

The Home/School Connection:
Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, PreK-8
Issue 8

Communicating in Languages Other Than English, Part I

Dear Parents,

In Issue 4 you were given an overview of the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. In this issue, we take a closer look at the first standard, Communication. We will focus on the interpersonal and intrapersonal modes and how they are addressed in the early second language class. We will discuss how you as a parent can help your child develop his/her ability to communicate in the language s/he is learning in school.

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

This standard focuses on interpersonal (between people) communication. If you visit your child's language class you may see methods, strategies and activities that were not used when you learned a foreign language.

Total Physical Response combines listening with physical movement. Actions are used to represent vocabulary taught in the target language. This is a very engaging way to introduce new vocabulary in a meaningful way.

With the *Natural Approach*, teachers work to make the language meaningful and memorable. In the beginning, the focus is on listening. The teacher uses a sequence of questions that gradually shift students from the listening to the speaking mode. This method is similar to the way in which your child learned his/her native language.

Some teachers use *passwords* or *language ladders*. These are selected phrases that are memorized as chunks. They are taught, and then posted with a visual to help the children remember the meaning of the words.

Rhymes, chants, and songs are fun ways to teach children chunks of language. Often when a child cannot remember a word in the target language, the teacher only needs to hum the song where s/he learned the word and the child will be able to produce the forgotten word. These also provide insight into the target culture.

In the early second language class, you may see *partner and small group activities* that are designed to allow your child to practice the language with different peers. There can be information exchanges where the children are interviewing or surveying each other, finding similarities and differences, or following and giving directions. These activities are student-centered and build on students' language skills and interests.

What can I do at home?

- Have your child teach you the actions and vocabulary that s/he is learning at school.
- Request a list of vocabulary from your child's teacher and create your own passwords or language ladders in your home.
- Have your child teach you any songs, chants, or rhymes s/he is learning at school.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

This standard focuses on the interpretation and understanding of written and spoken language. It involves one-way listening and reading in which the learner works with a variety of materials.

Listening is considered by many teachers and researchers to be the cornerstone of language development (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). As children are beginning to learn a language, their teacher will focus on developing their listening skills in the language. In order to develop students' listening skills, teachers must use the target language for classroom instruction.

Storytelling is often used in a language class. At the beginning of a child's language experience, the story will contain a large number of visuals and actions to help convey the meaning. By introducing stories in the target language, the teacher is able to introduce vocabulary in a meaningful way and he/she can also teach certain aspects of the culture from which the story comes.

Reading allows children to draw on their own experiences. They will often work with longer texts and authentic materials. Many of the pre-reading strategies used by the classroom teacher are used by the language teacher.

What can I do at home?

Look for authentic literature such as newspapers, websites, and magazines in the target language to share with your child.

- Look through the materials together to find familiar words. Make a list of words you both recognize.
- Use a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.

Listen to songs or watch television shows in the target language *with* your child.

- Simply buying videos and asking your child to watch them alone will not help to develop any second language skills on his/her part.
- Listen for and write down for familiar words. Discuss with your child what you hear.

Conclusion

The three modes of communication do not occur in isolation during instruction. Your child's teacher will have a variety of activities that help your child develop his/her interpersonal and interpretive skills in the target language.

Information about the methods, strategies, and activities discussed in this newsletter were taken from:

Curtain, H. & Dahlberg, C. A. (2004)
Languages and Children: Making the Match.
Boston: Pearson.

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NNELL's Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com