test of memory.
- Questions should require more than a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response – our children need to learn how to make sentences in their speaking before they can successfully do so in writing.
- Listen to the response. If the answer is not clear, try ‘What do you mean?’ or ‘I don’t understand – can you explain it a different way?’
- A follow-up could be ‘What will you do next?’ or ‘How do you think you could solve that problem?’
- Don’t pretend to be the expert in everything. It is more valuable to admit to not knowing, and respond with ‘I don’t know. It looks like ... or it could be for ... I wonder how we could find out.’

Persevere. It takes time for collaborative meaning-making to develop.

For information on supporting reading, see previous blogs [Reading 1](#) – reading to your child, and [Reading 2](#) signs and symbols.

References

Alexander, R. (2006) Towards Dialogic Teaching: Rethinking classroom talk 3rd Edition Dialogos: UK

Rossbridge, J. & Rushton, K. (2010) Conversations about Text: Teaching Grammar Using Literary Texts PETAA: Newtown