

Creating Language-Rich Preschool Classroom Environments

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- ◆ Do children at your preschool have strong language and literacy skills?
- ◆ Do children with language disabilities participate in general preschool classrooms?
- ◆ Do educators at your school collaborate in language-rich curriculums?
- ◆ Do you have sufficient funding for a quality preschool program?

These are broad, ambitious questions, and we hope to set you on your way to answering them and ensuring the success of all the children in your preschool program.

This article describes a systematic, team-based process for achieving language-rich classroom environments for preschool children (see box, "What Does the Literature Say About Language-Rich Classroom Environments?"). A fictitious school, Dell Preschool, served as the program site for the five-step collaborative process for achieving such environments (see box, "Dell Preschool").

A Collaborative Process for Creating Language-Rich Classroom Environments

It is, of course, one thing to know what a language-rich classroom environment looks like and another thing to put one's ideas and intentions into everyday practice. My experiences as a consultant for

school districts that are attempting to implement language-rich classrooms suggests that a team-based action plan incorporating the engagement and expertise of diverse local constituents is the best route to actualization. The five steps to actualizing a team-based action plan include identifying a team, developing a philosophy, designing the physical space, designing daily language plans, and ensuring quality adult-child interaction. Table 1 summarizes each of these five steps.

Identifying a Team

One team should be organized for each classroom for which a language-rich environment is proposed. Although teams in a school can work together, action plans need to be individualized for each classroom. The team should include everyone who is involved in education and intervention for children in the classroom, including the classroom teacher, the classroom assistant, relevant specialists (e.g., speech-language pathologist, physical therapist), and any family resource coordinators. The team should also include one or more parents and a program administrator, if possible. One team at Dell Preschool consisted of the classroom teacher, the classroom assistant, the

Title I coordinator, a reading specialist, a family resource specialist, a student's parent, and the assistant principal. The facilitator of the team should be the classroom teacher, who is most vested in achieving a rigorous, doable, and effective action plan.

The key to creating and implementing language-rich classroom environments is infusing the classroom with rich adult-child interactions. One teacher and one assistant cannot do this job for 15 to 20 children. The subsequent steps in the action plan are undertaken by the entire team with the understanding that each team member has made a commitment to being actively involved in the classroom. By going through the next four steps, each team member will be fully prepared (and committed) to contribute in a systematic, consistent way to the language richness of the classroom environment.

Developing a Philosophy

Classrooms are idiosyncratic environments that reflect sociocultural aspects of the community being served, as well as administrative choices (e.g., curriculum), teacher values and skills (e.g., instructional quality, physical organization), and the children's needs and strengths. Once the team has been



What Does the Literature Say About Language-Rich Classroom Environments?

What Is a Language-Rich Classroom Environment?

A language-rich classroom environment is one in which children are exposed deliberately and recurrently to high-quality verbal input among peers and adults and in which adult-child verbal interactions are characterized by high levels of adult responsiveness. The five key elements of this definition are in its explicit references to (a) exposure, (b) deliberateness, (c) recurrence, (d) high-quality input, and (e) adult responsiveness.

Exposure means that children experience high-quality linguistic input both passively and actively within the classroom (Bunce, 1995). They are exposed to language throughout the day in diverse contexts and interactions. In some of these exposures, the child may not be an active participant; rather, children may be passive observers of the language that is used around them. Children do not need to overtly produce or imitate language to acquire key language forms and concepts, since incidental exposures to language in which children are merely bystanders can be sufficient for language learning to take place (Akhtar, Jipson, & Callanan, 2001). Nevertheless, active experiences are also important for language acquisition, and children require opportunities to use their language when they interact with others.

Deliberateness means that the adults in the classroom are intentional in the language that they choose to use with children. When talking with children, adults in language-rich classroom environments make knowledgeable choices in the words, grammar, and sounds that they use so that they can stimulate children's ongoing achievement of new skills. Adults provide children with

meaningful variation in the language to which they are exposed. For instance, when interacting with children, adults vary the abstraction level of the language that they use. Variations in the abstraction level allow children to participate in perceptually oriented conversations in which they use language to label, imitate, and describe, as well as in conceptually oriented conversations that engage children in using language to hypothesize, summarize, predict, decide, and reason (van Kleeck, Gillam, Hamilton, & McGrath, 1997).

Recurrence refers to the importance of repetition to children's acquisition of important linguistic concepts. This point is demonstrated well in studies that have investigated young children's acquisition of new vocabulary words when someone reads storybooks to them. Robbins and Ehri (1994), for instance, showed that the probability that young children would learn a new word from a storybook was considerably greater if the word occurred twice in a storybook rather than only once. Penno, Wilkinson, and Moore (2002) found that children's use of new vocabulary words from storybooks increased in a progressive manner from the first reading session to the third one as children experienced new words repeatedly over readings. In language-rich classrooms, repetition is valued and is an integral part of the classroom routine. Children receive multiple opportunities to experience specific linguistic concepts in diverse contexts of use, and classroom experiences are organized to foster repetition.

High-quality input means that adult language in the classroom is characterized by diverse content, form, and use. Content, form, and use are the three

interrelated elements of language that form the complex whole of oral language. *Content* consists of the words that are used and the concepts that are expressed; this term is more or less synonymous with vocabulary, or semantics. *Form* refers to the way that word structure and sentence structure are organized grammatically and phonologically. *Use* refers to the ways that language is used in functional contexts to achieve social purposes. Children's content, form, and use achievements directly reflect their experiences with language in the world around them (Hart & Risley, 1995). Thus, exposing children to language that is diverse in these three areas is an important feature of the language-rich classroom, as shown in Table 2.

Adult responsiveness means that adults frequently and consistently respond to a child's communicative acts in a way that is sensitive to the child's developing competencies. High levels of responsiveness by teachers and parents—particularly when adult responses focus on child-initiated topics—have repeatedly been associated with robust language gains by children (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002). In addition to being responsive to all communicative acts of children, adults should ensure that their responses are contingent; a contingent response is one that responds to a child's communicative intent rather than to the "correctness" of the child's act. For instance, an adult who responds "Oh, that wasn't very nice!" to a child's "Her hit me!" is responding contingently; the adult has focused on the child's meaning and communicative intention rather than on the words and grammar that the child used.

organized, the next step in developing a language-rich classroom is for the team to construct a philosophy that is individualized to the classroom environment. By developing a philosophy, teams can take a principled approach to creating language-rich classroom envi-

ronments. A philosophy is essentially a set of principles that all team members will translate into everyday practices. A philosophy about oral language—what it is, how it is acquired, and why it is important—influences the choices that educators make in structuring the phys-

ical environment of the classroom, designing daily lesson plans, and interacting with children.

The team must thus develop a statement of its philosophy. From this statement, it will derive operating principles for a language-rich classroom. The

philosophical statement has three elements: (a) a definition of language, (b) a statement of why language is important, and (c) a general statement indicating how language is supported in the classroom. Although formal definitions of language (e.g., *language* is “an arbitrary code or system of symbols to communicate meaning” [Hallahan & Kaufman, 2003, p. 266]) may be useful for getting started, translating formal definitions into everyday classroom experiences is difficult. Hence, teams should develop their own definition, with guidance from team members who are most knowledgeable about how oral language develops and is best support-

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A philosophy about oral language influences the choices that educators make in structuring the physical environment of the classroom, designing daily lesson plans, and interacting with children.

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ed. Figure 1 presents the philosophy that one Dell Preschool team developed.

This exercise may seem time-consuming and peripheral to the goal of implementing a language-rich classroom, but it is critical for several reasons. First, some team members may be less knowledgeable about oral language than others. This activity will be educational for all, since the team works together to define language, discuss how language develops, and identify ways to support language in the classroom (see box, “Theoretical Perspective of Language”). Second, this activity helps ensure that everyone on the team is “on the same page.” It is important that all team members subscribe to the philosophy, and developing the classroom philosophy as a group activity promotes ownership by the entire team.

Dell Preschool

Many educators who work with preschool children strive to immerse them in the richest oral language environment possible. Educators at Dell Preschool, a fictitious name for the school used as an example in this article, make this effort.

The school’s 36 students come from high-poverty households. The preschool, which is funded through Title I, is situated in a particularly mountainous and remote county in the Appalachian region of the United States. The per capita annual income in the county is about \$12,000 per year, and 30% of the adult population is functionally illiterate. Nearly 20% of the children in the county school system receive special education services.

The oral language needs of children attending Dell Preschool are considerable. Like other children in disadvantaged circumstances, they could benefit from systematic, focused efforts to ensure that they develop the oral language skills that can furnish the foundation for short- and long-term academic achievement.

Providing language-rich classroom environments has long been a goal of the administrators and educators at

Dell Preschool. According to recent data, one quarter of the preschool graduates fail the spring oral language screening in kindergarten; consequently, the staff of Dell Preschool has ramped up efforts to create language-rich classroom environments by designing a team-based action plan.

The staff adopted this team-based approach in light of recent public-policy initiatives asserting the importance of collaborative partnerships in promoting the collective expertise of diverse educators in preschool language intervention (e.g., Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Because of the influence of several factors, language-focused initiatives similar to the one at Dell Preschool occur in many preschool programs across the United States. These factors include increased awareness of the association among oral language foundations and later reading achievement, sensitivity to the risk factors that hinder children’s achievement of strong language and literacy skills, participation of children with language disabilities in general preschool classrooms, and significant infusion of federal dollars to all such efforts.

Designing the Physical Space

The physical environment of a classroom has a coercive power over the quality and the quantity of children’s oral language experiences (Roskos & Neuman, 2002). The environment mediates the language that the teachers and children use. In creating language-rich classroom environments, the physical environment must provide ample sup-

ports for facilitating children’s exposure to diverse aspects of language content, form, and use. Two key supports that the team must explicitly and carefully consider are how to organize the space and how to obtain props and materials.

Organization of space. Roskos and Neuman (2002) have identified four key attributes of spatial arrangements in classrooms that researchers believe can

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Figure 1. Philosophy of the Deli Preschool Team

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• Philosophy: *Language is a set of tools that we use to communicate our thoughts and feelings with one another. Language is essential for our full participation in society as speakers, listeners, readers, and writers. In our classroom, language growth is supported by setting daily goals for vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and pragmatics; by designing activities that meet these goals; and by ensuring frequent child-to-child, child-to-adult, and adult-to-child meaningful communication.*

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Table 1. Five-Step Team-Based Action Plan for Designing and Implementing Language-Rich Preschool Classrooms

Step	Actions
1. Identify a team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team should include as many constituents as possible who are involved with the preschoolers in the classroom. • The team should include parents and administrators. • All team members should commit to contributing in a systematic, consistent way to the language richness of the classroom.
2. Develop a philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team develops a set of principles governing oral language in the classroom that will translate into principle-based everyday practices. • The philosophy should define language, state why language is important, and identify how language is supported in the classroom.
3. Design the physical space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team identifies how to organize the classroom space to maximize language enhancement. • The team identifies props and materials, including literacy-related artifacts and real-world props. • The team identifies community supports for donation of materials and props.
4. Design daily language plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team develops a set of objectives for the whole year for linguistic content, form, and use. • The objectives can reflect sociocultural values and state-level policies (e.g., standards of learning). • The daily language plan identifies key objectives and activities and is accessible to all who enter the classroom to "jump in" and engage with children.
5. Ensure quality adult-child conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All team members should have training on adult-child interaction techniques that maximize children's language growth. • Team members can mentor each other in the classroom for quality implementation.

facilitate language learning and use. First, the classroom should be organized to emphasize open space. Second, specific areas should be clearly identified throughout the classroom (e.g., library, dramatic play area). Third, a variety of materials should be available to children, particularly materials that encourage creativity and problem-solving. These materials should be clustered conceptually or schematically. Fourth, authentic, functionally complex dramatic play settings should be available in each classroom. Examples include an airport, a grocery store, a miniature classroom, and a restaurant. Bunce

(1995) has effectively argued that dramatic play settings should be rotated daily (or at least weekly) to provide children with rich opportunities to learn about diverse aspects of their communities.

Provision of props and materials. Of particular importance in developing language-rich classroom environments are literacy-related artifacts, as well as real-world props and materials. Literacy-related artifacts are materials that are associated with written language. They include, for instance, writing utensils (pens, pencils, and crayons), writing media (envelopes, paper, and card-

board), and various types of printed materials (menus, signs, books, recipes, maps, and newspapers). Literacy-related artifacts encourage children to use language at an abstract, metalinguistic level and to view language as an object of scrutiny. Literacy-related artifacts also help children make connections between oral and written language. Storybooks, a literacy artifact that should be widely available and readily accessible in every language-rich preschool classroom, provide children with an endless supply of familiar and unfamiliar linguistic forms, content, and use.

Real-world props and materials are authentic tools that children use in their play to represent life outside the classroom. Exposure to these props and materials, particularly with adult mediation, helps children learn new words,

Language-rich classroom environments emphasize children’s acquisition of language through their interactions with both peers and adults.

develop schematic representations of community activities, and apply background knowledge to new learning situations. Real-world props should be rotated regularly to provide children with maximal exposure to new linguistic concepts.

The team must collaborate to design the physical space of the language-rich classroom environment. A team approach engages creative and functional contributions of diverse constituents in designing the physical space. It also brings in the collective energy of a group of people for such physical activities as building partitions or painting the room for demarcating classroom areas. A team-based approach to the physical design of the classroom can also be useful for identifying community resources for materials and identifying possible people or organizations that might donate materials or props.

At Dell Preschool, considerable time and effort was focused on reorganizing the classroom space to maximize its support for children’s language skills. The team scrutinized the classroom by using *The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit* (ELLCO; Smith & Dickinson, 2002) and the *Print Environment Assessment Form* (Dowhower & Beagle, 1998; Taylor, Blum, & Logsdon, 1986), two instruments designed to examine language and literacy richness in early childhood classrooms. Teachers and assistants at

Table 2. Content, Form, and Use Experiences in Language-Rich Classrooms

Content Experiences	Children experience many different word types, including adjectives, nouns, verbs, prepositions, and adverbs. Children are exposed to the ways that important societal concepts are expressed, such as kinship (<i>brother, uncle, aunt</i>), time (<i>tomorrow, yesterday</i>), and shelter (<i>house, apartment</i>). Children are exposed to gradations of precision in using vocabulary (<i>old, stale, musty</i>), learn the multiple meanings of words (<i>run</i>), learn to organize concepts (<i>farmer, nurse, pharmacist</i>), and learn how to play with words (<i>a grasshopper man is a man who collects grasshoppers</i>). Children are exposed to diverse ways to express similar things (<i>that towel, that white towel, the towel he has</i>).
Form Experiences	Children experience many different grammatical constructions, including elaborated noun phrases (<i>the old dark house</i>), various verb constructions (<i>walks, is walking, will walk, walked</i>), and prepositional phrases (<i>under the table</i>). Children hear sentences that are simple, complex, and compound; and they are exposed to diverse ways to link ideas syntactically (e.g., <i>If you want a sticker, you need to come and get one</i>). Children experience question types of many different constructions, including auxiliary inverted (<i>Is he going?</i>), tag (<i>He is going, isn't he?</i>), and the who, what, when, why, where forms of questions.
Use Experiences	Children are exposed to the many ways that language is used for social and functional purposes. Children are exposed to diverse speech acts (<i>label, repeat, answer, request, greet, protest</i>) and learn conversational moves (<i>initiating a topic, maintaining a topic, closing a topic</i>). They listen to and produce stories that are organized temporally and causally, and they are exposed to strategies for solving communication breakdowns. They are encouraged to initiate with their peers, to take turns, and to negotiate for objects. They learn how to talk to different people (<i>friends, teachers, librarians</i>) in different settings (<i>schools, stores, homes</i>).

Dell Preschool used the results of these instruments to identify explicit ways to enhance language supports in the classroom, such as increasing the amount of children's print displayed on the walls, improving the variety of storybooks available in the classroom library, decreasing the amount of time that children spent in transitions between activities, and increasing the number and variety of literacy artifacts available in various classroom centers.

Designing Daily Language Plans

Adopting a philosophy and designing the physical environment to support oral language are not enough to ensure the language richness of a preschool classroom. Designing a daily plan with clear goals for language content, form, and use is also necessary to ensure an intentional and deliberate focus on language in the classroom (Bunce, 1995). The daily plan is a road map for ensuring that specific language targets are addressed throughout the day—every day—in planned and incidental classroom experiences. Although classroom teachers and assistants can develop daily plans in advance (perhaps on Monday for the entire week), adopting an a priori organizational scheme for the daily plans is the responsibility of the entire team. The entire team must be knowledgeable about the structure and the content of the plan. The daily language plan should be readily available to any person (particularly team members) who enters the classroom, so that he or she can assist in meeting its objectives. Daily language plans have two components, objectives and activities.

Objectives. Objectives identify specific targets in language content, form, and use (Bunce, 1995). The daily language plan should include at least one objective in each area that is addressed for all children in the classroom on a given day. This systematic focus on content, form, and use ensures that no area is underemphasized in the language-rich classroom. Content, form, and use are equally important parameters of language; and each area is susceptible to delays when adverse developmental or

environmental circumstances are present.

Identifying objectives for use in the daily plans can be an a priori team activity. The team should identify a broad set of oral language objectives to be used and reused throughout the year by brainstorming a list of general expectations concerning oral language goals for children in their community or classroom. State- and federal-level policy documents may be useful in creating this list. Examples of objectives in content, form, and use that are appropriate for 3- and 4-year-old children are listed in Table 3.

Activities. The team should develop activities that correlate with the objectives on the daily language plan. The activities support achievement of the objectives, and they can build on the existing organization of the classroom day. For instance, Table 3 identifies a content objective as "to understand and use words of time (yesterday, tomorrow, year, month)." A daily activity in the classroom that can support this objective is the daily circle time, during which the teacher and children identify the day, week, and year, as well as the weather. This activity provides a natural support for addressing the time content

Theoretical Perspective of Language

Language-rich classroom environments emphasize children's acquisition of language through their interactions with both peers and adults. An emphasis on social interaction as a route to language gains is consistent with social-interactionist developmental theory. Social-interactionist perspectives view language acquisition as a sociobiological process in which both innate biological propensity and frequent, sensitive verbal input are critical for supporting language growth. Chapman (2000) indicates that the "socio" part of the equation includes "frequent, relatively well-tuned affectively positive verbal interactions," which are considered a critical locus of support in early language acquisition (p. 43). This perspective emphasizes the importance of socially embedded, mediated interactions with more knowledgeable conversational partners as a critical developmental mechanism for children (Justice & Ezell, 1999; Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). Within such interactions, the more knowledgeable partner, such as the teacher, fine-tunes her or his verbal input to scaffold the child's communicative engagement and gradual movement toward more independent levels of linguistic skill.

Social-interactionist accounts are useful for interpreting the differences in language acquisition in individual children that appear to be mediated by variations in quality and quantity of language input. Much research has

indicated that individual differences in maternal and other caretakers' verbal input can explain the wide variation in the rate of children's early language growth and later language outcomes, thereby lending support to social-interactionist accounts of language acquisition (e.g., Baumwell, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1997; Landry, Miller-Loncar, Smith, & Swank, 1997). Rush (1999), for instance, studied mother-child interactions for 39 preschoolers living in poverty and found a strong negative correlation between the amount of time that children spent playing alone and their expressive and receptive vocabulary skills. Reciprocally, strong positive correlations were observed between the rate of maternal one-on-one vocal responses to children and children's vocabulary skills.

Similar patterns have been found when examining children's oral language skills and their interactions with such other caregivers as preschool teachers and day-care providers. Girolametto and Weitzman (2002) showed that the rate of day-care providers' use of techniques that Girolametto and Weitzman consider characteristic of "conversational responsiveness" (e.g., imitations, labeling, and expansions) can explain variation in children's language productivity (i.e., the amount of language produced by children), as well as their vocabulary and grammar use.

objective. By identifying specific objectives and correlated activities at the start of each day, the focus on oral language enhancement becomes deliberate and is likely to be more effective. An example of a daily language plan is presented in Figure 2.

Ensuring Quality Adult-Child Conversations

With a philosophy, a supportive physical environment, and daily language plans in place, there is one final, and essential, element for the language-rich preschool environment: ensuring the quality of adult-child conversations.

A social-interactive perspective of language acquisition emphasizes the importance of frequent well-tuned communicative interactions in children's achievement of language content, form, and use (Chapman, 2000). Variations in the quality and quantity of the language that children experience in their homes and classrooms partially account for individual differences in the rate of children's language accomplishments (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Hoff, 2003). This line of research has important implications for the design of language-rich preschool classrooms.

A language-rich classroom environment thus must involve adults who deliberately use language-stimulation strategies when conversing with children. Table 4 presents eight key strategies, as identified by Girolametto and Weitzman (2002) and Bunce (1995). They are (1) waiting, (2) pausing, (3) confirming, (4) imitating, (5) extending, (6) labeling, (7) open questioning, and (8) scripting.

Girolametto, Weitzman, and Greenberg (2003) differentiate these techniques into child-oriented responses, interaction-promoting responses, and language-modeling responses. Child-oriented responses, which are used to create and maintain a shared conversational focus between adult and child, include waiting and extending. Interaction-promoting responses, which encourage the child into active dialogue, include pausing, open questioning, imitating, and confirming. Language-modeling responses provide children with demonstrations of linguistic forms, con-

Table 3. Examples of Objectives in Content, Form, and Use

Content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To understand and use words of time (<i>yesterday, tomorrow, year, month</i>) 2. To understand and use words of emotion (<i>sad, happy, angry, excited</i>) 3. To understand and use words of transportation (<i>car, tractor, airplane</i>) 4. To understand and use words of emotion as noun descriptions (<i>the happy boy, the sad bunny</i>) 5. To categorize words (<i>bear, cat, and dog are animals</i>)
Form	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To add -er to words to make "worker" words (<i>a person who farms is a farmer</i>) 2. To understand and use personal pronouns (<i>I, we, he, she, it</i>) 3. To understand and use plural forms (<i>shoe/shoes</i>) 4. To elaborate nouns with articles and adjectives (<i>the fast, green car</i>) 5. To use future-tense verbs to discuss future events (<i>we will go</i>)
Use	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To initiate to peers when needing help or wanting something 2. To maintain a topic for two or more turns in a conversation 3. To follow or give directions with two or more steps 4. To tell a personal event as a story to a peer 5. To use language for many different purposes (e.g., question, comment, request action, request information, reply, greet, and leave)

tent, and uses. These responses include labeling and scripting. Together, these strategies constitute high-quality verbal input by adults. By using these techniques, adults reduce their directiveness and increase their responsiveness and sensitivity to children's developing language competencies. In turn, when children interact with adults who are using these techniques, the children produce more language that is lexically and grammatically complex (Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002), which leads to improved language achievements during the preschool period (Rice & Hadley, 1995).

A team approach is essential so that all team members fully understand, appreciate, and achieve quality use of these eight techniques. Conversations between adults and children that are characterized by adult use of waiting, pausing, confirming, imitating, extending, labeling, open questioning, and scripting are the core of the language-rich preschool classroom. Indeed, a classroom may have an outstanding philosophy, an exemplary physical arrangement, and a deliberate daily language plan; however, without adult-child conversations of sufficiently high quality and sensitivity, these efforts are

Figure 2. Sample Daily Language Plan

Daily Language Plan: Dell Preschool

Thursday, October 9

Teacher: Miss Harden

Today's Objectives

1. To understand and use labels associated with clothing (content)
2. To understand and use plural forms (form)
3. To ask questions to peers (use)
4. To ask for help when needed (use)

Specific Activities

1. During circle time, the children will take turns asking one another to identify their favorite piece of clothing.
2. During circle time, we will dress the puppet and talk about each piece of clothing.
3. During dramatic play, a shopping store will be set up so that children can shop for clothes.
4. During art, the children will paste articles of clothing (felt) on pictures of themselves.

not likely to result in the desired child outcomes.

Although some excellent educators may frequently use these strategies when interacting with children, studies of preschool classrooms have suggested that these strategies occur less frequently than is desirable (e.g., Girolametto, Hoaken, Weitzman, & van Leishout,

ing by using videotapes (Ezell & Justice, 2000; Girolametto et al., 2003). Adults can observe on adult models video who are using particular strategies while they interact with children, and they can rate the models' conversational responsiveness. Alternatively, adults can watch themselves interacting with the children in their own classrooms to evaluate their own strengths and needs in using specific language-stimulation strategies.

Final Thoughts

Building preschool programs that provide language-rich classroom environments is a complex and multidimensional process. Although many educators, policymakers, and parents are aware of specific qualities of language-rich classrooms, putting this knowledge to work takes considerable effort. This article describes a five-step team-based process for designing and implementing language-rich classroom environments for preschool classrooms. The team-based action plan involves identifying a team, developing a philosophy, designing the physical space, designing daily language plans, and ensuring quality adult-child conversations. This process-oriented approach provides a framework for ensuring that preschool children have the language-rich classroom

environments that are most beneficial to their early development.

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This process-oriented approach provides a framework for ensuring that preschool children have the language-rich classroom environments that are most beneficial to their early development.

2000). Teams therefore must schedule sessions to practice these strategies with one another, and team members should mentor one another in the classroom in quality implementation of these strategies. A salient approach to improving adult behaviors when interacting with children is through observational learn-

Table 4. Language Stimulation Techniques

Technique	Description
Waiting	Adult uses a slow pace during conversation; adult actively listens to children when talking; adult does not dominate conversation.
Pausing	Adult pauses expectantly and frequently during interactions with children to encourage their turn-taking and active participation.
Confirming	Adult responds to all child utterances by confirming understanding of the child's intentions. Adult does not ignore child communicative bids.
Imitating	Adult imitates and repeats what child says more or less exactly. Example: Child: I did the puzzle. Adult: You did the puzzle.
Extending	Adult repeats what child says and adds a small amount of syntactic or semantic information. Example: Child: I did the puzzle. Adult: You did the puzzle well.
Labeling	Adult provides the labels for familiar and unfamiliar actions, objects, or abstractions (e.g., feelings).
Open questioning	Adult asks questions to which he or she does not know the answer; these include some what, where, and when questions (e.g., What are you going to do now?), as well as how and why questions.
Scripting	Adult provides a routine to the child for representing an activity (e.g., First, you go up to the counter. Then you say, "I want a hamburger...") and engages the child in known routines (e.g., "Now it is time for circle time. What do we do first?").

For additional descriptions of these and other language stimulation techniques, see Bunce (1995) and Girolametto and Weitzman (2002).

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