

# Oral Communication – A Fundamental Means of Language Development in Preschoolers

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## Abstract

*Preschool educators have the noble mission of teaching young children fluent, grammatically correct expression and a varied lexicon appropriate to their age. I believe pedagogical mastery lies in how each educator personalizes the instructional-educational process to develop lifelong learning competencies. Using teaching methods such as storytelling, retelling, picture reading, conversation, and educational games maximizes children's intellectual capacities, maintains their interest in the subject matter, stimulates their creative attitude, and encourages their own effort in developing logical and analogical thinking through practicing correct communication skills in the Romanian language. Communication must be continuously practiced not only to learn specific techniques and procedures but especially to learn to express thoughts and ideas coherently, thus making cooperative project-building an activity that involves understanding the world, others, and oneself.*

**Keywords:** *communication, language, conversation, coherence, expressiveness*

*Language is the form of communication of messages between senders and receivers, constituting the essence of the entire process of language education, as a process of educating communication<sup>117</sup>. In early education, the development of oral language is particularly important for interactions, social relationships, friendship, and for building a sense of belonging. Educators help children develop good oral language skills both directly through their interaction with them and indirectly, by creating an environment rich in learning stimuli. Communication is the basis of any educational intervention. In kindergarten, communication plays a primordial role, mastering the meaning of words being the indispensable*

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<sup>117</sup> A. Ilica, A. Marșieu, *Limbajul copiilor și comunicarea*, Revista învățământului preșcolar, nr. 3-4, 1999, p. 21.



premise for acquiring oral communication skills and capacities. *Educational communication can aim both at transmitting information to enrich knowledge and at forming skills, abilities, and competencies pursued through educational activities. The two aspects focused on by educational communication are both the instruction of preschoolers and their education*<sup>118</sup>. The teacher needs oral communication skills, empathic abilities, active listening, so that the message can be efficiently transmitted and received by preschoolers. Once formulated correctly, the responses provided will be those expected, and active listening will be demonstrated.

### **Body of the Work**

*The development of oral communication aims, besides cultivating correct speech skills and mastering the necessary rules for communication in a social context, in cooperative relationships, to cultivate correct expression.* Additionally, educators focus on organizing activities to develop children's ability to perceive the beauty of literary language, the norms of oral communication, polite address, nuanced expression through the use of artistic expressions. To ensure active verbal participation of children, it is necessary that, in the educational action in kindergarten, preschoolers are stimulated to become subjects of the pedagogical act by participating in all activities both physically and mentally<sup>119</sup>.

In all activities carried out in kindergarten, training children to solve situations and verbalize them should not be neglected.

Language education activities enable the cultivation of oral language, with emphasis on communication, free dialogue, the formation of the skill of orderly expression of thought, and the mastery of grammatical structure. Using language as a powerful means of intellectual, moral, and aesthetic education, the educator instructs and educates children, develops their speech, which is necessary in the process of communication and knowledge of the surrounding life, and at the same time perfects their expression, correcting their pronunciation, enriching their vocabulary, and helping them practically acquire the grammatical structure of the language. The teacher must allow the child to speak, to tell stories, to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Mastery of a rich vocabulary offers the preschooler the opportunity to move easily in the surrounding environment and to experiment with their own language acquisitions. In oral communication, we have paid special attention to enriching vocabulary, understanding the meaning of words, correct oral

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<sup>118</sup> I. Albulescu, H. Catalano, *Sinteze de pedagogia învățământului preșcolar*, Ed. DPH, București, 2019, p. 149.

<sup>119</sup> G. Dobrogeanu, *Comunicarea orală și formarea deprinderilor corecte de vorbire*, Revista învățământului preșcolar, nr. 1-2, 1999, p. 116.



grammatical structure, developing reproductive speech, and dialogue. Certain activities are used to develop communication skills and enrich language: storytelling, retelling, didactic games, picture readings, conversations. Special attention will be paid to speech expressiveness, by conducting exercises to develop oral expression and retelling the content of stories or parts of stories.

The educator's storytelling plays a major role in developing children's language and oral communication. „Storytelling is a frequently used method at young ages, due to its more affective, more accessible nature.” Through them, children become familiar with the structure of the language, its grammatical forms, the beauty, and expressiveness of the language, which contributes to the development of their speech and thinking. *Often, the content of the stories reproduces the children's own life experience, allowing the repetition in various variants of a theme, each time with elements of novelty and surprise. In free or unsuggested storytelling, the child can address an insignificant, uninteresting aspect, can needlessly prolong the story, can reach an inelegant conclusion, but this path remains important in terms of exercising creative capacity*<sup>120</sup>. As long as the teacher presents the story in as correct stylistic and grammatical form as possible, specific forms of expression of both literary and popular language penetrate the children's language, facilitating the effortless acquisition of stylistic forms, poetic expressions. Along with these, various inflectional forms of words become known and assimilated by the children. Moreover, by listening to stories or fairy tales, children not only perceive the verbal means used by the educator but also memorize the words with which the stories begin and end, the expressions repeated in fairy tales<sup>121</sup>. Thus, literary and popular language, with its specific stylistic means, enters the children's everyday language. Through storytelling activities, we aimed at enriching, precision, and correctness of vocabulary acquisition, the relationship between word and object (depicted action), the level of children's ability to ask questions on a theme, consolidating the skills and habits of correct oral expression in more extensive grammatical structures, in sentences and phrases, which will greatly help children in acquiring the skills to compose texts in later school activities. We found that the help provided by storytelling activities consists in the fact that through these means children acquire some expressions of literary language and gain more nuanced and colorful expression possibilities. An effective means of fixing stories is to use images that depict the main

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<sup>120</sup> D Gherghina et alii, *Metodica activităților instructiv-educative în învățământul preșcolar*, Ed. Didactica Nova, Craiova, 2007, p. 54.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.



moments in their logical sequence, images that highlight the traits of the respective characters. They stimulate discussions with children. We fixed the stories through a series of questions and answers.

Retelling activities are exercises in which children are put in a situation to reproduce the content of previously known stories (fables or fairy tales). These activities aim to develop children's ability to present them fluently and logically from all aspects: phonetic, lexical, and grammatical, and to practice contextual and monological speech. Moreover, retellings constitute a means of verifying and appreciating children's skills in correctly presenting the content of the respective text, their ability to use dialogues between characters, descriptions, and explanations in motivating situations. Retelling text based on visual support is absolutely necessary for younger children and those who lack experience in oral expression. For older children, it is absolutely necessary to create situations where visual support is used only partially or not at all. Initially, we asked children to reproduce short stories, with simple themes and content, with similar, sometimes even identical dialogues that are repeated. However, gradually, we asked children to reproduce longer stories (tales, fairy tales) with richer content. We conducted a number of retellings in the older group, including „Hazel Stick” by Călin Gruia, „Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” by Charles Perrault, „Salt in the Food” by Petre Ispirescu etc., during which we could observe that the success of a retelling activity depends on the understanding of the text taught, thus contributing to the assimilation of grammatical forms, autonomy, and language creativity, thus facilitating the gradual transition to stories created by children.

If in school, learning is the dominant form of activity, in kindergarten, it is replaced by play. This is the basis of the entire educational activity. Didactic play is an attractive and accessible form of activity that combines fun elements with work and learning, being an efficient means of activating children's vocabulary, correcting pronunciation, and mastering grammatical constructions. Didactic play occupies a particularly important place in the development of preschool children's speech because the form of play engages the child in stimulating and practicing speech in the direction proposed within each game, without the child realizing this effort. „Playing, the child practices understanding through communication, develops the ability to discriminate, judge, imagine, and verbally formulate both the real and the imaginary.”<sup>122</sup> The efficiency of

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<sup>122</sup> M. Dumitrana, *Educarea limbajului în învățământul preșcolar, Comunicarea orală*, Vol. 1, Ed. Compania, București, 1999, p. 9.



didactic games compared to other frontal-directed activities lies in the fact that all children in the group participate in them, making the same effort of thinking and expression. Game elements impart a livelier character, bring variety and a state of good mood, cheerfulness, preventing the onset of fatigue. Through didactic games, preschoolers became familiar with the semantic relationships between words, i.e., the connections made based on the meaning of words in relation to their form. Considering that a language is richer the more synonyms it has, allowing nuanced and elegant expression, we engaged children in didactic games that contributed to enriching their vocabulary with synonyms. In the didactic game „How else can you say?” preschoolers, using appropriate material, found synonyms for known words, which they then practiced in sentences: tree – tree, snow – snowdrift, cat – cat, fruit – fruit, forest – woods, ball – sphere, room – chamber – room, bag – sack. Divided into two teams, the children took turns asking questions by naming the object drawn on the chosen token. For example, „How else can you say tree?” For each correct answer, the team was rewarded. The effectiveness of didactic games in speech development largely depends on how the educator knows how to select the game in relation to the specific situation in the group of children. She must know the preschoolers very well, below the level of language development reached, as well as in terms of speech defects.

Reading through pictures is an activity where children are stimulated and taught to speak with the help of images. Through the image, the child receives a message, expresses themselves about it, and communicates it. For this purpose, the child, first of all, needs to learn to read the images, to recognize certain pictorial symbols, in order to decipher the word, to reach the transmitted message. From my experience working with preschoolers, I can say that while storytelling through pictures for young preschoolers is often limited to naming the elements separately appearing in the image, older preschoolers manage to include each element in an action, to give it fluency and significance, to enrich the respective actions, and to complete the narrative. In the case of reading through pictures, we aimed to develop a question plan before each activity. Formulating words as questions or direct addresses made the children think, analyze, compare, clarify, draw conclusions, and generalize. In this way, we developed language and oral communication, expanded vocabulary, and, of course, the child's ability to express themselves. My intervention in the development of the child's language and oral communication was through sustained dialogue. By expressing aloud their observations, appreciations, and judgments, the child exercises their



speech, especially in forming simple sentences (for the young group) and extended sentences (for the middle and large groups). They learn to think and logically express themselves by linking words in sentences, sentences in phrases, and the latter in a short description or analysis. At the same time, they learn to give their speech a certain color, showing their position, agreement, or disagreement, surprise, or gratitude.

Reading through pictures contributed to the oral communication practice of all children. During the activity of reading through pictures, we used the method of differentiated work, in the reading stage of the picture, and requested responses according to each child's abilities. Thus, for those who had difficulty expressing themselves, we asked them to list the components, others to describe the appearance of objects and certain actions, while others interpreted the data.

Conversation is one of the most complex activities in the educational process carried out in the kindergarten, aiming to develop speech and facilitate children's knowledge of the surrounding environment. The level of difficulty of this activity is determined by the predominant use of conversation method over a longer duration without intuitive support.

Conversation develops the ability to express and support one's own opinions in front of a group. It consists of establishing a direct dialogue between the educator and the child, based on a series of questions and recording the obtained answers. *Conversation is organized and carried out verbally, in the absence of any concrete material, but it is based on the knowledge acquired by children throughout other activities*<sup>123</sup>. Conversation also directly contributes to improving the quality of children's correct expression. The discussions they engage in require them to use appropriate words, control their vocabulary, search for the most suitable terms to accurately convey their thoughts. At the same time, they are put in a situation where they must use various grammatical forms, constructing sentences and phrases correctly, ensuring the fluency and coherence necessary. Additionally, children learn not to stray from the subject, to attentively follow the thread of the discussion, to respond precisely to the questions posed to them, to express ideas clearly and precisely, to complement their peers' responses without repeating what has already been said.

Periodically, I have created a set of questions on various themes: Who was wrong?, After we recognize?, based on poems like „The Lame Puppy” by Elena Farago, „Spring” by Vasile Alecsandri. Through the questions asked, the children provided various answers, demonstrating

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<sup>123</sup> D. Gherghina, et alii, *op. cit.*, p. 75.



that by memorizing different verses of the poems, they developed a rich vocabulary, grammatically correct.

Through conversation, the child showcases their level of language and develops their personality.

I used conversation as a means to broaden the horizon of knowledge, to form and consolidate representations and notions about family, nature, habits, beliefs, moral feelings. The basic method I used in all language education memorization activities was conversation. In organizing and conducting language education activities through memorization on various topics such as: „Autumn” by Demostene Botez, „The Punished Robber” by Tudor Arghezi, „The Rain Comes” by George Coşbuc, „A Good Deed” by George Zarafu, „Winter on the Street” by George Coşbuc, „The Arrival of the Swallow” by George Coşbuc, I used conversation as the basic method. In the middle group, the children learned the poem „A Good Deed” by George Zarafu. After learning the poem „A Good Deed” by George Zarafu, I had a conversation with the children about the text of the poem, analyzing it through questions:

*Why was the pigeon crying?*

*How did he feel?*

*What did Florinel do?*

*Did Florinel do well, what did he do?*

Why do you think he did well? The motivation in the children's answers was a list of the described facts: „he did well because he caressed him”, „he took him home and took care of him”. Returning to the question „Why do we say that Florinel did well?”, the children managed to give the appropriate answer: „He did well because he didn't let him die, he bandaged him, fed him, and after two weeks he released him, and the pigeon, through its swirling flight, thanked him.” After learning the poem „Spring” by Vasile Alecsandri, I had a conversation with the children about the text of the poem, analyzing it through questions using the stellar explosion method. After dividing the preschoolers into five groups, I asked them to formulate questions related to the learned poem, using the stellar explosion method. Example:

Who?

Who arrived in the grove? (the swallow)

What?

What was the cuckoo doing in the grove? (singing)

Why?

Why was the field green? (because spring had arrived)

When?

When did the beautiful weather come? (spring)

How?



How was the thrush? (golden yellow) I believe that the conversation method is truly useful, consisting of an active dialogue between children and educators, stimulating children to think and elaborate their answers on their own. The questions must be formulated clearly, correctly, and must require thinking and memory, and the answers must be correct and original.

Activities organized in kindergarten, especially those aimed at developing language and oral communication, allow for the efficient formation of communication skills, with the emphasis on free dialogue, offering children multiple opportunities to practice the act of communication.

In conclusion, activating and enriching vocabulary is a complex and long-term process that is not limited to preschool education but continues throughout life. The practice of literary language requires respect for universally recognized and accepted norms, and any violation of these norms constitutes a linguistic deviation. Learning a language is both freedom and constraint: freedom because it allows everyone to express themselves, to affirm themselves, to understand the world, and constraint because, in order to communicate, it is necessary to use the elements of the communication situation appropriately.

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