

Two Domains of Foundational Skills

Code-related Skills

- **Alphabet Shape and Name Knowledge** a child can distinguish among letter shapes and connect the correct name to each one
- **Phonological Awareness** The general awareness that oral language is composed of units of sound, such as words, syllables, onsets and rimes, and phonemes. Phonemic awareness is the ability to detect and manipulate individual sounds –phonemes –in spoken words, which is necessary for learning to read.
- **Concepts of Print** –Understandings about “how print works.” It includes an awareness that the left page of an open book is read before the right page, that print is scanned from left to right, that each letter exists in a “big” and a “little” form, that space separates words in lines of print, and that some graphic marks are punctuation, not letters or numbers.



Oral Language Skills

- **Vocabulary & Conceptual Knowledge** - Vocabulary breadth refers to the number of words known. Knowing a variety of words, at a beginning level of understanding, gives children some access to many topics. Vocabulary depth refers to robust knowledge about a word. This knowledge includes its multiple meanings, syntactic function, and morphological variations (e.g., electric, electricity; mouse, mice). It also includes knowing relationships among the word and other words. Depth of vocabulary knowledge requires and fosters conceptual knowledge, and allows children to provide definitional information about a word. When teachers’ explanations fill in children’s knowledge gaps, they foster conceptual understanding and also deepen children’s vocabulary understanding.
- **Facility with Syntax and Morphology** – Syntax pertains to how words and phrases are ordered in a sentence and includes understanding the structure of well-formed sentences. Exposure to syntax, such as the word order in declarative sentences, questions, embedded clauses, and compound sentences, is important for developing children’s language comprehension. Morphology is the study of word parts and includes knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and word roots. Children are exposed to morphology when adults use plural forms of words, make adverbs (e.g., sweet, sweetly), change a verb’s tense (e.g., whisper, whispered), or make nouns and verbs from root words (e.g., move remove, movement).
- **Discourse Skills** – Discourse skills involve understanding how written or spoken language is used to tell, request, explain and clarify. They also include how language is used (pragmatics) to communicate meaning and purpose. Children learn discourse skills by participating in conversations, listening to stories read aloud, and by writing and using print in the environment. They also learn discourse skills - how to use language for a variety of purposes-- by telling stories, giving and requesting information, and sharing their opinions.