Assessing Vocabulary and Oral Language Skills in Preschoolers

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Professional Learning Institute
Long Beach, CA

Disclosure

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Agenda

- Importance of assessment of vocabulary and oral language skills in preschool
- Overview of the PELI: Preschool Early Literacy Indicators
- Administration and scoring of vocabulary-oral language
- Practice
- Case study
- Discussion and questions

The Issue: Differences in Reading Trajectories

Start Early

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 Cohort</th>
<th>Grade 2 Cohort</th>
<th>Grade 3 Cohort</th>
<th>Grade 4 Cohort</th>
<th>Grade 5 Cohort</th>
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<td>Middle 10%</td>
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<td>Low 10%</td>
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</table>

Importance of Assessing Vocabulary and Oral Language in Preschool

What do Reading Trajectories Have to Do with Vocabulary and Oral Language in Preschool?

Relationship between reading and language skills

- Decoding skills are supported by vocabulary, syntactic and semantic understandings. (Share, 1999)
- Strong link between development of oral language and the development of phonological awareness. (Dickinson et al., 2003; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998)
- Variations in oral language abilities account for differences in reading comprehension more significant than age, nonverbal ability or non-word reading. (Nation & Snowling 2004)
Skills at Kindergarten Entry Make a Difference

- Children who enter kindergarten with well-developed language and emergent literacy skills are more likely to benefit from kindergarten instruction in learning to read and become proficient readers.
- Children who lack language and emergent literacy skills at kindergarten entry are more likely to have later reading difficulties.

Critical precursor skills for later reading develop long before children enter school and begin formal reading instruction.

The Issue: Differences in Language Trajectories Begin Even Earlier (Hart & Risley, 1995)

Patterns in Performance are Stable Across the Preschool Year …

... unless we DO something
What Do We Need to Do? Promote Vocabulary and Oral Language Development *Early*

Identify children *early* who may need additional support in acquiring vocabulary and oral language skills.
- Provide additional support
- Monitor progress
- Modify support as needed
- Evaluate outcomes

Vocabulary and Oral Language: What Is It?
- Knowledge of words and word meanings
- The ability to put words together in simple sentences with correct grammar and syntax to communicate needs, wants, ideas and information

Promote Vocabulary and Oral Language Development *Early*

How many words do children learn?
- Typically developing children acquire 2.2 words a day* from 1 year of age to the end of grade 2
  - 15.4 a week
  - 803 a year
- By age 5, a typically developing child has an oral vocabulary of approximately 3,000 words.*

How many words can you teach?
- 2 to 3 a day
- 10 to 15 a week
- 350 to 525 a year

*root words
Biemiller, 2005; Biemiller & Slonim, 2001
Overview of the Preschool Early Literacy Indicators (PELI)

What is the PELI?

Preschool Early Literacy Indicators
A storybook embedded assessment of early literacy and language skills for preschool. PELI assesses:
- Alphabet knowledge
- Phonological awareness
- Vocabulary and oral language
- Comprehension

PELI Assessment Materials

Benchmark assessment books
- Three times per year screening of all children
- Beginning, middle, and end of year
Interim progress monitoring books
- Progress monitoring between benchmarks for some children
Quick checks
- More frequent progress monitoring for children receiving intervention in a particular skill area

PELI Books

10 different books – equally difficult
- 5 books for 3-4 year old children
  - 3 Benchmark books
  - 2 Interim (Progress Monitoring) books
- 5 books for 4-5 year old
  - 3 Benchmark books
  - 2 Interim (Progress Monitoring) books
- Score forms corresponding to each book
How to use PELI books

Use benchmark books to assess all children three times per year
- Benchmark 1: Beginning of year
- Benchmark 2: Middle of year
- Benchmark 3: End of year

Use interim progress monitoring books to assess some children between benchmark assessments
- Mid-way between benchmark 1 and 2
- Mid-way between benchmark 2 and 3

PELI Books

Time for Bed

PELI Score Forms

Features of PELI

- Storybook format is familiar to preschool students
- Assessment is untimed
- Child sits to the left of assessor
- Child is seated in the chair
- Assessor asks questions
- Assessor reads questions and waits for the child's response
- Assessor writes down the child's response
Features of PELI

- Stories feature diverse characters

Overview: Alphabet Knowledge

- Child is asked to name as many letters as he/she knows from an array of letters embedded in theme-related picture.
- Score is number of letters correctly named.

Overview: Vocabulary-Oral Language

- Child is shown a scene related to the theme of the book.
- Child is asked to:
  - Name 10 items.
  - Tell everything he/she can about 5 items.
- Score is total of: a) number of pictures correctly named and b) quality of response rating for “Tell About.”

Overview: Comprehension

- Questions: Assessor reads a story, pausing to ask questions before, during, and after.
- Shared retell: Child fills in missing words during a brief retelling of the story.
- Score is total of: a) questions answered correctly and b) correct responses during Shared Retell.
Overview: Phonological Awareness

- **Game format**
  - The assessor shows and names a picture and asks the child to say the first part or the first sound in words.

- **Score** is total of: a) first parts of words and b) first sounds in words that child says.

PELI Scores

**Subtest Scores**

- **Alphabet Knowledge**
- **Vocabulary-Oral Language**
- **Comprehension**
- **Phonological Awareness**

**PELI Composite Score**

- A combination of the individual subtests used to represent the overall skill level of the child
- Each subtest equally weighted to contribute equally to the composite

- **AK**: 10 * 2 = 20
- **V-OL**: 18 * 3 = 54
- **Comp**: 14 * 4 = 56
- **PA**: 4 * 4 = 16

- **PCS** = 146
- **PLI** = 110

PELI Benchmark Goals

- **What is a benchmark goal?**
  - A research-based target score that represents the lowest level of performance that predicts reaching the next goal

- **What is the research base for the benchmark goals?**
  - How a score at a particular point in time (e.g., beginning of pre-K year) predicts early literacy outcomes (e.g., beginning of K performance on early literacy/language assessments)
### Benchmark Goals and Cut Points for Risk for 3-4 Year Old Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Likely Need for Support</th>
<th>Beginning of Year</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</th>
<th>Likely Need for Support</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Alphabet Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>At/above</td>
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<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>2 - 4</td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
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<td><strong>Phonological Awareness</strong></td>
<td>At/above</td>
<td>Core</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>2 - 4</td>
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<td>At/above</td>
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<td>2 - 5</td>
<td>7 - 10</td>
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<td>0 - 6</td>
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<td>100 - 128</td>
<td>231 - 264</td>
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<td>33 - 61</td>
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<td>At/above</td>
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<td>128 - 162</td>
<td>231 - 274</td>
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<td>Strategic</td>
<td>35 - 67</td>
<td>59 - 99</td>
<td>104 - 143</td>
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### Research: Reliability and Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PCS</th>
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<td>.79</td>
<td>.83</td>
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</table>

| Criterion-related Validity | CELF Expressive vocabulary | .51 | .51 | .50 | .24 | .23 | .46 |
|                           | Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test | .75 | .69 | .67 | .68 | .35 |
|                           | DIBELS Next First Sound Fluency | .62 | .56 | .40 | .65 | .51 |
|                           | DIBELS Next Letter Naming Fluency | .53 | .53 | .30 | .44 | .34 |
|                           | DIBELS Next Composite Score (80%) | .64 | .63 | .39 | .61 | .70 |

| Predictive Validity | CELF Expressive vocabulary | .54 | .56 | .51 | .36 | .95 |
|                     | Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test | .77 | .77 | .70 | .57 | .50 |
|                     | DIBELS Next First Sound Fluency | .60 | .34 | .36 | .63 | .51 |
|                     | DIBELS Next Letter Naming Fluency | .52 | .21 | .24 | .44 | .72 |
|                     | DIBELS Next Composite Score (80%) | .63 | .31 | .34 | .59 | .69 |

### Research: Decision Utility for Benchmark Goals (4-5 Year Olds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtest/Score</th>
<th>AUC</th>
<th>Sens</th>
<th>Spec</th>
<th>AC</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>NPP</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>.61</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **DIBELS**             |     |      |      |      |     |     |
| Alphabet Knowledge     | .89 | .87  | .77  | .79  | .53 | .95 |
| Phonological Awareness | .86 | .83  | .73  | .76  | .52 | .93 |
| PELI Composite Score   | .87 | .86  | .74  | .77  | .54 | .94 |

Note: AUC = Area Under Curve; Sens = Sensitivity; Spec = Specificity; AC = Accurate Classification; PPP = Positive Predictive Power; NPP = Negative Predictive Power.
Research: Decision Utility for Cut Points for Risk (4-5 Year Olds)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Spec</th>
<th>AC</th>
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Note: AUC = Area Under Curve; Sens = Sensitivity; Spec = Specificity; AC = Accurate Classification; PPP = Positive Predictive Power; NPP = Negative Predictive Power.

Vocabulary and Oral Language
Part I: Picture Naming

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Literacy Skill</th>
<th>Vocabulary and Oral Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Child is shown a picture of a scene and asked to name common objects in the picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>1 point for each object correctly named</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompts</td>
<td>What's another name for it? Do you know what it is called in English? What is the whole thing called? What is just this part called?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue</td>
<td>Discontinue if child gives no response on the first three items. Go on to “Tell About.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Picture Naming Directions

V-OL 1. Here is a picture of a farm. I am going to point to some things and you tell me what they are.

Point to each picture and ask, What is this? or Do you know what this is? for the following words:

1. cow  6. barn
2. sun  7. fence
3. owl  8. wheelbarrow
4. tractor  9. windmill
5. scarecrow  10. puddle

Tell About Directions

Now I want you to tell me everything you can about some words. My turn first. I will tell you everything I can about an owl (point to the owl). An owl is a kind of bird that flies around at night and it says, “Hoo.” Now it is your turn.

If the child has not named the picture correctly, say, This is a __________ before asking him/her to tell you about it:

1. Tell me everything you can about a cow.
2. Tell me everything you can about a barn.
3. Tell me everything you can about a tractor.
4. Tell me everything you can about a wheelbarrow.
5. Tell me everything you can about a puddle.

Vocabulary and Oral Language Part II: Tell About

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Literacy Skill</th>
<th>Vocabulary and Oral Language</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Format</td>
<td>Child is asked to tell all he/she can about 5 words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Quality of response rating on 0–5 point scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prompts</td>
<td>What do you do with a _____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is a _____ for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What does a _____ do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue</td>
<td>Discontinue if child gives no response on the first three words.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Video: Ben and On the Farm
Tell About Quality of Response Rating

Follows progression of early childhood language development:

0  No response or incorrect/irrelevant response
1  One word response
2  Phrase, correct two-element sentence,
3  Correct three-element sentence,
4  Correct expanded sentence
5  Correct compound sentence

Language Development
First Year: Listening and Learning

Listening
Looking
Joint Attention
Cooing
Babbling
Vocables

Language Development
Stage 1: Single Words

First 10 words:
Nouns, Verbs, Descriptive Words
(food animals toys)

kitty  mama  car
eat  juice  more
ball baby  water
big    go  dada
want  cookie

Language Development
Stage 2: Two-Word Combinations

50-word vocabulary:
mostly Nouns

More cookie
Mommy go
Big doggie
Eat cookie
Kitty here
No bed
Want ball
Daddy eat

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Language Development 
Stage 3: Three-Element Sentences

Oral vocabulary of 50–100 words
Combine Ideas

Daddy throw Throw ball
Daddy throw ball
I go Go school
I go school
The doggie is big
I run fast I want juice
That is my kitty
The doggie is in the house
I kick a ball

Language Development 
Stage 4: Four + Element Sentences

Oral vocabulary of 900–1000 words
Sentences expand and become more grammatically correct

I like to build with blocks at school.
I went to the movies last night.
I can swing on the swings with my friends At the playground.

Language Development 
Stages 5-6: Compound/Complex Sentences

Oral vocabulary of 4,000–6,000 words
Sentences become increasingly sophisticated and correct
Ideas are linked in sentences using “connector words” like and, then, because, if, when, after

I go to sleep in my bedroom when I am tired.
I like to read a story before I go to sleep.
I like it when it is nice out and we can play outside.
The game that I played last night is my favorite.
I am going to my grandma’s after I get home from school today.

Language Development by Age 5 – Kindergarten Entry

Oral vocabulary of 5,000–8,000 words
Easily use complex sentences that link two or more ideas
Sentences are, for the most part, grammatically correct
Tell About Quality of Response Rating

Follows progression of early childhood language development:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>No response or incorrect/irrelevant response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>One word response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Phrase, correct two-element sentence,</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Correct three-element sentence,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Correct expanded sentence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Correct compound sentence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0-Point Responses

0 = No response or response unrelated to target word

Examples of responses that are clearly unrelated to the target word or convey incorrect information

- It tells you how hot it is outside (clock)
- It can help you (lizard)
- It’s for push (telescope)

Examples of responses that are vague and/or do not convey information about the target word:

- I want it (merry go round)
- That place (stairs)

Note: You can ask a follow-up question—What do you do with ____? What is a ____ for? Tell me something else about a ____.

Sentence Elements

Subject: Who or what the sentence is about (noun, pronoun or noun phrase)

Verb: Action – does what/what happens? (verb or verb phrase)

Object: The person or thing affected by the action

Descriptive word:

- Adjective: Describes a person, place, or thing
- Adverb: A word or phrase that describes an action, typically tells how, when or where

Prepositional phrase: phrase that begins with a preposition (e.g., in, on, under) and ends with a noun or pronoun
Frame of Reference for Scoring …

Become familiar with a three-element sentence and use it as your frame of reference.

Simple Three-Element Sentence

Subject – Verb -- Object

- I throw rocks.
- I will throw it.
- He throws the ball.
- I did throw the ball.
- I read a book.
- My teacher reads books.
- We can read our books.

Simple Three-Element Sentence

Subject – Verb - Object

- I like to eat.
- I want to play.
- I would like to help.
- Bobby likes to dance.
- Faye wants to read.
- I do like singing.
- Bobby likes sliding.

Simple Three-Element Sentence

Subject ---Verb – Descriptive Word

Adjective
- The boy is tall.
- The cat is fluffy.
- His hair is red.
- My mom is happy.
- The girl feels sad.
- Swimming is fun.

Adverb
- The monkey is running fast.
- He can jump very high.
- The girl walks slowly.
- I can throw far.
Simple Three-Element Sentence

Subject --- Verb --- Descriptive Word
A word or phrase that describes or renames the subject

Noun
- Our teacher is a man.
- My dad is a carpenter.
- A dog is an animal.
- Those people are doctors.

Subject -- Verb -- Prepositional Phrase

The cat is under the table.
The book is for my teacher.
The bike is in the garage.
Bobby is at school.
Pablo is on the bus.

Practice # 1: Three-Element Sentences

- he throws
- he throws the ball
- I want to run fast
- I play on the playground
- Bobby is playing at school
- I kick the ball on the playground
- kick the ball
- I play

Elements: subject verb object descriptive words prepositional phrases

Practice # 2: Three-Element Sentences

tape is sticky
you can color the paper
make fish
we get paper and paint
you can sleep in a house
I like to draw
for draw fish
you can make a fish

Elements: subject verb object descriptive words prepositional phrases
### Practice # 3: Three-Element Sentences

- you play at school
- we make it
- we get some lights and candy
- we look in the sky
- a doctor helps you when you are sick
- you talk to your teacher
- I like swinging on swings

### Elements:
- subject
- verb
- object
- descriptive words
- prepositional phrases

#### If it is not a 3 …

Is it less than or greater than?

- If it is less than a 3 and the utterance contains more than a single word, it is a 2.

#### Examples of 2-Point Responses

- Cow
  - get milk
  - in the barn
- Barn
  - the animals
  - eat in there

#### Examples of 5-Point Responses (Grammatically correct sentences consisting of two stand-alone clauses joined by connector word(s))

- cow: a cow says moo and you get milk from a cow
- barn: a barn keeps animals in it so they don’t get lost
- tractor: you get in it and then you drive it around on the grass
- wheelbarrow: a wheelbarrow can roll and it can take hay to the animals
- puddle: you jump in it when the rain falls down

### Scores for Ben: On the Farm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary/Oral Language</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cow:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a cow say moo moo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barn:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a barn say old mcdonald had a farm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tractor:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a tractor say it moves along</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wheelbarrow:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a wheelbarrow picks some woodchips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Puddle:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a puddle grows bigger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Scores for Ben: On the Farm

Benchmark goal for 3-4 year olds at EOY: 14+

Tell About: Practice 1

Tell About: Practice 2

Tell About: Practice 3

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Tell About: Practice 4

Tell about the barnyard and explain how the farmer uses his tools. 

Use of vocabulary: it can moo and it walks and you can milk cows, the farmer can drive it so he can bring hay to the animals, a wheelbarrow can roll around on one wheel, kids can jump in puddles and they can splash everybody.

Scores for Calvin: A Day at the Beach

For Calvin: A Day at the Beach, scores are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary/Oral Language</th>
<th>V/O/L 1 Score</th>
<th>V/O/L 2 Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sandcastle</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umbrella</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water bottle</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>towel</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anchor</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score: V/O/L</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calvin's score is 26, which exceeds the benchmark goal of 22+ for 3-4 year olds at EOY.
How do we Use the Data?  
Case Study
More Frequent Progress Monitoring

Use weekly/biweekly Quick Checks for children who are receiving additional instructional support in a targeted area.

- Progress monitoring materials (10 alternate forms) for:
  - Phonological Awareness
  - Alphabet Knowledge
  - Vocabulary-Oral Language

Quick Checks: Scoring Booklets

Scoring Booklets: Look Inside

Quick Checks: Child-Facing Materials

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Child-Facing Materials: Look Inside

Progress Monitoring on V-OL: Daphne

Building Futures by Changing Outcomes!

Thank You!!

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