Introduction

A SEAL classroom is alive with language! Children are talking and actively producing language to give expression to their thoughts, emotions, needs and knowledge. The amount, quality and focus of student talk determine how much students learn. Producing language encourages learners to process the language more deeply than is required when they simply listen, because it deepens both language and comprehension when a learner puts their understandings into words. SEAL "Module I: Oral, Complex, Academic and Precise language" is designed to provide teachers with the background and strategies to intentionally and systematically support the development of high-level oral language in both the social/interpersonal and academic realms.

Standards and Foundations-Based

The Common Core standards for language arts include speaking and listening standards, recognizing that our students need to develop the skills of participating in conversations and collaborations and presenting ideas articulately to be prepared for 21st century careers and college. These standards include:

- Participating effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on other's ideas and expressing their own clearly and *persuasively. (Beginning in Kindergarten with "participating in collaborative conversations about kindergarten topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups" including "continuing a conversation through multiple exchanges". By third grade, students are building on each others' ideas and expressing their own clearly, and are posing and responding to specific questions for clarification or follow-up.)*
- Integrating and evaluating information presented orally. *(Beginning in Kindergarten with "confirming understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood". By third grade, students are focusing on main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.)*
- Presenting information, findings and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development and styles are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. *(Beginning in Kindergarten with "describing familiar people, places, things and events, and with prompting and support, providing additional detail". By third grade, students are planning and delivering presentations on a topic or text, telling stories, recounting experiences with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace. Their presentations organize ideas around major points of information, follow a logical sequence, use clear and specific vocabulary, and provide a strong conclusion)*
- Adapting speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate *(beginning in Kindergarten with "speaking audibly and expressing thoughts, feelings and ideas clearly").*

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The California Preschool Learning Foundations for Language define the age/grade appropriate steps towards developing these oral communication skills, such that a child entering Kindergarten should be able to:

- Use language to communicate effectively with others in both familiar and unfamiliar social situations for a variety of basic purposes, speak clearly enough to be understood, and use accepted language and style during communication with both familiar and unfamiliar adults and children.

By five years old, children should be able to:

- Use language to construct extended narratives (real or fictional)
- Understand and use an increasing variety and specificity of accepted words for objects, actions and attributes
- Use simple and complex words that describe the relationships between objects and categories of objects.

The skills for effective participation in discussions and for presenting and expressing ideas begin to be built in the earliest grades by building vocabulary and designing a variety of rich structured conversations. Just expecting or allowing talk to occur isn't enough. Productive, extended talk does not just happen. It needs to be deliberately and systematically planned, modeled, supported, encouraged and celebrated.

Exposure to Rich, Complex Language

In the early grades, English Learners need a curriculum that expands their vocabulary substantially, and supports them in learning to talk about, describe and imagine their world. A key part of how this occurs is through the kind of language they HEAR. Hearing their teacher and the adults around them using rich, expressive and authentic language gives them a model for such language. Children need to hear language being using through exposure to authentic and high quality language and through interaction with people who speak the language proficiently. Teachers model useful phrases, questions, expressions and grammatical syntax. Read Alouds with wonderful, complex, interesting and compelling language brings vocabulary and expression alive.

Explicit Vocabulary Teaching

In SEAL classrooms, teachers thoughtfully and strategically select vocabulary to teach, model and infuse into the curriculum. This vocabulary encompasses depth of meaning, precision, and is central to the concepts being taught. Teachers draw pictures and label the visuals while describing what is in the picture, as a means to build vocabulary and comprehension. Vocabulary development is supported with realia. Students have many opportunities throughout the day to use the vocabulary and deepen their understanding of the meaning of the words. Additionally, teachers are intentional about teaching the words children need in the socio-emotional and interpersonal realms to express their needs, experiences and feelings.

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Multiple, Safe Opportunities to Use the Language

To develop a language, children need many opportunities to practice using the language. And a safe and supportive environment is needed for most children to take risks in using new vocabulary and language structures to express their thoughts. Teachers need to structure those opportunities, beginning with support for young children about how to participate in conversations and use language interactively. Structures such as Heads-Together, Think Pair Share, Amplification with Teacher as Language Coach, and others give children an opportunity to reflect and put their thoughts into words, understand and react to what they are learning.

The teacher becomes a coach, guiding students to use oral language by encouraging, modeling, probing, and providing physical and verbal cues to help student elaborate their language. Teachers ask high-quality questions that require students to put complex thoughts into language, and encourage students to elaborate, using more enriched language. Teachers initiate conversations with individual children throughout the day, extending the conversation through multiple exchanges. To further encourage language development, teachers structure many opportunities for student language production with their peer through cooperative learning and interactive activities.

Other powerful oral language activities include songs, chants, children's rhymes and choral reading. Through these types of activities, children are given the opportunity to hear the language and practice producing the language in non-threatening ways – utilizing rhythm and repetition to bolster fluency.

Oral Language as Early Literacy

Oral language is the foundation for literacy. Children learn pre-writing and emergent writing skills through oral language by creating books with their own drawings or photos about their own experiences, dictating to adults who write the words as children narrate. This later becomes daily journal writing. For the teachers, listening to children describe what they are drawing and narrate their "story" becomes a way to monitor the extent to which children have internalized new vocabulary and the depth of comprehension. Through Interactive Read-Alouds, children predict, summarize, retell and talk about their responses to what they are learning. Vocabulary comes alive in new ways. Foundational literacy skills of phonemic and phonological awareness develop through awareness of spoken words.

Oral Proficiency in Two Languages

By definition, English Learners are children living in dual language worlds. In the SEAL model, the development of oral language is encouraged in both their home language and in English. While children naturally code-switch across their two languages, it is important for children to *hear* each language system with authenticity and integrity. This means that teachers need to keep instruction and teacher use of the two languages separate during the day. Care should intentionally be taken that literature read aloud in Spanish is not just directly translated English, but is authentic and well-translated. Parents need to be enlisted in supporting oral language production through homework activities linked to the themes that engage parents in asking children questions and eliciting language from their children related to what they are learning.

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Learning to Love Language

Finally, in a SEAL classroom, children have FUN with language. They learn silly language, fabulous expressions, rhyming and poetry. They are asked their opinions, preferences and perspectives – and learn to see language as a vehicle of voice.

Over the course of a year, teachers should hear students participating more actively, speaking more, and using increasingly more complex and precise language, incorporating vocabulary appropriately. Students should show increased confidence and skill speaking in small groups, in front of the class, to peers and with adults. Students will be using whole sentences, and more varied expressions. Parents will be able to report that their children are talking more, and (as a result) parents are learning more about what their children are learning at school.

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