Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classes
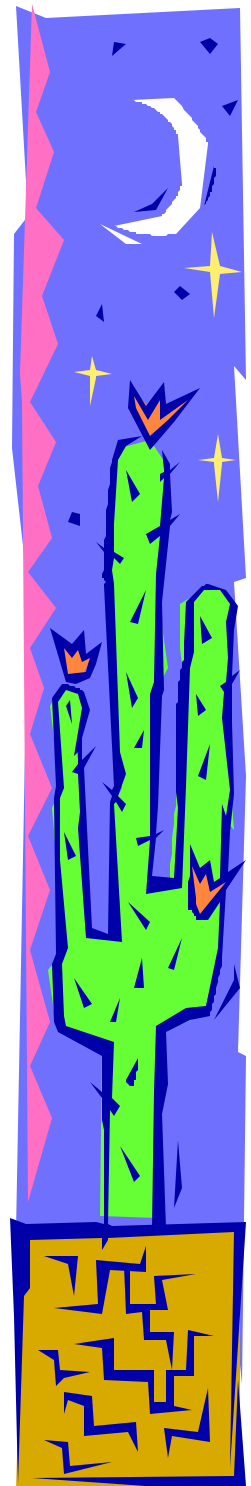
A Self Assessment Tool for Teachers

The self assessment tool is designed to help preschool teachers implement practices to enhance language development during typical classroom activities. Goals to promote language development are identified in six areas: *encouraging complex verbal reasoning; increasing the use of decontextualized language; developing personal narrative skills; facilitating interaction among children; teaching new vocabulary; and supporting second language acquisition.*

The first section focuses on the teacher's ability to create opportunities for communiation and respond to the children's communications in order to promote the following language goals: **encouraging complex verbal reasoning, increasing the use of decontextualized language, and developing personal narrative skills.** Strategies important to these goals include structuring activities for problem solving; providing opportunities for story telling and pretend play; and engaging children in conversations beyond the here and now. The second section focuses on the teacher's use of strategies to f**acilitate interaction among children**. Activities can be structured to encourage peer interaction, and the teacher's comments and questions can promote the social interaction that is crucial to language development during the preschool years. The third area in the self assessment tool focuses on **teaching new vocabulary**, and includes the teacher's efforts to teach new words and concepts. The fourth area, **supporting second language acquisition**, includes strategies such as using slow, simple statements with gestures to encourage comprehension and providing opportunities for children to use English. A final section provides a space for noting behaviors typical of a responsive interaction style that encourage communication, problem solving, and language learning.

Teachers use the self assessment tool by reflecting on their interactions with children during a typical preschool classroom activity. A plus (+) is placed next to each statement or "indicator" of teacher behavior that supports the language goals. Columns are provided for teachers to identify ways that those strategies were used successfully and ways that they would like to improve their use of particular language facilitation strategies. The self assessment tool can be shared with all members of the classroom team (teachers, teacher aides, special educators, and speech-language clinicians) so that all team members can work together to identify ways to enhance the language learning opportunities in the preschool classroom.

A tool to support teachers use of language facilitiation strategies during preschool activities.

Self Assessment of Language Facilitation Practices

Teacher:_____ Date:_____ Activity:_____	+ skill used - skill not used	Ways that I do this well	Ways that I could do this better
GOALS / **INDICATORS**			

GOALS		INDICATORS	+ skill used / - skill not used	Ways that I do this well	Ways that I could do this better
Encourage complex verbal reasoning **Increase use of decontextualized language** **Develop personal narrative skills**	Creating opportunities for language learning	I create problems in the environment for children to solve			
		I provide opportunities to talk about objects/events beyond here & now			
		I participate in and encourage pretend play			
		I provide opportunities for children to direct the activity			
		I wait for children to request materials or turns			
		I model language by describing objects and actions during play			
		I model stories and sequence events during play			
		I add written language to activities to promote literacy			
	Responding to children's communications	I interact at the child's eye level			
		I follow the child's interest and focus of attention			
		I respond to children when they want to show or tell me something			
		I repeat the child's ideas/utterances (using longer, more correct sentences)			
		I make comments and ask questions to continue conversations			
		I ask open-ended questions			
		I provide positive feedback when children use new language skills			

Facilitate interaction among children	I direct children to communicate and interact with peers			
	I draw attention to other children in the group by commenting on what they are doing			
	I comment/praise children's attempts at peer interaction			
	I select (and structure) activities that require peer interaction			
	I comment on feelings/emotions of myself and others			
Teach new vocabulary words and/or concepts	I use the correct word for objects/events in immediate environment			
	I use words to express important concepts			
	I define words verbally ("joyful means feeling happy")			
	I give examples of words ("green like grass")			
	I repeat unfamiliar words often during an activity			
	I demonstrate concepts with appropriate actions and/or props			
Support emerging 2nd language skills	I slow my rate of speech			
	I use gestures with English			
	I rephrase questions/comments to make simpler when not understood			
	I add translations in the child's native language as needed to help a child understand			
	I translate the child's non-English utterance to English			
	I encourage the child to use English			
	I provide positive feedback for a child's attempts to use English			
Develop a responsive interaction style	I give the child enough time to respond			
	My speech and instructions are provided slowly and clearly			
	I give the child time to talk			
	I let the child direct the activity/interaction as much as possible			

Wilcox, M.J., Murphy, K.M., Bacon, C.K., and Thomas, S. (2000). *Promoting use of language facilitation practices by Head Start teachers.* Poster presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Convention, Washington, DC.