

# The Language Development of the Preschool Child: A Quick Reference

## Competency 4: Using the Resources of Language to Communicate

### Meaning of the competency

*This competency involves language development. Language is an important tool in children's cognitive development, a necessary means of social development and learning about the world. Placed in a rich, stimulating environment, children develop oral and written communication skills that allow them to affirm their personality, relate to others, construct their understanding of the world and complete activities and projects. They organize the contents of their messages through action. They pay attention to others and show interest in what they say and do. With guidance, they gradually become aware of the effects of their actions, drawings, words and messages.*

### Outcomes at the end of preschool

*The children are able to express and explain themselves so as to be understood by other children and adults. They are able to listen to questions or instructions and to respond appropriately. They react positively to activities involving their language skills, specifically in the areas of reading and writing. They have been introduced to the various forms and functions of language and they adapt them to different communication situations.*

### Oral-Written language connection

According to research, in order for children to begin to develop literacy skills and eventually develop good reading comprehension skills, they need to have a strong vocabulary base. The larger the child's oral vocabulary, the more easily the child will comprehend text. (Sousa, 2005. How the Brain Learns to Read).

Learning to read and write begins with the awareness that speech is composed of individual sounds (phonemes) and recognizing that written spellings represent those sounds (the alphabetic principle). To be successful in acquiring the alphabetic principle, the child has to be aware of how the phonemes of spoken language can be manipulated to form new words and rhymes.

According to McCracken and McCracken (1986), those children who are exposed to rich language and literacy experiences from birth, are much better prepared to begin developing literacy skills when they arrive at school. They suggest that children need about 2000 stories under their belt in order for them to be ready to begin to learn to read and write.

*\*\* Children whose first language is not French or English and who are enrolled in a French or English speaking class for the first time may experience difficulties in mastering a second language. Teachers should take this into account both in providing learning support and in evaluating their competencies. In French immersion classes, it is helpful to make connections between French and English in order to facilitate communication and encourage children to apply their learnings. QEP, pg. 53*

## The 5 Year-Old

Reading	Writing	Handwriting
<p><i>Partner reading can begin with peers.</i></p> <p><i>Begin reading short chapter books to the group</i></p> <p><i>Big books and language experience stories written by the class and turned into big books.</i></p> <p><i>Predictable books remain important</i></p> <p><i>Phonics instruction should be organic (given where and when needed), not formalized.</i></p> <p><i> Encourage reading the environment (labels, sings, posters, charts)</i></p>	<p><i>Drawing and labelling initial consonant to stand for one feature in the drawing.</i></p> <p><i>Stories are told in a single drawing and one or two words.</i></p> <p><i>Spelling; continues to be largely prephonemic or early phonemic-initial consonants begin to appear as representing words and are sometimes strung together in sentences as ISTBFL (I see the butterfly)</i></p>	<p><i>Pencil grasp moves to three fingered approach and letter formation tends to be all upper case; irregular spacing between words is related to beginning understanding of spelling.</i></p>

## The 6 Year-Old

Reading	Writing	Handwriting
<p><i>Partner reading should continue</i></p> <p><i>Phonics instruction through whole language experiences with the whole class and small heterogeneous groups.</i></p> <p><i>Predictable books are still important, but also easy chapter books.</i></p> <p><i>Simple expressive assignments about reading comprehension begin (writing, drawing, clay, painting, drama, blocks, construction).</i></p>	<p><i>Drawing continues to have a big influence on story development; children form stories from a collection of drawings. They begin to create with whole sentences even if these sentences are early phonemic or use letter name spelling strategies: I WNT TO HR HS (I went to her house).</i></p> <p><i>Spelling: Letter naming (I lik to et candee-I like to eat candy) and transitional spelling (My frends ride bickes) predominate at this age.</i></p> <p><i>Growing sense of phonetic clues is emerging and should be taught extensively.</i></p>	<p><i>Proper pencil grip.</i></p> <p><i>Size of letters larger than at five.</i></p> <p><i>Writing is sloppier because writer is usually in a hurry or experimenting with new letter formation.</i></p> <p><i>Upper and lower case used together spontaneously.</i></p> <p><i>Spacing is unpredictable.</i></p>

## The 7 Year-Old

Reading	Writing	Handwriting
<p><i>Silent reading is not yet silent- lots of whispering as children read.</i></p> <p><i>Individual reading becomes stronger than partner reading.</i></p> <p><i>Phonics instruction intensifies through small reading group instruction.</i></p> <p><i>Formal spelling program introduced (also as part of writing).</i></p> <p><i>Reading comprehension assignments continue and include more written responses.</i></p>	<p><i>Longer stories which have a beginning, middle and end emerge, sometimes chapter books.</i></p> <p><i>The story line is all important: everything from "breakfast to bed".</i></p> <p><i>Now writing comes before drawing and sometimes does not even include drawing.</i></p> <p><i>Spelling: correct spelling slowly emerges from transitional with increased phonetic and sight word fluency; a formal spelling program appropriately begins.</i></p> <p><i>Invented spelling should still be accepted because revision is still not seen as necessary or important.</i></p> <p><i>Capitalization and punctuation are easily taught.</i></p>	<p><i>Pencil grip down on shaft of pencil, often right on the lead, a very tight grip; often over-tense.</i></p> <p><i>Size of letters is often microscopic, anchored to the baseline.</i></p> <p><i>Not a good age to introduce cursive handwriting; introduce it to younger or older children.</i></p>

### **References**

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Beaty, Janice J. (2013). *Observing Development of the Young Child* (8<sup>th</sup> ed). Toronto: Pearson

McCracken, Robert A., and Marlene J. McCracken. (1986). *Stories, songs, and poetry to teach reading and writing: Literacy through language*. Chicago: American Library Association.

David Sousa, (2007). *How the Brain Learns to Read*. California: Corwin Press), States that being aware of sound differences in spoken language is crucial to learning to read written language. (pg.33).

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