Talk Together

Supporting Oral Language Development

FILM 1.
USER PACK

The aim of this User Pack is to help you get the most out of our Language Assessment film series.

What is included?

1. Tips for Watching - suggestions for how to get the most out of viewing the film.

2. **Reflection Questions** - questions to help you relate the film content to your context.

3. Talk to Text Cards - cards which provide a text version of the topics discussed in the film.

Talk Together

Supporting Oral Language Development

Film 1:
Assessing Speaking and Listening Skills:
What is important?

Watch the film **here**.
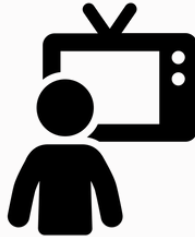
Tips for Watching

- Use a device with good sound quality – the audio is an important part of the film.
- Find a quiet location to watch the film – you can also watch the film as a group with colleagues.
- Use the 3 Rs as you watch: Rewind, Reflect, Repeat – pause and re-watch parts of the film to help you consider what has been said or allow more time to read on-screen text.
- Watch the film 2 or 3 times – this will help you to grasp any new ideas presented.
- Take notes while you watch – you may want to talk with colleagues about the content of the film afterwards.

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Film 1:
Assessing Speaking and Listening Skills:
What is important?

Reflection Questions

Take a few minutes to think about what you have learned in the film. If you are viewing the film as a group, you can discuss these questions together.

1. Consider language assessments you have come across before. **Which dimensions of language did they seek to measure?**

2. The film discusses the importance of language for children to access education and engage with the world around the. **How is language important for children in your country or community?**

3. **What kind of opportunities do you think children in your context get to develop their speaking and listening skills?** How could you provide more opportunities for children?

TALK TO TEXT CARDS

Film 1:
Assessing Speaking and Listening Skills: What is important?

1. **THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING AND LISTENING FOR LEARNING**

Language is essential for understanding what is around us. When we speak to ask questions about the world around us, we are using language. When we listen to explanations about the world around us, we are listening to language. So speaking and listening, is a foundation to new learning and for new skills, a new knowledge.

For example, learning to read and write depends on spoken language, whether it is recognizing and decoding the word *tiger* or the word *bear* in the storybook, or writing your thoughts about the story you've just read saying, *I liked the sleepy tiger and the growling bear*. These are all dependent on how good your spoken language skills are.

But literacy learning is not the only place where language plays a role. Language plays a role in the learning about emotions, in our developing social skills. For example, human need language to communicate how you feel, that you feel anxious, that you're feeling worried. That you're feeling angry. You also need language to understand the world around you, how others feel. Are they feeling happy or are they feeling joyful? Are they feeling hugely excited about something?

Assessing children's language is a good way to understand the profile of strengths and weaknesses.

2. WHY ASSESS CHILDREN'S LANGUAGE SKILLS?

It's important to assess a child's language in order to understand whether they're on the right track of development and also whether their development is at the right rate. In turn, this is important because language is a foundation for learning.

If you think about it, language is important for all aspects of education because the education curriculum is delivered through language itself. So, it's important to assess language in order to check that a child is in a good position to benefit from their education.

Teachers vary in their knowledge about child language acquisition. Ideally, all teachers need to know something about the stages of language development and what is expected at each age. But they don't need to have detailed knowledge as for example, a linguist might have. With that appreciation of language as a backdrop, then teachers are well placed to assess language.

3. WHAT ARE THE DIMENSIONS OF CHILD LANGUAGE?

Child language is a **multidimensional system**, but these different dimensions interact with each other. It is useful to think of child language as complex, as something that comes together because of different building blocks.

What are these building blocks? One would be **phonology**, which is the sound patterns that define a language. Another would be **vocabulary**. This refers to all the words that make up the language.

The third would be the rules of putting these words together to construct sentences: the **grammar** of the language. The fourth, which depends on the phonology, the vocabulary and the grammar, comes together to make what we call **discourse**. In discourse, what we are looking at is the extended use of language. It is many sentences put together and one uses this to communicate or to understand. Examples of discourse include conversations or listening to a story.

4. THE PACE OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT VARIES BETWEEN CHILDREN

One way to think about language is to see how different children in a given age band are displaying that particular skill. For example, if it's vocabulary and you're looking at five-year-olds, some children would be ahead, some would be a little far behind and some would be really far behind. Similarly with grammar, with phonology, and with discourse.

Why is it that different children develop at different speeds? And why is it that within a child, different dimensions develop quicker than others? The reasons are several, but one of the most commonly seen reasons is the lack of opportunity or the presence of opportunity.

Some children have a rich language background. They have a place where they can use their language. They are encouraged to use their language and encouraged to risk using the language so that they can try and fail, but then try again. Children who have a lot of storytelling or who have a lot of book reading happening to them, they have access to wider and wider vocabulary, for example. This creates an opportunity to develop receptive vocabulary. For children who have a lot of conversations happening around them, they have an opportunity for them to use that expressive vocabulary, expressive grammar and expressive discourse skills. Opportunity makes a big difference to the speed at which each aspect of language will develop.

There are various reasons why children might have difficulties with spoken language. First of all, some children have difficulties with all aspects of their development: walking, crawling, feeding, and also language. And in many ways, we would expect language development to be slow in these children because everything is just a bit slow to get going. Sometimes, and of more concern to teachers and parents, we find children whose language development is out of step or out of line with other aspects of their development.

Some other children have difficulties with language because it's part of some general physical or medical condition, for example, a genetic problem like Down's Syndrome, which itself can cause slow language development. And yet other children have developmental language difficulties that are somewhat unexplained. This is sometimes referred to as developmental language disorder. And these children have specific difficulty in learning language, although they can learn other skills without any difficulty.

5. WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO ASSESS?

A child's language system is multidimensional. It is important to assess expressive language skills and receptive language skills.

Given that language is multidimensional with dimensions such as vocab, grammar, phonology and discourse, it is essential that language assessment is also multidimensional.

All of this together gives us the kind of information we want to support children's language learning. Why do we need to support children's language learning? Because that is what supports a deeper understanding of their own emotional life, their social skills, their engagement with text and books, and importantly, their future success in the world of academics.