Section Four
Speech and Language in the Primary Grades,
Building Foundations for Learning

4.1 Oral Language and Literacy

While children's oral language skills (listening and speaking) are constantly developing in school, much of the focus of instruction is on developing literacy skills (reading and writing). This begins in kindergarten by learning about rhyming, letter names and sounds, and breaking speech into parts such as words, syllables and sounds. This forms the basis for learning to read and spell words. Later, children will build on these skills to read words, longer sentences and paragraphs and produce written sentences and paragraphs. Children with difficulties with language development are likely to struggle with some or all of these aspects of learning to read and write. There are many fun activities that a parent can do to help their child learn the skills for developing literacy. Your child may need extra encouragement and support in developing these skills.

> ### OAFCCD Parent Tip
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> *It is important to check with the teacher to find out what skills your child is mastering and which ones require extra support and review. Speech-Language Pathologists who work in educational systems can provide teachers and parents with information about the connection between oral language and literacy. The Speech-Language Pathologist who provides programming, may also be able to provide ideas on what you can do to help your child at home. For ideas on activities you can do at home to help your child, check the OAFCCD Website. Playing fun games as a family can be a great way to help build your child's skills and confidence.*

At school, *the focus of supporting speech and language development shifts to helping students adapt to communication in the classroom environment.* In the classroom, children will learn to interact with a larger group of children and will benefit from the oral language, early literacy, social communication and overall learning activities of the regular curriculum. There are chances to communicate one-to-one with peers and adults, as well as small and large group communication experiences. Speech and language programming will focus on helping the child communicate in a wide variety of situations.

Development in any one area of communication, reading, writing or oral communication, is linked to development in the others. The fact that oral language - listening and speaking - is an integral part of early literacy and is recognized in the Ontario Curriculum.

Children are expected to become capable listeners, speakers, readers and writers as they progress in school. However, children with speech or language impairments may have difficulties and require more time, additional support and more frequent opportunities than other students to facilitate their development.

4.2 How are Speech and Language Needs of Children Met in the Primary Grades?

Students with speech and language impairments are supported through a variety of strategies. Some students will be successful through the teaching strategies used by the classroom teacher. However, for many students with a speech or language impairment, it will be necessary to provide accommodations or modifications to the learning program. For a small group of students it may also be necessary to provide an alternative program.

Speech and language supports vary across school boards in the province and may include:

- assessment, consultation and programming services by a speech-language pathologist
- support from special education resource teachers
- communication disorders assistants or speech and language assistants supervised by a speech-language pathologist
- kindergarten language and literacy programs
- special education language classes with support from speech-language pathologists.

Speech-Language Pathologists often work in partnership with other members of the school team. In some boards they may be organized into multi-disciplinary teams who provide support to schools. As a partner in the school team, the Speech-Language Pathologist may be working with individual students or groups, in the classroom with the teacher, or providing consultation through classroom visits.

The school Principal is usually the key connection to special education services and for professional support services, including Speech-Language Pathologists. Depending on the child's needs, the supports may be provided by the school board, or through the Community Care Access Centre School Health Support Program.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

When asked to consent to an assessment, or a referral, ask questions about the purpose and the process. Find out what will be involved for your child and when the assessment will occur. You may be asked to provide information about your child or consent for sharing of past assessment results. Make sure you understand what kind of information will be needed and how the results of the assessment will help your child.

4.3 Assistive Technology

Assistive technology may be helpful to some students with speech and language impairments. For students with speech impairments who require Augmentative or Alternative Communication (AAC) systems, assistive technology may include Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCA) devices that AAC users can use to communicate single or multiple messages. Dynamic display devices and software that use a computer screen with picture symbols are also available. As well, devices that allow sequencing of icons from multi-page overlays or communication boards and text to speech software programs are available for more sophisticated AAC users.

Many students with language impairments also benefit from assistive technology software with text-to-speech capability, speech recognition, word prediction features and visual/graphic supports. The Ministry of Education obtains provincial licenses for educational software and makes these programs available to all schools.

Some of the main Assistive Technology (AT) software programs currently licensed for use in Ontario schools are described below. Access to this software may vary in different school boards throughout the province depending on each board's computer equipment, network capability, and software policies.

Write:OutLoud SE - a word processing program that provides an auditory and visual cue when words are misspelt, and a talking spell check. It has several speech options to meet different learning levels.

Co:Writer SE is a word prediction program to help support student with spelling and grammar.

Dragon Naturally Speaking program allows students to dictate into a microphone and have the computer convert their speech into text.

Clicker5 is a writing support using words, phrases and pictures that the student can select and insert into documents and hear the message they have prepared.

SMART Ideas is a computer tool to help students think visually and turn complex ideas into colourful concept maps quickly and easily. It helps students with critical thinking, comprehension and writing skills.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

Some school boards use programs such as ' Write: OutLoud' and 'Co-Writer' in the classroom with all students. This will benefit students with speech or language impairments. However, if you are not sure what is available and whether your child needs a more unique approach talk to the classroom teacher. Find out how computers are being used in the classroom and which features help your child.

4.4 Special Education Programs and Services

In the primary grades teachers will use a wide range of strategies to help children learn language skills, including; speaking, reading and writing. At some point it may become clear that the student needs a more individualized approach. Some students with language impairments may require special education assistance including an individualized program focused on oral and written language development, or comprehensive accommodations and/or modified language and learning curriculum.

The student may require a Speech-Language Pathology assessment to identify the student's strengths and needs and strategies that could help the student. If the results of the assessment indicate:

- that the student needs additional programs and services or
- specific accommodations for learning or
- a modified program that is different from other students or
- an alternative program.

the school staff may consider developing an Individual Education Plan, (IEP) or having the student identified as exceptional, through the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

For some students with severe speech or language difficulties, specialized services from Speech-Language Pathologists in the areas of augmentative and alternative communication may need to be involved, particularly regarding equipment recommendations. School boards can obtain funding for individualized equipment through the Special Equipment Amount (SEA) Grant, with the recommendation of the appropriate professional. For some students with physically or neurologically based speech impairments, medical input from an Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist or other specialist may also be required.

OAFCCD Parent Tip

The development of an Individual Education Plan, (IEP) can be very helpful for some students. The Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process is an additional step that can be taken when a student has long-term needs. Section 7 includes information on the IEP, the IPRC and the role of parents in the processes.

4.5 Provincial Testing - Starting in Grade 3

Province wide assessment of students provides information on how individual students are doing and helps school staff, school boards and the Ministry of Education make decisions about improving the school system.

Currently, province wide assessment involves Grade 3 and 6 tests for reading, writing and mathematics, Grade 9 tests for mathematics and a Grade 10 Literacy Test. *The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)* is responsible for developing and analyzing provincial tests. Testing is based on the Ontario Curriculum and involves a variety of assessment activities.

All students are expected to participate in provincial testing. However, some students may be exempted from taking the test or have the test deferred. The decision to exempt or defer a student from the test will be made by the school Principal after consulting the family and considering the child's needs.

Students who require *accommodations* to their classroom program are allowed the same accommodations for provincial testing. However, those accommodations must be identified and documented in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) in advance of the testing. Other students who require their curriculum expectations to be modified from the usual expectations of students in the same grade and class *are not allowed these modifications* during the provincial testing (see section 7 regarding information on accommodations and modifications).

OAFCCD Parent Tip

There are a variety of resources to help you and your child prepare for provincial testing. The EQAO Website at: www.eqao.com includes a number of helpful resources and test examples. Most schools have information about the tests and will work with students and families to prepare for these.

Additional Sources of Information:

ABC 123 Simple Steps to Your Child's Success, Ministry of Education Website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca

Oral Language Foundation for Learning, (2009) Ministry of Education and Ontario Association of Speech –Language Pathologists and Audiologists (OSLA)

Guide for Accommodations, a Special Provision and Exemptions Support for Students with Special Education Needs and English Language Learners (2008) Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

Helping Your Child Learn to Read, A Parent's Guide (2001) Ministry of Education

Helping Your Child Learn Math, A Parent's Guide (2002) Ministry of Education

Education for All, The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (2005) Ministry of Education

Learning for All K-12 (2009) Ministry of Education

Special Education Companion (2001) Curriculum Unit Planner Teacher Companion, Ministry of Education *(Includes Learning Accommodations and Strategies for Students with Speech and Language Impairments)*

General Suggestions for Improvement of Oral and Written Language by: Dr. Genese Warr-Leeper, University of Western Ontario (2008) available on the OAFCCD Website at: www.oafccd.com