CHAPTER 1

The Importance of Speaking and Listening in Early Literacy

In Ms. Rivero's preschool class, the children are well along in their exploration of health and exercise. They have learned the names of major muscles (e.g., biceps) and exercised their muscles to make them stronger. They also encountered the word *skeleton* in connection with their bodies. They examined the photo of a human skeleton, compared human and animal skeletons, and even explored a three-dimensional human skeleton online. Quite fascinated by this part of his body, Jaquan (kindergarten ready), motions for Ms. Judy, the preschool director, to come over by him. He leans in close to her and whispers as he points to his chest, "All my bones

in there . . . All of 'em . . . from here [points to his head] to here [points to his toes] is my skeleton. My skel-l-l-e-ton." Then, in a very hushed tone, "It's not scary!"

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS IN PRESCHOOL

Speaking, listening, reading, and writing are collectively referred to as the English language arts (ELA). Each domain is indeed an *art* that requires considerable knowledge and skill for effective use in school and in life. In a global society, developing young children's language arts abilities is essential for their active participation in an increasingly online world.

Speaking and listening combine to form the oral language side of the ELA, and reading and writing represent its written language side. Oral language is also referred to as *orality*. Written language is termed *literacy*. Oral language and written language are interactive; they are in a reciprocal relationship with each other. This is to say that oral language informs written language, and written language influences oral language. When 4-year-old Henry shouts, "I pounce like a panther!" for example, he uses words from the e-book *Fierce Grey Mouse* (Bourgonje, 2013) that he recently read with his dad to describe what he is doing.

Oral language is the foundation of learning to read and write. Speaking and listening skills learned in the preschool years are crucial to future reading and writing achievement and school success. Children who do not develop sufficient oral language skills during this time find it difficult to keep pace with their peers in later years. They start to fall behind even before they start school (Biemiller, 2006; Dougherty, 2014; Hart & Risley, 2003; Scarborough, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Learning gaps that emerge early, however, can be overcome in language-rich contexts where children are encouraged to talk, listen, and explore the concepts that words convey. As the vignette from Ms. Rivero's class illustrates, preschoolers are fascinated with words, like the word *skeleton* in a study of health and fitness. In the process of learning about the word *skeleton*, these preschoolers also explored related words like *rib cage*, *elbow*, *backbone*, and *tibia* (especially *tibia*, because it even sounds like a hard word). One word, in short, led to another, creating a language-rich learning environment.

In sum, children need to learn to use language a lot in the preschool years. They need to learn how to carry on a good conversation with adults and peers. From age 3 onward, they should build a vocabulary store of at least 2,500 words per year (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001). They should encounter and practice using at least two to four new words each day. They need to learn how to attend and listen on purpose (Blair, 2002). They must set a steady pace toward meeting kindergarten-entry expectations. All together, preschoolers should steadily develop and improve skills in the following oral language areas:

1. *Semantics*: Developing meanings for the words they hear and say in their conversations with others.
2. *Syntax* (also known as grammar): Learning the rules of how words are linked together.
3. *Morphology*: Figuring out how to manipulate the smallest units of meaning in the language called morphemes. The word *preschool*, for example, has two morphemes: *pre* (meaning before) and *school*.
4. *Phonology*: Understanding the sound structure of language. From birth onward (or even before) children are learning all the sounds or phonemes of their language.
5. *Pragmatics*: Understanding the social uses of language and basic social rules like saying "hello" and "good-bye," saying "please" and "thank you," and taking turns in a conversation.

With adults' help, most children rapidly develop their oral language skills in these areas before they go to school, and together these skills form the oral language foundation for learning to read and write at school. This is true in any language system, not just English. All languages start with a group of sounds that must be learned and used by the infants in the families that speak that language. All languages have words that are made up of a variety of those sounds, and all conversation in all languages is made up of a group of words put together to express an idea. Communication in any language involves expressing and receiving ideas in a way that is understandable for all the people involved in the communication.

For young children who come from homes where English is not the primary language, all of these skills will have been developed in their home language. They will have learned the sounds of their language, the words of their language, and how to put words together to form ideas. So these young children will already know a great deal about how language works. They will bring those skills to the task of learning a new language; but it is important to remember that these children will need to start again with the sounds and the words of their new language, and with the rules about how conversation works in this language.

THE ORAL LANGUAGE–EARLY LITERACY RELATIONSHIP

Before children are readers and writers, they are speakers and listeners. Progressing from saying words to reading and writing them demands an intellectual shift in children's thinking. They must become conceptually aware that there is a code to be deciphered and that it is different from speech. Reading print is more than understanding speech written down. The following concepts explain how oral language and literacy are both alike and different. Two exceptions apply: (1) not all languages have a written form, and (2) some languages that are written do not use an alphabet or do not have an alphabet that is composed of 26 letters.

Concept 1: Talk and Print Are Alike

Talking, reading, and writing are interrelated processes. All three involve using words to *stand for* or represent persons, objects, and events in the world. Each draws from the other in real experience. Children speak and listen, they listen to reading, they read what they write, and so on. These overlapping processes are what Vygotsky (1962) described as "tools of the mind" that children can use to get things done. Talking, reading, and writing join together to build children's knowledge about the world and about words. At the starting line of learning to read and write, children rely on their considerable speech experiences to help them with print experiences.

Concept 2: Talk and Print Are Different

There are important differences between spoken and written language that make learning to read harder than learning to talk. Why? There are two main reasons. First, print is a code for speech that relies on the manipulation of a set of symbols (26 alphabet letters), and because it is a code, children need to be taught how to decode print before they can say it. This extra step requires extra mental effort. Adults must help children find the relationship between print symbols and speech sounds and help them make the effort to remember. Second, print is decontextualized: It does not have the real-time qualities of speech, such as tone, pitch, expression, and rhythm, that signal meaning. Before they go to school, children experience mostly talking that occurs in rich contexts. When a mother says to her 4-year-old son, "Put on your pajamas. It's time for bed," there are real environment cues to help him know what this means. Children also interact with peers in rich, meaningful, social play situations that provide many signals about what to say and do. Even speech on television and computer games has many sensory clues as to what the talk refers to and why a person is talking.

Print is different. It is silent and still. Meaning must be unbundled from the print itself by an active mind. This, too, requires extra mental effort to pick out the meaning from the words alone. Adults must show children how to think with print to make it meaningful. This is why reading to and with children is so powerful—because it shows them how to do what they need to do to comprehend the print code.

Concept 3: Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing Share Skills

Fortunately, skills learned for oral language are shared with literacy and vice versa. A few of the most essential skills are making predictions, asking and answering questions, telling and retelling, sense of story, and phonological awareness. You can think of these as *crossover skills* because they are used in children's talking, reading, and writing to the benefit of all three. Each skill leads to more complex

skills that strengthen and enrich children's abilities to use the language arts in more challenging learning experiences. Knowing how to teach these skills will help you be more effective and efficient as you plan language experiences for the active talkers and emerging readers and writers in your setting.

Making Predictions

This is the ability to use context to choose the appropriate language. At a friend's birthday party, children remember to say "happy birthday" because the setting reminds them of the event. As a familiar bedtime favorite, they can chime in, chanting "Chicka, chicka, boom, boom" as you read aloud the storybook to them. Similarly, they use the skill of prediction to guess what a printed word might be when they hear its beginning sound or connect visual cues with the meaning (e.g., the tail-like form of the letter *g* at the end of the word *pig*).

Asking and Answering Questions

In oral language, questions are signs of seeking, noticing, and incorporating new and more complex experiences into prior experiences. They signal what's going on in children's minds while mental schemas are being organized and built. Questions indicate children's skill in monitoring comprehension; through their questions, we can see that children are "following along" and "getting it," whether it be a conversation, a book reading, a play episode, or a table activity. Questioning is a vital skill in speaking and listening as well as in reading and writing.

Telling and Retelling

These expressive verbal skills exercise children's use of language to tell, recount, report, explain, and pretend. Children need many opportunities to practice their expressive language skills so that they learn to include the details. In speaking, listening, reading, and writing, details matter. Attention to detail increases the length of sentences, the size of vocabulary, and the grammatical complexity of the talk. Details also enlarge the child's store of background knowledge.

Sense of Story

Children's personal stories about their real experiences indicate their storytelling abilities. Stories are one way they learn to represent their experience. Stories provide an organizer for holding an experience in mind and replaying it at will. Storytelling is also the forerunner of grasping the story structures found in literature. Children's oral storytelling abilities lay the foundation for using story elements to comprehend stories in books.

Phonological Awareness

As a skill, phonological awareness places special demands on children's abilities to self-regulate their thinking and actions. They must listen for specific words or sounds; listen to words and sounds carefully to manipulate them; and listen with the intention to act for a specific purpose, such as clapping for each word heard in a sentence, tapping for each sound heard in a word, completing a rhyme, singing and clapping in rhythm, and so on. Learning to read and write depends heavily on phonemic awareness, which is the basis of matching sounds to printed letters and decoding printed words.

Table 1.1 summarizes how oral language and literacy are alike and how they are different. Compare and contrast Halliday's functions of language and five functions of early literacy (Neuman & Roskos, 1989). Note how the functions or uses of language and literacy overlap. Both, for example, are means for interacting with others. However, their uses also differ in important ways. Literacy, for example, is used for exploring the world through print (signs), whereas language is used to explore the world through oral exchanges. To become literate, young children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing, and they need oral language to help them learn about both. When you are knowledgeable about the relationship between talk and print you can help young children make the mental shift from the more familiar world of talking to the less familiar one of reading and writing.

ORAL LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

Oral language comprehension is the ability to speak and listen with understanding. It is that part of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy (CCSS-ELA; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers [NGA & CCSSO], 2010) that addresses the communication areas of speaking, listening, and language. It involves

TABLE 1.1. Compare and Contrast Oral Language and Literacy

Language	Literacy
Instrumental: *I want.*	Exploratory: *How does it work?*
Regulatory: *Do as I say.*	Interactional: *Between you and me.*
Interactional: *You and me.*	Personal: *For me.*
Personal: *Here I come.*	Authenticating: *To legitimate.*
Heuristic: *Tell me why.*	Transactional: *Between me and text.*
Imaginative: *Let's pretend.*	

the strategies and skills of comprehension and collaboration (e.g., participating in collaborative conversations about grade-level topics and texts), the presentation of knowledge and ideas (e.g., describing people, places, things, and events with relevant details), and effective use of conventions, language, and vocabulary. It is the bedrock of future reading comprehension, broadly defined as the ability to read with understanding.

Oral language comprehension provides the evidence of a child's oral language development. When 4-year-old Josie actively listens and takes turns in a conversation about a family trip, for example, she demonstrates how far she has come in her own oral language development. In this respect, oral language comprehension involves the primary areas of language development described above: semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics.

Oral language comprehension is *more than the sum* of these parts. Oral language comprehension requires the *integration* of all oral language areas in order to speak and to listen with intention and purpose. The child must not only develop specific skills in each of these primary areas (e.g., syntax), but also know how to combine this linguistic information across them all to produce meaningful talk and listening.

Children develop their oral language comprehension in many ways—but three opportunities are key: (1) language experiences, (2) substantive conversation, and (3) oral language instruction. You will learn more about each in the following chapters, along with best practices that ensure all children have access to these opportunities at home and at school.

Language Experience

Language experience involves all those real-life experiences that are powerful motivators of language use, like Lucy's account of her tonsil operation: "I had some purple juice that made me asleep and I didn't feel it. Had this big ange [bandage] here sticking on my arm. And they had to sew it together." Such accounts can readily be turned into dictated language experience stories at school for sharing and repeated reading.

Substantive Conversation

Substantive conversation is a form of talk between adults and children that informs, explains, and elaborates on ideas. It often includes teachable moments, when adults have the opportunity to provide background knowledge on topics. It involves expanding the amount of child talk in a conversation and stretching the conversation to add details, new words, and new language structures, such as adjectives and adverbs, idioms, and figurative language. Consider this example between father and daughter while reading *One Morning in Maine* by Robert McCloskey (1976).

HEATHER: Are those the trees that they're talking about?

FATHER: Yeah, those are pine trees.

HEATHER: We have pine trees out back.

FATHER: We have some, but not so many, do we?

HEATHER: Yeah.

FATHER: Remember there were so many in Maine. Sometimes when the fog came up we couldn't see them, remember that? Real gray and foggy. Then when the fog went away we saw all little islands filled with trees just like that.

Oral Language Instruction

Oral language instruction is a teaching and learning context that can be used to instruct children about language and how to effectively use their speaking and listening skills. Adults nurture children's oral language comprehension when they set out to intentionally teach them something. Children's lives are replete with these instructional episodes that range from very short interactions (e.g., explaining an idea or how to do something) to more extended ones (e.g., shared book reading). When Henry's mother teaches him how to tie his shoe, for example, she uses talk and action in a way that pins Henry's attention to the activity (he listens on purpose) and asks him to use words as tools for remembering ("Step 1: Cross the laces like normal" and so on). When teachers engage children in shared book reading discussions (which they should do often), they also provide opportunities for children to practice and strengthen their oral language comprehension.

ORAL LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION LEADS TO READING COMPREHENSION

To be a participating member in conversations at home and school depends on effective oral language comprehension skills. As the ability to speak and listen with understanding improves, children learn more and more oral language skills from an ever-widening world of social and academic situations. They learn, in short, by speaking, listening, and using language, and therefore develop their own oral language comprehension prowess.

Oral language comprehension skills are essential for communication, but they are equally critical for written communication. In achieving early literacy, young children need writing to help them learn about reading, they need reading to help them learn about writing, and they need oral language comprehension to help them learn about both.

For purposes of early literacy learning, the concepts and skills of oral language comprehension can be organized into three large skill domains: language conventions, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. Each domain is further described below, emphasizing those skills that have a strong bearing on early literacy skills, such as print awareness and story comprehension. High-quality oral language comprehension instruction for children in general equally applies to those children for whom English is a second language and those with special needs (Dixon et al., 2012; Goldenberg, 2008).

Language Conventions

In his classic text *The Foundations of Literacy*, Don Holdaway (1979, p. 62) describes the important language factors that link to early literacy as "familiarity with written dialect in oral form." What he meant by this was that as children gain familiarity with book language, through being read to, they begin to incorporate it into their own talk—terms like *clever indeed! Once upon a time*, *It seems a pity*, and *First, next, . . . then*. This is the kind of language usage that prepares children for learning to read and write.

Subsequent research summaries of early literacy predictors corroborate the role of oral language, specifically grammar and usage, in preparing children for the learn-to-read process (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). It is not just any talk that builds bridges to early literacy. Rather it is talk that involves (1) more complex grammatical structures, such as contractions (*I'm*, *we're*, *they're*) and pronouns (*she*, *he*, *they*, *it*); (2) structures that imply consequence, comparison, and temporal order (*if . . . then*, *because . . . like and different . . . first, next . . .*); and (3) intonation patterns (*Once upon a time and way long ago there was a princess who lived on a glass hill)* and terms (*however*, *therefore)* that are nonconversational in form that build bridges to the written discourse of books. Children benefit from a language environment that provides many opportunities for them to expand their grammatical awareness and the usage of compound and complex sentences they eventually will be required to read. Strategies that help to support English language learners include (1) slow but natural levels of speech; (2) clear enunciation; (3) short, simple sentences; (4) repetition and paraphrasing; and (5) controlled vocabulary and idioms.

Vocabulary

Our vocabulary consists of those words we know, love, and use. Lately, the 4-year-olds in Ms. Starr's Head Start classroom, for example, simply love the word *swooped* and use it every chance they get, as in "I sw-o-o-o-o-ped in to grab my milk!"

Vocabulary knowledge is that body of words known by a person. It is organized into two kinds: receptive and expressive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary consists of words *known by association* when listening or reading. For example, when Ella Mae hears her mother read that Peter Rabbit was a *naughty* little rabbit, she understands the word by associating it with Peter's misdeeds in Mr. McGregor's garden. Word meaning, in brief, is understood in the context of hearing it or reading it.

Expressive vocabulary consists of those words we can produce or those *known by person*. The person can produce the word as needed to fit the circumstances. This time, when reading the story, Ella Mae points to Peter Rabbit and says he *wiggled* under the fence. She retrieves the word from her own memory.

In young children, their receptive vocabulary is typically larger than their expressive vocabulary, as we might expect. They can hear and understand more words than they can necessarily say and use in different situations.

The significance of vocabulary knowledge in the early years for future learning is profound. By age 3, children already show large differences in vocabulary that persist through high school and perpetuate ever-widening achievement gaps. Vocabulary knowledge at age 3, in fact, predicts reading comprehension at grade three (Hart & Risley, 2003; Stanovich, 1986). Children with poor vocabulary at an early age are less likely to learn words incidentally (Robbins & Ehri, 1994) and typically have less background knowledge for oral language comprehension, which in turn impacts their early literacy development (Hirsch, 2006; Neuman & Wright, 2014). Upon entry to kindergarten, low-vocabulary children already have far fewer word meanings than their average and above-average peers. By the end of second grade this number swells to 2,000 fewer word meanings than their peers, which puts them seriously at risk for acquiring the 6,000 word meanings they need for third grade reading comprehension (Biemiller, 2010). To prevent falling further behind in the primary grades, low-vocabulary preschoolers need plenty of rich oral language activities—as well as direct instruction by adults—to build up their store of word meanings at kindergarten entry.

Children's vocabulary knowledge (store of word meanings or lexicon) also impacts their acquisition of decoding skills, providing linguistic information (e.g., phoneme awareness) for mapping spoken language to print (Ehri, 2014; Wagner et al., 1997). Word meanings help children with word reading (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). Meanings supply cues for identifying *and* comprehending words, which develops the word-to-text skills children need for comprehension. Vocabulary is the link between word-reading skills and comprehension processes. The size and quality of children's vocabulary knowledge (word meanings or lexicon), therefore, has serious consequences for children's school readiness in general and their overall literacy development (National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2008).

Adults can ensure that young children acquire the vocabulary they need for reading achievement by using teaching strategies that range from incidental, or happenstance, to more intentional, or deliberate instruction.

Traditionally, early childhood teachers have used incidental strategies to help children learn new words, capitalizing on *teachable moments* in the course of everyday routines and learning activities. While spontaneous, these strategies can nonetheless be quite powerful for several reasons.

1. Adult talk is geared to the goals of activity, or goal oriented.
2. Adult talk is contingent on the child's talk, that is, dependent on the child's understanding at the moment.
3. It provides immediate feedback to the child, which is impactful.

Study the examples provided in Table 1.2 and note these important features of incidental strategies. When present and of high quality, they can provide rich opportunities that help children learn new words.

Recent research shows the benefits of intentional strategies for strengthening vocabulary knowledge, especially for children with vocabulary delays (Marulis

TABLE 1.2. Incidental Strategies

Incidental strategy	Example
Carrying on conversation	CHILD: What's a *pleat*? TEACHER: That's an interesting word. What do you think it is? CHILD: A skirt. TEACHER: Oh . . . someone talked to you about a pleated skirt. Well . . . the pleat is a fold of cloth in the skirt. When you spin around the pleats spread apart, and the skirt sort of lifts up. CHILD: Oh . . . like an umbrella.
Explaining terms in the course of events	CHILD: Ms. E. said it was hot in here and that made the water vaporate, and that vaporation makes flowers droop. MS. E.: Yes, water evaporates from the soil when it's hot, and then the plant doesn't have enough water. It wilts or droops.
Promoting vocabulary in storybook reading	Finally he encountered a "big thing" (*Are You My Mother?* by P. D. Eastman, 1998). CHILD: It's not his mother. TEACHER: It's not his mother? What does it look like? CHILD: Like a toy. TEACHER: You've seen a toy like that? CHILD: It's a dump truck. TEACHER: It's something that lifts up dirt in a big shovel. CHILD: It's a crane. TEACHER: Yes, like a crane.

& Neuman, 2010). Intentional strategies use direct, intensive adult language to deliberately teach new words. Several promising strategies have emerged. Silverman (2007), for example, describes anchored vocabulary instruction that combines oral contextual strategies (e.g., linking new words to personal experience) and analytical strategies (e.g., attending to letters and sounds of new words) that bridge oral and print sources of word meanings. More direct, Biemiller and Boote (2006) found that well-placed vocabulary *interruptions* to explain word meanings in a repeated readings approach boosted kindergarteners' vocabulary knowledge. In this approach, target words are selected from a storybook or informational text. The text is read two times: first without interruption and then with periodic interruptions to explain a few target word meanings. The teacher says the target word, points out its form (letter and sound features), and uses it in context. He or she then asks the students to say the word, use it in a sentence, and say it again. This technique yielded sufficient word learning gains to justify instructional time spent. Similarly, Smeets and Bus (2012) found that multiple-choice questions embedded in an interactive electronic storybook either during or after reading increased word learning measurably over incidental comments and even dictionary hot spots in storybook reading. Here—as the child reads the e-book—the story periodically "pauses" on a screen page where the young reader is prompted to answer a question about a word meaning by clicking on a picture. A lovable virtual tutor (a small, fuzzy creature) says, for example, "Time for a question. Bear is *shy*. Where can you see that?" Three pictures are displayed and the child is asked to click on a choice; the tutor provides immediate feedback to the response. The enhanced e-book proved to be as effective in helping children learn word meanings as adult explanations.

Instructional features common across these intentional strategies include (1) a before–during–after (BDA) instructional framework to introduce, discuss, and review new words; (2) repetition and explanation of new words in context (e.g., of a storybook); and (3) plenty of opportunities to practice using new words in a variety of settings. The goal in all is to provide purposeful exposure to new words, including high-utility root words and disciplinary content words.

Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension starts to develop early in life, around age 1, and continues to grow during the elementary school years. It involves oral language competencies, such as the ability to parse the speech stream (talk) into morpheme and syntactic units, vocabulary, sentence structures, and anaphoric referents (referring back to prior statements and ideas in conversation) among other skills (e.g., background knowledge; Samuels, 1987).

During the preschool and primary grades, children's listening comprehension *leads* their reading comprehension. This is to say that their listening comprehension predicts their reading achievement. Children with advanced listening

comprehension prior to kindergarten are about a year ahead of their average peers, whereas those with delays are about a year behind. While competencies increase for all children, the gap widens across the elementary school years. By grade three, advanced children's listening comprehension is equivalent to that of average children in grade four, while slower-progressing children are similar to average second graders or even younger children.

Broadly speaking, young children's listening comprehension can only increase through interactions with others and with books that introduce new vocabulary, concepts, and language structures. Because they cannot yet read, most of children's listening skill growth comes from nonprint sources such as talk, media, play, and adult read-alouds. And for many children this continues to be the case throughout the elementary grade years (Biemiller, 2003).

For this fundamental reason (listening leads reading), children need a full menu of oral language activities that helps them learn to use listening as a tool for meaningful (and memorable) comprehension. Activities that ask children to respond to direct questions; talk and listen in small groups; question to clarify or gain further information; recount events; and respond to stories, songs, and poems are key. When children are guided to listen with intention and purpose (attentively), they can participate more fully in conversations and in turn gain more from high-quality social and instructional interactions that build a solid foundation for reading and writing.

CONCLUSION

Several key ideas conclude this chapter. From the start it is important to understand that speaking, listening, reading, and writing comprise the ELA. In preschool, the ELA focus is on oral language with the twofold goal of (1) expanding children's speaking and listening abilities and (2) laying the foundations for learning to read and write. Oral language includes five areas of knowledge and skill: semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics. Oral language and literacy are alike in that they both deal with language as a way of representing the world. But they are also different because print requires extra mental work to do more than say and listen to words, but also to read and write them. Oral language and literacy also share common skills (e.g., asking and answering questions). Oral language comprehension is the ability to speak and listen with understanding. Children develop it through language experiences, substantive conversation, and oral language instruction. Oral language comprehension prepares the way for reading comprehension by increasing children's knowledge and skill with language conventions, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. English language learners bring the skills they use to learn their first language to learning a second language, but will require more time and instruction to learn the sounds, words, and conversation rules of the new one.

Preschool in Practice

Personalizing Professional Development

The teachers at Hopkins Early Childhood Center value their own professional learning. Finding time to learn, however, can be challenging in the busy, bustling world of teaching young children. But these teachers have found the time by taking advantage of online resources and tech tools that are so readily available these days.

Currently several PreK teachers are enrolled in an online module offered free of charge through their local educational services center. The module is entitled *Language for Learning in the Early Years* (Roskos, 2008), and addresses the following professional learning goals:

- Understand the major domains of oral language development.
- Examine approaches that support oral language learning.
- Distinguish key elements of supportive approaches.
- Plan to use supportive approaches in classroom practice.

The module provides teachers with background on the essentials of oral language development and learning. It offers concrete examples of how to support children's developing oral language skills. And it aligns with the Language Modeling domain of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008), which is used at the center for the evaluation of teaching skills. The module's multimedia and interactive format is also very engaging. Best of all, individual teachers can view the module based on their personal schedules and at their own pace.

The teachers like the option of online modules as a way to personalize their own professional development. Digital pioneers, several Hopkins teachers also use Twitter to connect with fellow educators on common topics and issues, such as technology in the preschool classroom. They like the fact that they can pose questions and get answers almost immediately. Others like to participate in webinars and blogs (e.g., *www.ernweb.com*) that help them keep up to date and learn from others. The most recent webinar on creating high-impact literacy stations for PreK children was a big hit!

At Hopkins, teachers are effectively using social media and online offerings in combination within their professional learning community to develop their own personalized professional development plans and reflect on how that professional development is affecting the teaching they do every day.

Aligning ELA Standards

The CCSS-ELA framework is an aligned set of standards across grades K–12. It maps end-of-year expectations for knowledge and skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. The PreK teachers at Garrison Elementary School recognize the importance of aligning the statewide early learning standards in the language arts to the kindergarten CCSS-ELA expectations. They want to make sure that the language and literacy expectations for their kindergarten-bound students start them well on their way to meeting kindergarten

expectations down the road—and that there are no major instructional gaps in the PreK language and literacy program.

To complete the alignment task, they carved out time at their regular grade-level meetings in the fall. Working together, they "mapped" each early learning standard in the state language and literacy domains to one or more standards in the kindergarten CCSS-ELA set. Several examples from the Reading Foundations map are provided in Table 1.3. Although the alignment task took considerable time, it was worth it. The teachers found two large gaps in their language and literacy program that needed to be addressed: developing emergent reader skills with those children who appeared ready, and exploring digital tools to produce and publish early writing. They used this information to (1) plan small-group instructional activities in emergent reading skills for high letter-knowledge children (e.g., sound-stretching words to map phonemes to letters, modeling use of the word wall for writing and reading level A texts), and (2) adding iPads to the writing center and showing children how to use age-appropriate apps (e.g., Doodle Buddy from Pinger, Inc., available through iTunes: *https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/doodle-buddy-paint-draw-scribble/id313232441?mt=8*) for creating drawings and stories together and on their own.

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE CITED IN THIS CHAPTER

Are You My Mother? by P. D. Eastman (1998). Random House.
Fierce Grey Mouse by Chantal Bourgonje (2013). Tizio.
One Morning in Maine by Robert McCloskey (1976). Puffin Books.

TABLE 1.3. Aligning Statewide Early Learning Standards to the CCSS-ELA for Kindergarten

ELDS–Early Reading	CCSS–Reading Kindergarten
Ask and answer questions, and comment about characters and major events in familiar stories.	RL.K.1
ELDS–Print Concepts	
Demonstrate an understanding of basic conventions of print in English and other languages.	RF.K.1
ELDS–Phonological Awareness	
With modeling and support, recognize and produce rhyming words.	RF.K.2.a

Note. ELDS, Early Learning and Development Standards (Ohio).

IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION, REFLECTION, AND ACTION

1. Record the language of two or three preschoolers engaged in a similar activity at the sand table, in dramatic play, or in a joint project. Transcribe and analyze a 5- to 8-minute portion of the language sample. Note the children's use of vocabulary, grammar, sentence complexity, and pragmatics. Share your observations with a peer who has also collected a language sample. What are the similarities? What are the differences?
2. In this chapter, both spontaneous incidental learning and intention instruction are discussed. Describe the differences between the two types of learning situations and give an example of each.
3. In the discussion of oral language in this chapter, we learn that there are five areas of knowledge and skill for a child to learn: semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics. Define each term and provide descriptions of how children are engaged in learning these elements in spontaneous ways with family and in preschool.
4. At the end of this chapter, some Early Learning Development Standards are compared with the CCSS. The CCSS do not have a preschool section. Study the CCSS for kindergarten for Reading Literature and Reading Informational Text. Describe if and how these can be used in preschool but in a more appropriate manner for 3- and 4-year-olds.

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