



## A Message from the Editor

Meredith Lewis, Editor  
Center for UPK

“Eyes not only to look, but to see.  
Ears not only to hear, but to listen.”

— Jean Lewis, grandmother of the editor

## Universal Pre-K at Bank Street



**W**hen I first shared the idea of exploring children’s language development for this issue of *NewsFlash* with my grandmother, she was excited. She understood immediately that the interaction adults have with children shapes the possibility for language development. She pronounced with

conviction that we need “eyes not only to look, but to see,” and “ears not only to hear, but to listen.”

By taking the time to see and listen, we discover what children are learning, and we become better able to encourage their progress. Their desire to express themselves in meaningful ways grows. They need us

to give them new ways to describe their world—through words, symbols, print, music—and all the other ways that language can be shared. When we follow their lead and introduce them to new adventures, we captivate their curiosity and stretch their imagination. We can enhance every moment of every day, so that imparting new knowledge sets the stage for new experiences that support children. We can create opportunities for motivating exploration that embeds language development in everything that we do.

With a focus on language, this newsletter will discuss aspects of children’s development from birth, in the voices of teachers, administrators, and other professionals within the field of early care and education. Research continues to point to the role that language and literacy play in relation to a child’s preparedness for kindergarten. We hold a powerful key to our children—we must use it to open the right doors. As you read, I encourage you to make notes in the margins and reflect on your own experiences – both in the classroom and at home. Many who have taken the time to “see and listen” have learned important lessons about language from their students. For me, I have learned so much more than the gift of words from my grandmother, and to her I will be forever grateful.

*Meredith*



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## Letter from the Dean

Fern Khan, Dean  
Continuing Education

Among the many ways to support literacy development in young children is the intentional design of environments and experiences that not only enhances and expands their cognitive, emotional, and physical growth, but also gives each child opportunities to feel successful. These feelings of success and emerging competence are reinforced by the continuity of healthy, purposeful, and spontaneous interactions with adults, both in school and at home.

Reading to children is one of those interactions that can bring pleasure to both the child and the adult. I have often heard adults reflect on their early experiences of being read to and the warm feelings that are usually evoked by these memories. In early childhood programs, young children participate actively in reading experiences. They listen intently at times when they are read to—and they eagerly anticipate times when they will be the storytellers.

In addition, talking to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers is just as important; yet many young parents and caregivers are unaware of its value in language development. In her 1992 visit to Bank Street, Hillary Clinton stressed the importance of talking to children to encourage language development and use. She described a visit to one program where she observed a young mother holding her baby on her shoulder. Ms. Clinton noticed the lack of communication between mother and baby. She inquired whether the mother talked with her baby. The mother responded, “Why would I talk to him? He can’t talk back. He’s only a baby!” Unfortunately, this is not an unusual story. It reflects the beliefs of many young parents and caregivers living under stressful conditions and without the benefit of a support system to guide them. Parents and caregivers need support and training to converse with infants.

We are keenly aware from research that active interactions between children and adults contribute enormously to literacy development. To support this growth, a distinguishing feature of the Division of Continuing Education’s professional development outreach programs is designed to encourage and model for teachers and paraprofessionals different ways to engage young children in a

wide range of literacy-building activities, from developing routines, to singing and storytelling. Our staff developers introduce strategies that promote written and verbal self-expression. Children are encouraged to tell stories, describe an experience, “read” their early writings, describe their drawings, and assume work roles in the classroom or at home. Teachers are also encouraged to look for and use those “teachable moments” when learning might occur. Teachers generally feel supported by Continuing Education staff developers to teach in ways that help children become independent learners, and to be more responsive to their students’ needs.



### Upcoming Events 2003–04

**December 5 – 7**

*Zero to Three’s 18th  
National Training Institute,  
New Orleans, Louisiana*

**January 26**

*Interagency Early Childhood  
Professional Development Institute’s  
Ninth Annual Conference,  
Brooklyn, New York*

**April 22 – 24**

*New York State Association for  
the Education of Young Children  
(NYSAEYC)’s Annual Conference,  
New York, New York*

# Words are Yummy!

## Language Development in the Preschool Classroom

Allison W. Cassin, Head Teacher  
Lavelle School for the Blind

Children who are three and four years old are in awe of the world that surrounds them. Their growing minds take in information with every new experience at a swift rate. And so, the preschool classroom is an ideal environment in which our youngsters can learn to love words.

“Words are Yummy!” is the phrase that hangs on my classroom in a ten-foot ice cream cone. It is displayed in such grandeur because my greatest hope for my students over the course of one year is that they develop a strong sense of how words can help build their future. I want my children to believe that words are as yummy as the most delicious of ice cream cones.

Words are everywhere—they are written, spoken, signed, and sung. They are used to express both thought and feeling. Words can inspire and they can be hurtful. Words have the ability to both give and receive respect. Words can be boisterous. Words can be quiet. Words are hilarious, and they are serious. Words are everything.

Children model what has been inspired in them. And so with each day, the preschool teacher has the opportunity to use words that help create a thrilling world for each of her students. Positive action verbs can be used when asking and answering questions. Rhymes and limericks can be chanted to teach themes. Student-written books can be created to support concept generalization. And, parent letters create dynamic arenas for the “spoken-written word connection,” as all children are interested in what is being sent home! When reading stories aloud, a variety of voice inflections teaches literary tone. Lunch menus provide great lessons in repetition and sight words. And, the playground offers boundless experiences to enhance imaginative language as children observe planes disappearing into clouds, and leaves changing from green to orange and red.

When preschool children are immersed in a language-rich environment, they learn at a very young age to use words to express themselves as individuals who are self-confident as well as supportive. They learn without realizing that words are the mechanics of interpersonal relationships. Ultimately, they learn by what is modeled, that words truly are “yummy.” ●

## The Center for Universal Pre-K at Bank Street College of Education

The Mission of Bank Street’s Center for Universal Pre-Kindergarten is to *help early care and education programs strengthen their services to young children and their families*. We provide a variety of services and resources at NO cost, for teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, policy makers, advocacy groups, and researchers that promote quality Universal Pre-K programming.

### Early Childhood Mentoring Program

The Early Childhood Mentoring Program offers experienced early childhood teachers the opportunity to become trained mentors to beginning teachers.

### Universal Pre-K Fellows Program

The Universal Pre-K Fellows Program is a credit-bearing professional development program that strengthens teachers’ and assistant teachers’ understanding of developmentally appropriate practice through seminars, mentoring, resources, and career development.

### Quality New York

Quality New York provides support to early childhood programs throughout New York City that are seeking accreditation through NAEYC. This program is a collaboration with Bank Street College’s Center for UPK, Child Care, Inc., and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies.

### Community of Learners Project

The Community of Learners Project brings together Bank Street College and Region One in the Bronx, to provide professional development services to Universal Pre-K program staff.

### On-site consultation, professional development, and technical assistance

The Center for Universal Pre-K works with preschool programs throughout New York City to provide specialized professional development workshops and targeted on-site support.

For more information, please contact María Beneján at 212.961.3410, or visit our website at [www.bankstreet.edu/upk/index.html](http://www.bankstreet.edu/upk/index.html).

The Center for Universal Pre-K is a part of the *Division of Continuing Education* at Bank Street College of Education.

# What I've Learned about Names

Christina Boughal, Second Grade Teacher  
PS 30, Queens

In pre-K, teachers make an amazing impact on a child's journey to literacy. When I first began my teaching career, I was overwhelmed with the idea of teaching children how to read. The idea of teaching children the "basis behind all learning" seemed to be a tremendous responsibility.

When students arrived in my pre-K classroom on the first day of school, I had oak tag paper cut into rectangles. Each student drew a picture of himself or herself on the rectangle, and I wrote their name at the top. Each card was laminated and became the child's attendance card for the rest of the year. As a part of the classroom routine, students placed their name card into a number line upon arrival. At meeting time, we discussed who came in first, who came in last, and other items. Students quickly learned each other's names. By the end of the third or fourth week of school, they were able to recognize their classmates' names in print.

When I first began this practice, I was surprised to see how fast they were able to do this. After reading *The Art of Teaching Reading*, by Lucy Calkins, I began to realize how important it is for students to learn their classmates' names. I then decided to take advantage of this interest to promote emergent literacy skills. I made two sets of names on strips of oak tag. In the beginning, I would hold up a child's name and we would sing the name. The students loved to see their name and their classmates' names in print. Then we started to discuss how certain children's names looked similar. For example, Ashanti and Ashara both have the same beginning four letters.

Students then asked me if they could play with the names. We developed a game where students matched names together on a pocket chart. Children worked together and discussed whether a name was a match or not, and why. From learning each other's names, students were able to recognize not only that print contains different words, but that words are made up of different letters. After a while, students began looking at titles of books and other print in their environment, and matching the letters that they saw with their classmates' names. For example, I observed one of my students "reading" *The Carrot Seed*, by Ruth Krauss, to a few other students. She said, "Carrot begins with the letter C. Can you think of other words that begin with the letter C? Charlene begins with the letter C."

Children also become more independent because they know their names and their classmates' names. I allow a pre-determined number of children into the block and house-keeping areas. The children who were not able to go to the center of their choice would get very upset and start crying. To solve this problem, I put a piece of paper and pencil next to each center, to create a "waiting list." Children now could

sign up on the list. Children see who is before them and they read each other's names. Children read the names of children who are in the center, and when a student leaves, they take their name card out of their current center, and the first child on the waiting list puts their name card into the new center. This allows children to move in and out of centers without relying upon the teacher. Children are also less upset when they are not able to go to the center of their choice. They simply sign up on the waiting list.

After three years in pre-K, this year I am teaching second grade. I feel the pressure of teaching students how to read. I have a few students who have been through the pre-K program at our school, and I am grateful and happy that their journey to literacy began at that crucial time in their life. ●

## Widely held expectations of the four-year-old-child

Adapted from *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, by Susan Bredekamp

- Has a vocabulary of about 5000 words; shows attention to abstract uses.
- Usually speaks in five- to six-word sentences.
- Likes to sing simple songs; knows many rhymes and finger plays.
- Talks in front of the group with some resistance; likes to tell others about family and experiences.
- Uses verbal commands to claim many things; begins teasing others.
- Expresses emotions through facial gestures and reads others for body cues; copies behaviors (such as hand gestures) of older children or adults.
- Can control volume of voice for periods of time when reminded; begins to read context for social cues.
- Uses more advanced sentence structures and experiments with new constructions, creating some comprehension difficulties for the listener.
- Tries to communicate more than his/her vocabulary allows; borrows words to create meaning.
- Learns new vocabulary quickly if related to own experience ("We walk our dog on a belt. Oh, it is a leash. We walk our dog on a leash.").
- Can retell a four- or five-step directive or sequence in a story.

## SPOTLIGHT:

# Tarima Levine on Language Development

Tarima Levine is an experienced professional in the field of infants and toddlers, and works as a staff developer at Bank Street College. For eighteen months, she will work as a learning coach for StoryQUEST, which is a language and literacy training research project of the California Institute of Human Services at Sonoma State University, funded by the U.S. Department of Education through an Early Childhood Professional Development Grant, the only one awarded in the zero-to-three category.

### Where does language development begin?

Language development is rooted in the relationship between a child and his/her primary caregiver—the person who spends the most time with the child. Relationships are the child’s first symbols, and symbols are language. Through our responsive interactions with them, infants learn that their vocalizations and actions hold meaning. We have learned that it is important for the caregiver to learn how to read a baby’s cues, and then respond effectively, thus making their overtures purposeful.

### How does language development unfold?

Language acquisition is a fascinating process. While there are language milestones, babies develop language at their individual pace. In the beginning, babies communicate through vocalizations and gestures. For example, a caregiver who coos back at an infant, mimicking the sounds she makes, is actually “teaching” her and helping her practice taking turns in a conversation. This process supports further language development as infants begin to imitate sounds, and sounds become more like word approximations and true words.

### What is StoryQUEST?

StoryQUEST is a professional development grant, focused on training six-member teams (a parent, a teacher, a supervisor, an educational coordinator, a community member, and a Head Start literacy specialist) from the Early Head Start community about language and literacy in the zero-to-three population. We discuss what it is and how to foster it through research-based training and on-site visits from a learning coach, during which members work with a colleague to develop an action plan based on the training.

This is a wonderful professional development training model because it encompasses everyone who could potentially interact in the lives of children, and recognizes the importance of each person’s role in establishing strong language and literacy beginnings for very young children. The learning coach embodies the importance of relationships by being a supportive encourager to each team member.

### How does StoryQUEST support language development?

Many educators might know what to do, intuitively, when caring for infants and toddlers, but are often unable to articulate research-based practice. What we are able to do, through this grant, is validate what educators are doing with research support, introduce and help them to integrate new techniques and strategies based in research, and help them learn how to translate their work to parents and the larger community.

For more information about StoryQUEST, please visit [www.sonoma.edu/cihs/storyquest](http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/storyquest). ●

## Why Focus on Language & Literacy?

Adapted from *Jumpstarting School Success*,  
Jumpstart for Young Children, Inc.

According to current research:

- Language and literacy are highly related to most other kinds of academic learning (Chall, *et al.*, 1990).
- Children’s language and literacy development begin long before children start formal instruction in elementary school (Allington & Cunningham, 1996; Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999; Hall & Moats, 1999; Holdaway, 1979; Teal & Sulzby, 1986).
- Children who are not strong early readers are likely to struggle throughout their schooling (Shaywitz, *et al.*, 1997).
- Early differences in literacy abilities persist and increase with time (Jorm, Share, Maclean, *et al.*, 1986).
- Children who have problems reading do less well in other subject areas and pose discipline problems in school (Shanahan & Barr, 1995).
- The average child from a higher-income home enters first grade with a 20,000-word vocabulary, while the average child from a low-income home enters with a 5000-word vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1995).

## It Takes a Responsive Village With a Plan

Dimitra Jacqueline Dreyer, Educational Director  
Graham Windham Grow With Us Preschool, Bronx

**D**o you know how it feels to try to express yourself when you are always being told what to do, when to do it, and what you are doing wrong? Most would agree that this sort of climate stifles one's initiative to speak and learn. We need to remember this when we work with children at the preschool level. Creating a safe environment that is accepting of mistakes empowers children to take risks in language learning. Over the past fifteen years, working as an assistant teacher, classroom teacher, and now as an educational director, I have grown to believe that creating a verbally and emotionally responsive environment that is predictable and consistent can have a profound impact on the language development of young children. This requires that caregivers work as a team and share a common understanding about how language development is facilitated.

At Graham Windham's Grow With Us Preschool, a special education preschool and Universal Prekindergarten program in the South Bronx, we model language and reinforce language development by encouraging children to verbalize their wants and needs throughout the day and in numerous contexts. Staff members elicit information from children about what they understand. They ask them to repeat what they have heard, and to apply it to new situations. For example, children generate a list of classroom safety rules, and then discuss how to play safely on the playground. Children then share the playground safety rules before going out to play each day. Similarly, children are asked to think about what they want to do at the beginning of each work period in the classroom. I believe children learn to ask for what they want, and to express their desire to share ideas when they feel welcomed to do so. Adults at all levels within our school embrace this approach.

Within the classroom, caregivers interact authentically with children throughout the work period, asking questions and commenting on what children are doing, rather than giving commands and telling children what "not" to do. All staff members listen actively to children, respond

meaningfully to their expressions, and create opportunities for children to experiment with language. For example, when a child says, "Look at what I made," upon completing a painting, a caregiver, administrator, or clinician might say, "Wow! Tell me about your picture..." instead of saying, "That's beautiful." We have found that asking children about their work can lead to discussion about their concrete experiences at home and at school. This, in turn, fosters language learning. At the conclusion of each "free choice time," children are asked to recall and share their experiences. Teachers will often record what is shared, help children to reflect on the day before, or make plans for tomorrow. In so doing, children begin to learn the language associated with sequencing events. Words like "first," "and then," "yesterday," "tomorrow," "later," and "before" support children as they describe their experiences.

Children experience consistency in their interactions with the school receptionist, school custodian, school psychologist, administrative director, teachers, clinicians, teacher's aides, and educational director. When children reach out to hand our administrative assistant an empty tape dispenser, she is always sure to ask, "Do you need help? What do you need?" instead of simply offering more tape. This reinforces their language learning. Children in our care learn early that speaking yields desired outcomes. Children's efforts to articulate their needs and desires are acknowledged and rewarded by responsive listeners with a plan to help them acquire and develop language.

Parents of graduates of Grow With Us who return to share news of their child's success in school often refer to their blossoming confidence and ability to express themselves. We believe this can be attributed to the consistent and thoughtful approach, employed by all caregivers within the preschool learning environment—our "village," which invites children to share, learn, and take risks.

# Resources

Compiled by the Center for UPK

This list of suggested resources may assist you in supporting language development for your preschoolers and their families.

- Barron, Marlene. *I Learn to Read and Write the Way I Learn to Talk*. Katonah, New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc., 1990.
- Bialostok, Steven. *Raising Readers: Helping Your Child to Literacy*. Winnepeg, Canada: Peguis Publishers, 1992.
- Cambourne, Brian. *The Whole Story: Natural Learning and the Acquisition of Literacy in the Classroom*. New York: Ashton Scholastic, 1988.
- Christie, James F. *Play and Early Literacy Development*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1991.
- Cunningham, Patricia M. and Richard L. Allington. *Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read and Write*. New York: Harper Collins, 1994.
- Gallas, Karen. *The Languages of Learning: How Children Talk, Write, Dance, Draw and Sing Their Understanding of the World*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1994.
- Jaggar, Angela, et al. *Observing the Language Learner*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1985.
- Mandel-Morrow, Lesley. *Literacy Development in the Early Years*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989.
- Preece, Alison and Diane Cowden. *Young Writers in the Making: Sharing the Process with Parents*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1993.
- Strickland, Dorothy S. and Lesley Mandel-Morrow. *Emerging Literacy: Young Children Learn to Read and Write*. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1989.

Each of the following websites provides information regarding developmental stages of children as well as methods for nurturing language development:

American Academy of Pediatrics  
[www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Child Development Institute  
[www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com)

The National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center (NRC)  
[www.hsnrc.org](http://www.hsnrc.org)

Scholastic's Early Childhood Today  
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/>

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## An In-Depth Look

For more information and additional resources on Language Development, check out our website at [www.bankstreet.edu/upk/index.html](http://www.bankstreet.edu/upk/index.html).

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