

Developmental Observation Topic Plan

Topic: Engaging with Words

What parents will be observing:

- How everyday interactions and routines can be rich opportunities for language development.
- How their child responds to and engages with words, sounds, and gestures throughout the day.
- How their own use of language—tone, repetition, labeling, and responsiveness—supports their child’s communication skills.



Environment



Set up areas that reflect everyday routines and experiences where language naturally occurs. Include:

- Pretend Play Area: Mini kitchen, grocery store, or laundry setup with labeled items and picture cards to encourage naming and storytelling.
- Sensory Area: Items like textured fabrics, water play, or sand with descriptive word cards to encourage parents to label sensations.
- Music & Movement Corner: Instruments, scarves, and a playlist of songs with repetitive lyrics and rhymes. Include printed lyrics for parents to sing along.
- Mirror Station: For face-to-face interactions, babbling, and naming facial features/emotions.
- Book Nook: Books with props and puppets to act out the stories.
- Word Wall: Display common words used in routines with visuals.



Opening Discussion



A. Hello Song

Hello (child's name), Hello (parent's name), How are you? How are you?
We're so glad to see you! We're so glad to see you!
Come and play! Come and play!

Another hello song can be used as the facilitator sees fit, but the same hello song should be used each week so that parents and children learn it and can sing along.

B. Introducing the Developmental Observation Topic

- a. Providing information on the DOT

Parents can build strong early literacy skills by starting simple, language-rich interactions from infancy. Reading aloud daily beginning at birth helps strengthen brain development, enriches vocabulary, and nurtures early social-emotional connections, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics, which emphasizes shared reading as foundational for later school readiness. One easy way to incorporate more language into interactions with infants and toddlers is to narrate activities that you are doing together. Caregivers can choose a routine each day that they will narrate to their child such as diaper changes or bath time. Additionally, caregivers can point out words that are all around children in their environment and read the words to the child, such as signs at a supermarket, labels on items in the cupboard, or street signs while driving.

Parents can further support emerging literacy by making reading interactive and enjoyable. Asking questions during shared reading, pointing out new words, and encouraging children to turn pages or comment on pictures all build vocabulary, comprehension, and print awareness. Evidence-based early literacy resources also emphasize everyday conversations, playful language activities, and engaging storybooks as tools to deepen oral language and early learning. These practices are shown to improve long-term academic outcomes. By creating a warm, consistent reading routine and treating literacy as a joyful shared experience, parents lay a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

You can find more information to share with parents about this topic at aap.org, naeyc.org, and nces.ed.gov.

b. Sharing what we already know

Ask parents:

- i. What words does your child use or respond to most often?
- ii. When do you notice your child trying to communicate?
- iii. What routines seem to spark the most interaction?

c. Summarizing the main points

- i. Everyday routines are powerful opportunities for language learning.
- ii. Children learn words through repetition, labeling, and responsive interactions.
- iii. Engaging with words helps children express themselves, understand others, and feel connected.

C. Describing the Environment

Today's environment includes...

- Pretend Play Area: Mini kitchen, grocery store, or laundry setup with labeled items and picture cards to encourage naming and storytelling.
- Sensory Area: Items like textured fabrics, water play, or sand with descriptive word cards to encourage parents to label sensations.
- Music & Movement Corner: Instruments, scarves, and a playlist of songs with repetitive lyrics and rhymes. Include printed lyrics for parents to sing along.
- Mirror Station: For face-to-face interactions, babbling, and naming facial features/emotions.
- Book Nook: Books with props and puppets to act out the stories.
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D. Suggesting Things to Try

Today we would like you to try...

- Narrate what they're doing ("Now we're putting on your socks!").
- Label objects and actions ("This is your spoon. You're eating!").
- Repeat favorite words and phrases ("Up! Up! Up we go!").
- Use gestures and facial expressions to reinforce meaning.
- Sing simple songs or rhymes during routines.
- Pause and wait for their child to respond - watch for eye contact, gestures, or sounds.

E. Making Predictions

You will be watching to see how your child responds to the different things we try. Remember that children of different ages and temperaments will react differently.

- What do you think your child will want to do first?
- How will they respond to the different things we talked about trying?
- What activity will hold your child's attention the best?



Parent-Child Observation Time



As you interact with each dyad, be sure to:

- Commend parents when you see them using skills that might be new to them or feel awkward, such as narrating what they are doing out loud or pointing out the labels on items and reading them to their child.
- As parents try different things, talk to them about what you see their child being most responsive to.
- If parents struggle to narrate what they are doing out loud, consider briefly modeling this skill while you play with the child together.



Transitions



A. From Activity to Snack

Some ideas for including the theme into your transition and snack include:

- Sing the ABCs while you move from parent-child time to snack
- Have a small finger food for snack and large print letters on the table. Encourage parents and children to use their snack to form the letters on the table.
- Have several snack options and have them labeled with both words and pictures next to them. Encourage parents to point to and read the labels to the children.

B. From Snack to Song and Games

Sing songs with a fun rhyme scheme or the ABCs to move from snack to the area where song and games will be done.



Parent-Child Song and Games



Examples of games:

- Alphabet Treasure Hunt
 - Hide foam letters or magnet letters around the room.
 - Have toddlers find one and bring it to their parent, have parents carry their infants around looking for letters
 - Have parents say the letter sound together with their child (“This is B, it says buh!”).
- Alphabet puzzles
 - If you have them available, set out the alphabet puzzles that are 2 pieces that connect with a letter on one side and a picture on the other (A and Apple) or the wooden puzzles that have the cutout spaces where the wooden letters can be slotted in.
 - Allow parents to put together the puzzles with their children.

Examples of songs:

- "Apples and Bananas" – Focuses on vowel sounds, playful rhyming with letter changes.
- "Bingo" – Spells B-I-N-G-O throughout the song.
- "Old MacDonald Had a Farm" – Spells E-I-E-I-O, and is heavy on repetitive rhyme structures
- "Five Little Ducks" – Uses rhyme and number sequencing.
- "The Name Song" – Rhyming name patterns (“Bobby, Bobby, bo-Bobby...”)



Closing Discussion



A. Review Predictions

Ask parents:

- What did you notice about your child's engagement?
- What words or routines seemed most exciting?
- What strategies worked best for keeping your child's attention?

B. Main Points

- Everyday routines are powerful opportunities for language learning.
- Children learn words through repetition, labeling, and responsive interactions.
- Engaging with words helps children express themselves, understand others, and feel connected.

C. Carry-over to Home

- Pick one routine (e.g., diaper change, snack time) and narrate it daily.
- Use favorite songs or rhymes during transitions.
- Create a "word basket" with labeled items for play.
- Visit the library and choose books about everyday life.

D. Good-Bye Song

Good-bye (child's name), Good-bye (adult's name), Good-bye (child's name)
We're glad you came to play

Another good-bye song can be used as the facilitator sees fit, but the same good-bye song should be used each week so that parents and children learn it and can sing along.