



# Facilitator’s Guide

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### Videos

Stream from [http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators\\_pd/](http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/)

“Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversation” (Overview)

“Build In Opportunities to Talk”

“Model Conversation”

“Use Complex Language and Vocabulary”

## Introduction

This professional development training module is designed to help you lead educators in using best practices to engage children in meaningful conversation. It is one of several modules developed for early childhood educators by the Department of Early Education and Care of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This training meets the guidelines for Continuing Education Units (CEUs) as outlined by the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MassAEYC).

For more information about this professional development training module, visit [http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators\\_pd/](http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/).

## About this Guide

This Facilitator's Guide provides instructions and narrative for delivering a video-based training for early childhood educators. You'll find an agenda, learning goals, preparation suggestions, talking points, activities, and handouts. You'll also find general tips and resources to help you facilitate the training. Use these materials with the accompanying videos to lead family child care and center- and school-based educators in an engaging, content-rich training.

**Note:** To view the videos referenced in this guide, go to [http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators\\_pd/](http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators_pd/). Select *“Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversation.”* Be sure you have access to the videos prior to and while leading this training.

## Learning Goals

After participating in this training, educators will be able to:

- Summarize the best practices for engaging young children in meaningful conversation.
- Identify how to build in opportunities to engage children in conversation throughout the day.
- Describe ways to model language to help children communicate ideas, express feelings, and solve conflicts.
- Demonstrate how to create opportunities for children to listen to and use complex language and vocabulary.
- Apply new knowledge to current practices.

## Agenda

Introduction	15 minutes
Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversation	5 minutes
Build In Opportunities to Talk	15–20 minutes
Model Conversation	15–20 minutes
BREAK (optional)	5–10 minutes
Use Complex Language and Vocabulary	15–20 minutes
Try It	15–20 minutes
Wrap Up	5–10 minutes
<b>Total Time</b>	<b>90–120 minutes</b>

## Preparation

Before leading this training, you should:

- Watch the videos and get to know the best practices.
- Read through the training module. Become familiar with the talking points so that you can share them in a natural, conversational way.
- Obtain and test the technology you need to share the videos with participants and make sure you have a reliable Internet connection during the training.
- Gather any props or materials needed for the Try It activity.
- Rehearse and fine-tune your presentation to “make it your own.” Time yourself to make sure you are within the allotted time.
- Create a handout packet with copies of the following for each participant:
  - Self-Assessment
  - Learning Log
  - Try It
  - Best Practices
  - Learning Guidelines and Standards
  - Training Evaluation
- Consider working with a partner the first time you lead this training. You can learn from and support each other when preparing, practicing, and facilitating. After the training, you can reflect on participants' evaluations together.

## Facilitation Tips

Whether you're a new or experienced facilitator, these tips can help your training run smoothly.

- Arrive early to prepare the training room for optimal learning.
  - Place handout packets where participants check in.
  - Have pens or pencils and paper on every table.
  - Check your technology setup to make sure videos play without problem.
- Create a space that is inviting and comfortable.
  - Play soft music as people arrive.
  - Greet participants with a smile and a handshake. A personal introduction helps set the stage for collaboration and learning.
- Invite partner or small group discussion.
  - Before the training begins, invite educators to identify a partner—people learn best when they have a chance to talk about what they are learning or thinking.
  - Allow a few minutes for partners to introduce themselves to each other.
  - During the training, provide opportunities for partner interaction.
- Keep participants engaged.
  - Follow the “ten-two rule” as you present the training: Speak for no longer than ten minutes at a time and then provide participants at least two minutes of interaction or activity.
  - Avoid simply reading the talking points that have been provided. Become familiar with each point so that you can keep the training engaging, fluid, and conversational.

## Icebreaker Ideas

When working with a group of educators who may or may not know each other, it's a good idea to provide a few moments to “break the ice.” This allows people to relax, laugh, move, and get to know each other (and you). Below are just a few ideas you can use to begin a training session.

### That's Me!

Read a statement aloud to the group. Ask participants to stand up, raise a hand in the air, and shout *That's me!* if the statement applies to them. It's fun to see which statements apply to all participants and which do not apply to any. Statements might include:

- *I teach at a family child care.*
- *I have worked with children for five years or more.*
- *I was born in Massachusetts.*
- *I write down the funny things that kids say.*
- *I laugh out loud at least once a day.*
- *I check Pinterest at least once a week.*
- *I have no idea what Pinterest is.*
- *I believe that there is no problem that good chocolate can't solve.*

You can come up with your own statements or invite a few participants to come up with statements. When they say their statement aloud, others (including you) can reply, *That's me!*

### Weave a Web

Holding onto a ball of yarn, share your name and an interesting fact about yourself with participants. Keep the end piece as you toss the ball of yarn to a participant. Ask the participant to share his or her name and a personal fact, and hold onto the yarn as they toss the ball to another participant. Continue until everyone has had a turn and the "web" is complete.

### Two Truths and a Lie

Ask participants to jot down two truths and one lie about themselves or their work with children. For example:

- *I speak Japanese.*
- *I am related to Davy Crockett.*
- *I have three sets of twins in my program this year.*

Form participants into small groups of three or four people. Have each person in the group read their statements aloud and ask the rest of the group to guess which statement is not true.

### Four Corners

Post a word from a set of four related words in each corner of the room, such as:

- *lion, bear, eagle, deer*
- *desert, beach, mountain, city*
- *sushi, salad, enchilada, pizza*
- *hybrid, convertible, truck, Mustang*

**Facilitator’s Guide** (CONTINUED)

Ask participants, *Are you a hybrid, convertible, truck, or Mustang?* Direct participants to move to the corner of the room with which they most identify. Ask participants, now in small groups in their corners, to share with one another why they chose that corner and how it represents their interests, so that they can discover common attributes they may share. Have each small group pick one person to share the group’s common attributes with the larger group. Repeat the process with another set of four words as many times as you like.

**People Bingo**

Photocopy and distribute the “bingo card” below. Invite participants to find people who match a fact listed on the card and have them sign off on that fact. Each person can sign off on only one fact. Explain that when a participant has obtained five signatures in a row (horizontally, vertically, or diagonally), he or she should shout *Bingo!* and introduce the people who signed his or her card to the rest of the group.

<b>People Bingo</b>				
<b>Has traveled outside the U.S.</b>	<b>Likes pineapple on pizza</b>	<b>Has lived in MA for more than 10 years</b>	<b>Knows how to juggle</b>	<b>Has never been on a plane</b>
<b>Can speak a foreign language</b>	<b>Has 3 or more brothers</b>	<b>Likes to camp</b>	<b>Has been scuba diving</b>	<b>Reads the Sunday paper</b>
<b>Likes to scrapbook</b>	<b>Has a summer birthday</b>	<b>FREE SPACE</b>	<b>Likes to garden</b>	<b>Can say the alphabet backwards</b>
<b>Likes math</b>	<b>Does crossword puzzles</b>	<b>Owens a cat</b>	<b>Has been to Alaska</b>	<b>Likes to run</b>
<b>Likes thunderstorms</b>	<b>Has watched a meteor shower</b>	<b>Is afraid of snakes</b>	<b>Knows how to sew</b>	<b>Can play basketball</b>

# Training

## Introduction

(15 minutes)

### Welcome Participants to the Training

- Introduce yourself and share your background and experience.
- Announce the length of the training (1½–2 hours) and note other logistics, such as break times, restroom location, and so on.
- Review the agenda and explain the structure of the training.
  - Participants will watch an overview video and then three short videos that explore best practices in creating a learning environment.
  - After each video, participants will briefly discuss the main points and reflect on what they have learned.
  - Participants will also have the opportunity to share and reflect on their own practices.
- Share the learning goals and objectives. Participants will:
  - Explore the best practices for engaging young children in meaningful conversation.
  - Identify opportunities to engage children in conversation throughout the day.
  - Examine ways to model language to help children communicate ideas, express feelings, and solve conflicts.
  - Discover how to create opportunities for children to listen to and use complex language and vocabulary.
  - Apply new knowledge to current practices.
- Introduce the Learning Log.
  - The Learning Log includes questions to help participants identify best practices and distill the important points made in each video. The *viewing questions* reinforce ideas from the videos. The *reflection questions* help educators draw connections to their own experiences.
  - The Learning Log can also be used to jot down notes, questions, and ideas.
- Consider doing an icebreaker activity to get participants “warmed up” and ready to learn and interact. (See Icebreaker Ideas for suggestions.)

## Facilitator's Guide (CONTINUED)

- Ask each participant to identify a partner to work with during the training and encourage them to share ideas. (You can offer small group discussions if you prefer.)

**Complete the Self-Assessment**

Educators grow and hone their skills by continually identifying their own strengths and training needs and reflecting on their own practices.

- Invite participants to complete the first half of the Self-Assessment to help them discover the skills they already possess and to identify those they would like to work on.
- Explain that toward the end of the training, participants will complete the second half of the Self-Assessment to measure their growth and learning.

**Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversation****(5 minutes)****Introduce the Topic**

The early learning years are a time of rapid language growth. Children engage adults and each other in conversation that helps them explain and describe their world. They learn to express their thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs; to problem-solve; and to interact positively with peers. Children need models to help them develop these conversation skills. They also need an environment that supports language development. Educators can engage children in meaningful conversation by building in opportunities to talk, modeling conversation, and using complex language and vocabulary in “child-friendly” ways.

**Introduce and View the Video**

Introduce the overview video featuring Eleonora Villegas-Reimers, Associate Professor of Education at Wheelock College. Use this brief video to set the stage for a working discussion of best practices in engaging children in meaningful conversation.



“Engaging Children in Meaningful Conversation”

(approx. 2 min)

**Build in Opportunities to Talk****(15–20 minutes)****Introduce the Best Practice**

To develop language and conversation skills, young children need many opportunities to talk—with each other, with adults, one-on-one, and in a group. Educators can create opportunities for children to engage in conversation throughout the day.



## Facilitator's Guide (CONTINUED)

- **Use everyday activities as opportunities for rich conversational talk** (e.g., Circle Time, Snack Time, Story Time, and Outdoor Play).
- **Design spaces that encourage children to talk together and share ideas** (e.g., in circles, at learning centers, in outdoor play areas, etc.).
- **Ask open-ended questions to challenge children to “go deeper” as they express ideas** (e.g., Ask, *Why do you think that happened?* rather than *Did you think that would happen?*).

### Introduce and View the Video

Tell participants they will watch a video in which center-based and family child care educators highlight opportunities for conversation that occur in their programs. Participants will see how the educators use everyday opportunities to engage children in meaningful talk as they listen carefully, build on what children say, model responses, and observe as children follow their example.



“Build in Opportunities to Talk” (approx. 3 min)

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use these questions to guide their viewing:

- *How do the educators use activities, explorations, and learning spaces to encourage conversation?*
- *What strategies do the educators use to prompt children to use as many words as possible when they express themselves?*

### Partner/Small Group Share

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked....*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

### Review

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

***Why is it important to engage children in conversation?***

- Conversation helps children express their thoughts, get what they need, resolve conflicts, ask for help, and learn from adults and from one another.
- Children need many opportunities to talk—with each other, with adults, one-on-one, and in groups.

***How can activities, explorations, and learning spaces provide opportunities for conversation?***

- Use everyday routines to provide rich opportunities for conversation. For example,
  - Circle Time or small group meetings offer daily opportunities for discussion.
  - During Story Time, children can be prompted to talk about what they know from their own lives to make connections between their own experiences and the books they hear read aloud.
- Design spaces and activities that offer opportunities for children to talk together about important ideas.
  - Learning centers can offer activities that require children to collaborate and converse. For example,
    - The Pretend and Play Center encourages children to act out scenarios in their world, such as taking on the role of a doctor or patient, a restaurant waiter or customer, or a shopper in a grocery store.
    - The Block Center gives children an opportunity to cooperatively design structures that become a railroad station, a construction site, a highway, etc.
  - Outdoor spaces and activities can encourage discussion. For instance, bring children to community gardens or plant seeds together.

***What strategies can educators use to prompt children to use as many words as possible to express themselves?***

- Use open-ended questions to challenge children to “go deeper” as they express ideas. For example, ask, *Why do you think that happened? What will happen next? How do you know?*
- Model language to foster communication and provide an example for how children can express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts.

### View Again (optional)

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

### Reflect

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own programs. Ask them to answer the *reflection questions* in the Learning Log.

## Model Conversation

(15–20 minutes)

### Introduce the Best Practice

Young children often need concrete models to learn how to express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts. They need specific language strategies that help them ask or explain how or why something happens or to negotiate a disagreement. Educators can help by modeling exact language.

- **Model descriptive language** to foster communication and to serve as a role model. Children learn by example strategies for problem solving, negotiating conflicts, and for sharing ideas and feelings. For example, say, *Sarah, say, “Josh, I would like to use the pink crayon.”* Or, *Tell Kali that hurts your feelings.*
- **“Listen in” to conversations.** Be ready to supply language models when children don't have the words they need to express themselves.
- **Provide children with frequent opportunities to work and learn with others.** During small group activities, educators can model how to use group strategies such as careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.

### Introduce and View the Video

Tell participants that in this video, they will see educators model for children how to use language to express thoughts, negotiate, problem-solve, and communicate with each other.

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use these questions to guide their viewing:

- *How do the educators use modeling to help children communicate?*
- *What other strategies do the educators use to help children who have trouble communicating effectively on their own?*



“Model Conversation”

(2m 28s)

### Partner/Small Group Share

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked...*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

### Review

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

#### *How can educators model language?*

- Supply the words children need to convey their thoughts. When children are unable to express themselves, educators can model how to express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts.
- Become role models for children. Help children express emotions, thoughts, and ideas by example. For instance, say, *I have an idea. We could cut the pizza into three pieces. Who has another idea? Or, I was sad when I saw the broken truck. Tell me how it makes you feel.*
- Act out situations for problem solving. Talking through a problem or conflict helps children gain cooperative negotiation skills, while role-playing can help them learn ways to interact.
- Model group strategies. Show children how to engage with a small group through careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.

#### *What other strategies can educators use to help children who have trouble communicating?*

- “Listen in” to the language children use. Children come to the early childhood environment with varying levels of language. Educators can tailor their own language to address specific needs. For example, some children need entire sentences modeled; some children need help with descriptive or time words: the *round* plate, a *sunny* day, *after* school.
- Provide children with frequent opportunities to collaborate with others. During small group activities, children work and learn with others. Educators can model how to use group strategies such as careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.

**View Again (optional)**

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

**Reflect**

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own programs. Ask them to answer the *reflection questions* in the Learning Log.

**Break (optional)****(5–10 minutes)****Use Complex Language and Vocabulary****(15–20 minutes)****Introduce the Best Practice**

Through language, people share ideas, solve problems and conflicts, cultivate relationships, and learn new things. As children's language abilities grow, they use fewer one-word labels and express themselves in more complex language constructions. This growth is essential—children with deep and broad vocabulary become better readers, writers, and communicators. Educators can foster this development by exposing children to complex language and vocabulary.

- **Offer new words** that children can use to grow their vocabulary.
- **Incorporate interesting and complex language.** Children need to hear sophisticated words and be prompted to use them in their own speaking vocabulary. For example, say, *That is a gigantic cloud! Look at this miniature pony. This looks like a ferocious lion.*
- **Provide “child-friendly” definitions** of complex vocabulary and encourage children to use the words in their speech. For example, say, *Now we scatter the tiles. That means we mix them up.*
- **Encourage children to define words on their own** when possible.
- **Use academic language**—the language of instruction. As they study subjects like math, reading, and science, children will need to learn these words (e.g., *longer, higher, more, fewer, predict, add, follow, alphabet*).
- **Chart children's progress over time.** As children grow, so do the number of words they use in a sentence. A child who might once have said only “*My truck*” can grow to use a more complete sentence: “*I made a picture of a truck.*”

## Facilitator's Guide (CONTINUED)

**Introduce and View the Video**

Tell participants they will see the educators model how to use complex vocabulary and expanded sentence structures.

Ask participants to look for effective strategies used by the educators in the video. Use this question to guide their viewing:



"Use Complex Language and Vocabulary" (3m 13s)

- *What strategies do the educators use to help children expand their vocabulary?*

**Partner/Small Group Share**

After viewing the video, get participants thinking, talking, and learning together.

- Invite participants to share with each other, in pairs or small groups, what they noticed as they watched. Challenge them to use the language stem *I noticed...* rather than *I liked...*
- Suggest that participants jot down notes, ideas, or questions in their Learning Log.

**Review**

Share and expand on key points covered in the video. Use the following questions and talking points in your discussion. Ask participants to offer examples from the video as well as to draw upon their own experiences.

***Why do children need to hear adults use sophisticated language?***

- Children with deep and broad vocabulary become better readers, writers, and communicators.
- Children can often understand complex words that are not yet in their speaking vocabulary.

***What strategies can educators use to introduce complex vocabulary?***

- Flood the environment with talk to help them learn new ideas and express themselves competently and confidently.
- Model the use of new words that children can use to describe their world.
- Incorporate interesting and complex language into daily talk. Children need to hear these words and be prompted to add them in their own speaking vocabulary.
- Provide simple, easy-to-understand definitions of vocabulary and encourage children to use the words in conversation.
- Ask children to define words. Children often pick up the vocabulary of their peers and hearing another child's definition can have more meaning.

Facilitator's Guide (CONTINUED)

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- Use read-aloud books to teach new vocabulary and to help children discover the meanings of the words they hear.
- Use academic language (the language of instruction) to familiarize children with words they will encounter as they learn more math, reading, science, etc. (e.g., *longer, higher, more, fewer, predict, add, follow, alphabet*).
- Ask open-ended questions to prompt children to think deeply and critically and to encourage multiple-word answers. These questions begin with words like *what* and *how* and usually cannot be answered with a simple “yes” or “no.” For example, ask, *What do you predict will happen when we put the snow in the water?* Or, *What might happen when you put another block at the top?*
- Prompt children to talk with peers. Say, *Samantha has a great way to find her boots. Ask her to tell you what she does.*

**View Again (optional)**

Emphasize the key messages by showing the video a second time, if possible. Seeing the video again will give participants an opportunity to notice things they may have missed and to expand their learning.

**Reflect**

Help participants make the connection between what they have learned and what they do in their own program. Ask them to answer the reflection questions in the Learning Log.

**Try It****(15–20 minutes)**

The Try It activity helps educators plan how to apply new ideas to their own early childhood program. Ask participants to work with a partner and direct their attention to the Try It handout in their packets. Provide each pair with a read-aloud book

**Book Talk**

- Have partners read the book aloud together and think about how they will use what they have learned in a book talk with children.
- Ask them to list the concepts they want children to learn from the book experience.
- Then, have them recall key vocabulary they will define or will ask children to define.
- Next, have pairs think of two or three open-ended questions they would ask while reading aloud.
- Finally, ask pairs to think about how they will build on children's own experiences to help them enjoy and relate to the text.

## Wrap Up

(5–10 minutes)

- Invite participants to complete the second half of the “Self-Assessment” and then measure their growth and learning.
- Ask participants to look over their notes from the training and jot down three things that they want to remember from today in their Learning Log.
- Invite partners or small groups to meet and share their three “keepers.” Then ask a few participants to share their “keepers” with the larger group.
- Thank participants for attending. Remind them to revisit the video or get activity ideas at Resources for Early Learning: <http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/>
- Encourage them to fill out and return the Training Evaluation.

## Glossary

**academic language:** the language of instruction—specific words children learn related to subjects such as math, science, art, and so on

**language/linguistic development:** the process of developing language skills to understand when others speak (or use sign language) and to speak (or sign) and engage in conversation

**open-ended questions:** questions that require critical thinking, invite opinion or explanation, and have the potential to result in multiple-word answers





# Self-Assessment

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Before the training:** Place a ✓ in the box that best represents your current comfort level.

**After the training:** Place a ✓ in the box that best represents your new comfort level.

1 = Very uncomfortable 2 = Uncomfortable 3 = Neutral 4 = Comfortable 5 = Very comfortable

	Before					After				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
<b>General</b> I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Create a kid-friendly environment that encourages a “flood of language” between and among children and adults.										
Be “tuned in” to children’s everyday conversations.										
<b>Build In Opportunities to Talk</b> I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Create interesting activities and environments for talk (e.g. circle time, block play, centers, read alouds, outdoor play, show and tell, art centers, dramatic play).										
Create a space in which children are able to express themselves freely and politely.										
View almost every activity as an opportunity for conversation.										
<b>Model Conversation</b> I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Model how to ask and answer questions, problem-solve, negotiate, and express ideas clearly.										
Ask open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking and challenge children to “go deeper.”										
Help children make connections between their lives and the books they read.										
<b>Use Complex Language and Vocabulary</b> I am comfortable with my ability to . . .										
Introduce and use interesting and sophisticated vocabulary that expands and stretches children’s vocabulary.										
Provide “child-friendly” definitions and elicit children’s definitions.										
Use academic language frequently: <i>higher, longer, predict, add, alphabet</i> , etc.										





# Learning Log

## Build In Opportunities to Talk

### View

In the video:

- *How do the educators use activities, explorations, and learning spaces to encourage conversation?*
  
- *What strategies do the educators use to prompt children to use as many words as possible to express themselves?*

### Reflect

In your program:

- *What strategies do you use to model conversation?*
  
- *What did you learn that you will take back to your learning environment and put into practice?*

### Notes

### Model Conversation

#### View

In the video:

- *How do the educators use modeling to help children communicate?*
  
- *What other strategies do the educators use to help children who have trouble communicating effectively on their own?*

#### Reflect

In your program:

- *What strategies do you use to model conversation?*
  
- *What did you learn that you will take back to your learning environment and put into practice?*

#### Notes

## Use Complex Language and Vocabulary

### View

In the video:

- *What strategies do the educators use to help children expand their vocabulary?*

### Reflect

In your program:

- What strategies do you use to expose children to complex language and vocabulary?
  
- *What did you learn that you will take back to your learning environment and put into practice?*

### Notes



## Best Practices

The early learning years are a time of rapid language growth. Children engage adults and each other in conversation that helps them explain and describe their world. They learn to express their thoughts, feelings, wants, and needs; to problem-solve; and to interact positively with peers. Children need models to help them develop these conversation skills. They also need an environment that supports language development. Educators can engage children in meaningful conversation by building in opportunities to talk, modeling conversation, and using complex language and vocabulary in “child-friendly” ways.

### Build in Opportunities to Talk

To develop language and conversation skills, young children need many opportunities to talk—with each other, with adults, one-on-one, and in a group. Educators can create opportunities for children to engage in conversation throughout the day.

- **Use everyday activities as opportunities for rich conversational talk** (e.g., Circle Time, Snack Time, Story Time, and Outdoor Play).
- **Design spaces that encourage children to talk together and share ideas** (e.g., in circles, at learning centers, in outdoor play areas, etc.)
- **Ask open-ended questions to challenge children to “go deeper” as they express ideas** (e.g., Ask, *Why do you think that happened?* rather than *Did you think that would happen?*).

### Why is it important to engage children in conversation?

- Conversation helps children express their thoughts, get what they need, resolve conflicts, ask for help, and learn from adults and from one another.
- Children need many opportunities to talk—with each other, with adults, one-on-one, and in groups.

### How can activities, explorations, and learning spaces provide opportunities for conversation?

- Use everyday routines to provide rich opportunities for conversation. For example,
  - Circle Time or small group meetings offer daily opportunities for discussion.

Best Practices (CONTINUED)

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- During Story Time, children can be prompted to talk about what they know from their own lives to make connections between their own experiences and the books they hear read aloud
- Design spaces and activities that offer opportunities for children to talk together about important ideas.
  - Learning centers can offer activities that require children to collaborate and converse. For example,
    - The Pretend and Play Center encourages children to act out scenarios in their world, such as taking on the role of a doctor or patient, a restaurant waiter or customer, or a shopper in a grocery store.
    - The Block Center gives children an opportunity to cooperatively design structures that become a railroad station, a construction site, a highway, etc.
  - Outdoor spaces and activities can encourage discussion. For instance, bring children to community gardens or plant seeds together.

### What strategies can educators use to prompt children to use as many words as possible to express themselves?

- Use open-ended questions to challenge children to “go deeper” as they express ideas. For example, ask, *Why do you think that happened? What will happen next? How do you know?*
- Model language to foster communication and provide an example for how children can express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts.

### Model Conversation

Young children often need concrete models to learn how to express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts. They need specific language strategies that help them ask or explain how or why something happens or to negotiate a disagreement. Educators can help by modeling exact language.

- **Model descriptive language** to foster communication and to serve as a role model. Children learn by example strategies for problem solving, negotiating conflicts, and for sharing ideas and feelings. For example, say, *Sarah, say, “Josh, I would like to use the pink crayon.”* Or, *Tell Kali that hurts your feelings.*

Best Practices (CONTINUED)

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- **“Listen in” to conversations.** Be ready to supply language models when children don’t have the words they need to express themselves.
- **Provide children with frequent opportunities to work and learn with others.** During small group activities, educators can model how to use group strategies such as careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.

### How can educators model language?

- Supply the words children need to convey their thoughts. When children are unable to express themselves, educators can model how to express feelings, tell what they are thinking, share a new idea, and solve conflicts.
- Become role models for children. Help children express emotions, thoughts, and ideas by example. For instance, say, *I have an idea. We could cut the pizza into three pieces. Who has another idea? Or, I was sad when I saw the broken truck. Tell me how it makes you feel.*
- Act out situations for problem solving. Talking through a problem or conflict helps children gain cooperative negotiation skills, while role-playing can help them learn ways to interact.
- Model group strategies. Show children how to engage with a small group through careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.

### What other strategies can educators use to help children who have trouble communicating?

- “Listen in” to the language children use. Children come to the early childhood environment with varying levels of language. Educators can tailor their own language to address specific needs. For example, some children need entire sentences modeled; some children need help with descriptive or time words: the *round* plate, a *sunny* day, *after* school.
- Provide children with frequent opportunities to collaborate with others. During small group activities, children work and learn with others. Educators can model how to use group strategies such as careful listening, looking at the person who is speaking, and asking and answering questions.



## Use Complex Language and Vocabulary

Through language, people share ideas, solve problems and conflicts, cultivate relationships, and learn new things. As children’s language abilities grow, they use fewer one-word labels and express themselves in more complex language constructions. This growth is essential—children with deep and broad vocabulary become better readers, writers, and communicators. Educators can foster this development by exposing children to complex language and vocabulary.

- **Offer new words** that children can use to grow their vocabulary.
- **Incorporate interesting and complex language.** Children need to hear sophisticated words and be prompted to use them in their own speaking vocabulary. For example, say, *That is a gigantic cloud! Look at this miniature pony. This looks like a ferocious lion.*
- **Provide “child-friendly” definitions** of complex vocabulary and encourage children to use the words in their speech. For example, say, *Now we scatter the tiles. That means we mix them up.*
- **Encourage children to define words on their own** when possible.
- **Use academic language**—the language of instruction. As they study subjects like math, reading, and science, children will need to learn these words (e.g., *longer, higher, more, fewer, predict, add, follow, alphabet*).
- **Chart children’s progress over time.** As children grow, so do the number of words they use in a sentence. A child who might once have said only “*My truck*” can grow to use a more complete sentence: “*I made a picture of a truck.*”

### Why do children need to hear adults use sophisticated language?

- Children with deep and broad vocabulary become better readers, writers, and communicators.
- Children can often understand complex words that are not yet in their speaking vocabulary.

### What strategies can educators use to introduce complex vocabulary?

- Flood the environment with talk to help them learn new ideas and express themselves competently and confidently.
- Model the use of new words that children can use to describe their world.
- Incorporate interesting and complex language into daily talk. Children need to hear these words and be prompted to add them in their own speaking vocabulary.

## Best Practices (CONTINUED)

- Provide simple, easy-to-understand definitions of vocabulary and encourage children to use the words in conversation.
- Ask children to define words. Children often pick up the vocabulary of their peers and hearing another child's definition can have more meaning.
- Use read-aloud books to teach new vocabulary and to help children discover the meanings of the words they hear.
- Use academic language (the language of instruction) to familiarize children with words they will encounter as they learn more math, reading, science, etc. (e.g., *longer, higher, more, fewer, predict, add, follow, alphabet*).
- Ask open-ended questions to prompt children to think deeply and critically and to encourage multiple-word answers. These questions begin with words like *what* and *how* and usually cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." For example, ask, *What do you predict will happen when we put the snow in the water? Or, What might happen when you put another block at the top?*
- Prompt children to talk with peers. Say, *Samantha has a great way to find her boots. Ask her to tell you what she does.*

## Glossary

**academic language:** the language of instruction—specific words children learn related to subjects such as math, science, art, and so on

**language/linguistic development:** the process of developing language skills to understand when others speak (or use sign language) and to speak (or sign) and engage in conversation

**open-ended questions:** questions that require critical thinking, invite opinion or explanation, and have the potential to result in multiple-word answers

View the self-paced video workshop at <http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/educators>.



## Learning Guidelines and Standards

This professional development training module is aligned to Massachusetts standards and guidelines.

### Massachusetts Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

#### Center and School Based:

- **Curriculum and Learning 1A: Curriculum, Assessment, and Diversity: Level 2**  
Program uses screening tools, progress reports, formative assessments, and information gathered through observation to set goals for individual children across all developmental domains; Staff demonstrate language and literacy skills either in English or the child's language that provide a model for children.
- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 2**  
All staff receive orientation and ongoing formal professional development and supervision in how to support positive relationships and interactions through positive, warm and nurturing interactions.
- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 3**  
Staff engage children in meaningful conversations, use open-ended questions and provide opportunities throughout the day to scaffold their development of more complex receptive and expressive language, support children's use of language to share ideas, problem solve and have positive peer interactions.
- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 4**  
Staff utilizes teaching strategies that ensure a positive classroom environment, engage children in learning and promote critical thinking skills.

#### Family Child Care:

- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 2**  
Educator has participated in formal professional development on how to support positive relationships and interactions with children through positive, warm and nurturing interactions.

- **Curriculum and Learning 1B: Teacher-Child Relationships and Interactions: Level 4** Educators engage children in meaningful conversations, as age and developmentally appropriate, use open-ended questions and provide opportunities throughout the day to scaffold their language to support the development of more complex receptive and expressive language, support children's use of language to share ideas, problem solve and have positive peer interactions; Educators utilize teaching strategies that ensure a positive learning environment, engage children in learning and promote critical thinking skills.

## **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

### **Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice:**

- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning B.2** Teachers continually gather information about children in a variety of ways and monitor each child's learning and development to make plans to help children progress.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning E.4** Teachers provide experiences, materials, and interactions to enable children to engage in play that allows them to stretch their boundaries to the fullest in their imagination, language, interaction, and self-regulation as well as to practice their newly acquired skills.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.2** To stimulate children's thinking and extend their learning, teachers pose problems, ask questions, and make comments and suggestions.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.3** To extend the range of children's interests and the scope of their thought, teachers present novel experiences and introduce stimulating ideas, problems, experiences, or hypotheses.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning F.6** To enhance children's conceptual understanding, teachers use various strategies, including intensive interview and conversation, that encourage children to reflect on and "revisit" their experiences.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning G.1** Teachers recognize and respond to the reality that in any group, children's skills will vary and they will need different levels of support. Teachers also know that any one child's level of skill and need for support will vary over time.
- **(2) Teaching to enhance development and learning G.2** Scaffolding can take a variety of forms; for example, giving the child a hint, adding a cue, modeling the skill, or adapting the materials and activities. It can be provided in a variety of contexts, not only in planned learning experiences but also in play, daily routines, and outdoor activities.

- **(3) Planning curriculum to achieve important goals A.1** Teachers consider what children should know, understand, and be able to do across the domains of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and across the disciplines, including language, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and health.
- **(3) Planning curriculum to achieve important goals D.1** Teachers plan curriculum experiences that integrate children’s learning within and across the domains (physical, social, emotional, cognitive) and the disciplines (including language, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and health).
- **(4) Assessing children’s development and learning C** There is a system in place to collect, make sense of, and use the assessment information to guide what goes on in the classroom (formative assessment). Teachers use this information in planning curriculum and learning experiences and in moment-to- moment interactions with children—that is, teachers continually engage in assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning.

## **Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy**

### **Speaking and Listening Standards for Pre-Kindergarteners:**

- **Comprehension and Collaboration MA.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners during daily routines and play.
- **Comprehension and Collaboration MA.1.a** Observe and use appropriate ways of interacting in a group (e.g., taking turns in talking, listening to peers, waiting to speak until another person is finished talking, asking questions and waiting for an answer, gaining the floor in appropriate ways).
- **Comprehension and Collaboration MA.1.b** Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.



# Training Evaluation

Thank you for your participation. Please indicate your impressions of the training below.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The training met my expectations.					
I will be able to apply what I have learned.					
The trainer was knowledgeable.					
The training was organized and easy to follow.					
Participation and interaction was encouraged.					
The handouts were pertinent and useful.					

### 1. How would you rate this training overall?

*Excellent*                  *Good*                  *Average*                  *Poor*

### 2. What was most beneficial to you in this training?

### 3. What suggestions do you have to improve this training?