UNIT 24 FURTHERING LANGUAGE

Structure
24.1 Introduction
24.2 Conversing with Children
24.3 Play Activities for Furthering Language and Pre-reading and Pre-writing Skills
   24.3.1 Readiness for Reading and Writing
   24.3.2 Activities for Auditory Discrimination
   24.3.3 Songs and Rhymes
   24.3.4 Stories
   24.3.5 Riddles
   24.3.6 Picture Reading
   24.3.7 Activities for Fine Motor Coordination
   24.3.8 Activities for Eye-hand Coordination
   24.3.9 Putting Labels to Things
   24.3.10 Activities for Visual Perception and Discrimination
   24.3.11 Reading Aloud
24.4 Children with Delayed Speech
24.5 Summing Up
24.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

24.1 INTRODUCTION

You must have often observed children running excitedly to their mothers and saying things like: “Mother, mother, look, feather” or “Mother, it is raining outside.” Very often mothers say: “Shh! I am busy, don’t disturb me” or “Hmm.” Some mothers respond positively by saying: “Yes, this is a crow’s feather” or “Yes, I too had noticed dark clouds. These clouds have brought us rain. Let’s stand at the window and watch.” These mothers are introducing the children to new words and concepts, such as that the feather which they have found is that of a crow or that dark clouds bring rain.

Learning to speak is one of the most important aspects of the development of a child. Do you remember from the Units on language development which you read in the earlier Blocks, the various ways in which language helps the child? It would help you to recapitulate and list in the space provided below, some of the key functions of language.

The early childhood years are years of rapid learning. The caregivers must capitalize on this critical period, and engage in a number of activities with the infants, toddlers and preschoolers to help them develop their linguistic abilities. You have already read in Units 5, 9, 11 and 16 about how language development of infants and toddlers can be facilitated and the role of caregivers in the same. In this Unit, we will focus on furthering language during the preschool age.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to

• understand the significance of conversing with children and answering their questions
• plan and carry out play activities that foster language development, including pre-reading and pre-writing skills in preschoolers
• explain what the worker should do to help children with delayed speech
Let us begin our discussion on what we can do to develop language abilities in preschoolers by identifying a common problem that comes in the way of language development of children. Caregivers are often too busy to listen to children. They are involved in other activities and expect children to be on their own. Their response to many of the questions asked by children is: "Quiet, I am busy right now", "Don't disturb me, go and play", or "Shh, someone is visiting, don't talk." These adults show an insensitivity to the natural need of children to talk about what they are trying to understand. What do you think could be the harmful effects of such adult behaviour? Write your comments and compare with the discussion that follows.

The child who is repeatedly snubbed and not responded to, becomes inhibited. With low levels of stimulation and little encouragement to practise speech, her language development suffers. Conversely, encouraging the child to talk and responding to her utterances facilitate her language development.

Language, as you may recall from the earlier Units, has three aspects: (i) listening; (ii) speaking; and (iii) reading and writing. Let us see what can be done to develop these language abilities in children. You have already been introduced to this in Unit 19 in the previous Block. Now, we shall go deeper into this matter, and build on the various aspects.

The crux of the matter is to encourage the preschoolers to talk. Let us take a look at the ways in which this can be done.

Preschoolers are curious about everything. They want to know the what, how and why of everything. Encourage these questions. Remember, if children get answers to their questions, they will ask further questions. If they find caregivers interested in what they are saying, they will talk more about what is important to them.

Recapitulating what you have read in Unit 19, it is a good idea to take part in some activity that the child is involved in and start a conversation. The following situation brings this out well.

Rahul, a five-year old, was drawing something when his teacher sat down next to him. Their conversation took the following course:

"What are you drawing?"

"A train. We went to Bombay sitting in this train."

"You went to Bombay! That is nice. Who went with you?"

"Mummy, Papa and Alka."

"Is Alka your sister?"

"Yes."

"Is she younger or older to you?"

"Older. She studies in Class I."

"So, what did you see in Bombay?"

"I saw the sea. There were big ships standing in it."

"Really! Did you get into any of those ships?"

"No. They were too far. And how could I go over the water? Papa told me he'll teach me swimming. Then I will swim to the ship."

"That'll be very exciting."
Have you had a conversation with a preschoofer recently? It would be interesting to write it down and analyze your responses to the child.

Children love to talk about anything and everything. An interested listener encourages children to talk. The caregiver who truly listens draws forth conversation from the child. We should ask the child questions that encourage her to respond. These questions should relate to things in which the child is interested and about which she knows something. Can you identify such questions in the conversation you just read? “What did you do yesterday?” and “Where did you get these shoes from?” could be a couple of other examples. Through such questions, you may pick up a conversation with the preschooler. When conversing with her, accept and extend her responses rather than being critical. Your interest in what the child is saying should reflect in your voice and facial expression.

Do bear in mind the importance of interaction on a one-to-one basis for developing the child’s language. This is particularly significant for a worker in the child care centre. Group activities have their own advantages, but in addition, you should take the time to converse with each child individually. Another thing which the caregiver should do is ensuring that the child too is talking. We sometimes do not notice how we dominate the conversation. The child may only be saying “Yes” or “No” or probably simply shaking her head.

The preschooler is at a stage when her vocabulary is growing rapidly. We can facilitate this process when conversing with her, by introducing words that will help her in enlarging her vocabulary, for instance: “Oh! Your dress is the same colour as the flower! Both are yellow!” A word of caution now. It is good to try and add new words to the child’s vocabulary, but this should not be done in a mechanical way. By all means convey information when conversing with the child, but do so in a play-way manner. Ensure that there is place for fun when talking with children. Draw in the child’s interest and let ideas build on each other and the talk flow freely. Do you recollect the example given in Unit 19 on ‘Language Development’ to illustrate this aspect? Can you recall another example from the preschooler-caregiver interactions which you may have overheard? If not, you might try to listen to a few caregivers conversing with their preschoolers, and identify a conversation in which the child was enjoying the talk while she was also being introduced to new words and concepts.

Another important aspect has to do with correcting errors in the child’s speech. As you know, preschoolers are still in the process of learning grammatical rules and correct usage of words. As a result, an adult often detects mistakes in the child’s speech. For instance, as you know from the earlier Blocks, preschoolers continue to underextend and overgeneralize. Similarly, even children ten years of age sometimes get confused about the tenses. Appreciating that such mistakes are an aspect of the developmental stage, do not be too quick to correct them. Do not embarrass or ridicule the child. Correct errors indirectly by rephrasing the child’s statement and extending the conversation. For instance, supposing the child says: “Arun hitted me!”, then responding by saying: “It is not ‘hitted’. It is ‘hit’. Now say it again—Arun hit me,” is not going to be very encouraging. Rather, you may say: “Arun hit you? Why did he do so?”

In this context, there is another viewpoint. It is being increasingly believed that there is no need at all to correct such errors in preschoolers’ statements or to become tense about them. The reason is that the preschoolers will outgrow these in any case, picking up the correct usage as they hear others use the correct words.
Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Read each of the following statements carefully and write in the brackets whether it is true or false.

a) We should tell children not to ask too many questions. ( )

b) If you look and sound interested in what the child is saying, the child will talk more. ( )

c) The worker should organize only group activities and not waste time talking to preschoolers individually. ( )

d) We should discourage the preschooler from making grammatical mistakes by telling her to think before she speaks. ( )

e) We should introduce new words to the preschooler by the play-way method. ( )

f) Encouraging the child to talk helps her language development. ( )

24.3 PLAY ACTIVITIES FOR FURTHERING LANGUAGE AND PRE-READING AND PRE-WRITING SKILLS

As you also must have observed when interacting with children, whenever a child learns a new concept, she also learns the label for it. Unless the child understands the concept represented by a word, the word will be meaningless to her. For instance, words like 'mountain', 'river', or 'snow' will mean nothing to a child who has never seen these, not even in a picture.

It is obvious that the play activities for children that you have read about in the previous Units of this Block — 'Play Activities for Developing Cognitive Abilities and Some Concepts' and 'Exploring the Environment' for instance — will facilitate their language development as well. For example, the many activities where children explore some aspect of the environment offer opportunities to foster their language development. For example, when out for a walk in the neighbourhood with the child, encourage the child to talk about what she is seeing or hearing or smelling, for example, a bird on a tree, a cat jumping from a wall or a goat bleating. Extend the child's language and thinking by answering her queries about something that has caught her attention (such as why the cat does not get hurt when she jumps from the wall or why a bird can fly and she cannot).

Draw the child's attention to various things around her and ask her questions about them. For example, you may draw the preschooler's attention to the swaying grass and leaves, and seeing the child interested, ask her what is causing them to move. This may
Play Activities for Preschoolers

lead to a conversation about wind. The discussion does not have to be concluded during the walk. As you have read in the previous Unit, the topic can easily be, and should be, pursued and built on after the trip.

The caregiver can also help the child develop listening skills by drawing her attention to the different sounds in the environment, e.g., the crunch of leaves, the sound of rain, the call of a bird, the sound of a tool, the voice of her friend, the tinkling of bangles, the rustling of paper, the sound of footsteps on the stairs and so on. She can also use this opportunity to enhance the child’s ability to observe details of different objects, and notice similarities and differences between them. Not many of us realize that this helps the child at a later time in learning to read and write. In fact, it is an important pre-reading and pre-writing skill. There are several ways in which the caregiver can help the child develop it. For example, as you read in the previous Unit, she may give the child a leaf and ask her to look at the leaves of various plants, identifying the plant whose leaves match the one which she has. Some more activities that will help the child observe similarities and differences are listed in Section 24.39.

24.3.1 Readiness for Reading and Writing

In fact, learning to read and write, like other complex learning tasks, is almost always preceded by activities that do not appear directly relevant, but without which the desired learning does not take place. For example, reading and writing require a well-integrated neurological structure, which, in turn, is supported by physical activity. So we could say, quite realistically, that lots of physical activity during early childhood helps children to write and read by fostering their neurological development and development of sensori-motor skills!

Readiness for reading and writing depends on merging of several different aspects of growth and experience such as basic neurological development, cognitive development and language development. In addition, aspects like motivation, feelings about self and significant others (especially in relation to success or failure) and ability to meet a challenge are also important. Even young children have feelings that they bring to their learning. For example, if they are afraid of failing, they may not try. If they are overly anxious to succeed, they may succeed at a level of tension that may harm them. A certain level of socio-emotional maturity is necessary for learning to read and write. According to researchers, the integration of physical-motor, cognitive, language and socio-emotional capacities required for reading is most likely to be achieved by most children only by age seven. So, you would realize that bringing the pressure onto children early is likely to be more harmful than beneficial, particularly since there is ample evidence to show that by the age of 8 to 10 years, such early gains in reading and writing no longer matter: even those who begin later catch up.

Preschool is a time for supportive help towards fostering the language development, sensori-motor and perceptual development, emotional development and physical skills of the child, as a most important contribution to her future academic success. And how various aspects of the development of the child may be fostered is something we have been discussing in several of the earlier Units of this Course. Let us take up a few examples that illustrate how some of the common preschool activities promote readiness for reading and writing. Activities like running, jumping, creeping, painting, pasting, block building, playing with puzzles and manipulating materials, among many others, help in the growth of left-right understanding, perceptual skills, eye-hand coordination, manipulative skills and ability to see relationships between parts and wholes — all required in reading and writing. Music and movement activities, language games and opportunities to freely use paints, crayons and pencil play an obvious part in promoting readiness for reading and writing. Rhymes, discussions and planning sessions, story telling, dramatization, and even social conversation at snack time introduce young children to the variety of purposes to which language is put.

Reading and writing are an essential aspect of language. Preschoolers need to be exposed to learning experiences that will prepare them for reading and writing. And so, let us now come to some specific pre-reading and pre-writing skills, and think of activities to foster them.

In Unit 19 you had an overview of pre-reading and pre-writing skills and the need to provide opportunities to help children acquire these skills. As you know, acquisition of pre-reading and pre-writing skills begins right from infancy. It develops as children gain
experience with language and print. You have already learnt in detail about how children learn to speak. Familiarity with oral language and a working vocabulary of spoken words is obviously a prerequisite for reading and writing. Equally obvious is the fact that in order to read and write, it is necessary for the child to be able to associate printed language with spoken language. The child needs to realize that printed language is a means of communication. As you have read earlier, a variety of experiences which form a part of daily life for many children, help in promoting this understanding. Can you give a couple of examples to illustrate? Yes, seeing pictures and words on paperbags, newspapers, magazines and hoardings on the streets, seeing the family members read and write, sharing a picture book, making a shopping list, and so on.

The child should be familiarized with the appearance and sound of the letters of the alphabet. The ability to discriminate between the different letters and letter sounds, helps the child in learning to read and write. This ability to discriminate begins to develop from infancy itself. For instance, as you read in Unit 19, when a young child learns to differentiate between two similar sounds, she is acquiring a skill that will lead her to differentiate between similar sounding words such as ‘bat’ and ‘pat’.

Apart from the incidental experience, children need to be exposed to some planned learning experiences that will prepare them for reading and writing. Let us now look at some of the activities that you can carry out with preschoolers to promote language development including pre-reading and pre-writing skills.

24.3.2 Activities for Auditory Discrimination

These activities have to do with identifying differences between sounds. These give opportunities to children to pay attention to sounds and to discriminate between them. As we just read, we can do this when exploring the environment with the child. In addition, we can structure activities to help the child learn to observe differences between different sounds. Let us take a look at some such activities.

- Give children toys and play materials that make some sound when played with. As children become familiar with their sounds, place some of these objects, for example, a rattle, a bell, ghungroos/anklets and a spoon on the floor under a piece of cloth. Put your hand under the cloth and make a sound with one of them, asking children to identify it.
- One child from behind a sheet makes a sound like stamping, clapping, yawning, coughing, and so on. Ask the other children what it was.
- Divide children into two groups. One group hides behind a sheet and one of the children in that group says something, for instance, a line from a nursery rhyme. Ask the other group to identify the voice, that is, who was the child who had spoken. You may discover that children, initially, find this activity a bit difficult and need some prompting. Help them by giving them hints about the child who had spoken: for example what the child is wearing.
- Let children pull toy animals or pictures of animals out of a box. One by one, make these animal sounds. Or, you may tape record the animal sounds and play them one by one. For each sound, the child who has that animal toy or picture stands up and shows it to the others.
- Ask children to close their eyes and describe and identify the sounds they hear. In the house there will be the sound of a knock on the door, tap water falling into a bucket, steel plates being put on the table, a kerosene stove being pumped, clothes being washed, and so on.
- It is also useful to have activities that familiarize children with similar word endings. These will help them to differentiate between words such as ‘sand’ and ‘band’, or ‘add’ and ‘at’. You may ask children to say words that rhyme or have similar endings, for instance log, dog, cog, bog, fog, and so on.

You may modify this activity by speaking out a string of words that have similar word endings, followed by a word that does not, requiring the children to say something such as ‘Stop!’ at that stage, for example can, ban, tan, man, fan, fog. Give a small pause after each word to give the children time to respond.
Such activities help children in identifying sounds, and observing differences in similar sounding words.

### 24.3.3 Songs and Rhymes

Children love to sing songs and rhymes. Singing songs and rhymes is not only an enjoyable activity, it is also useful for promoting children’s language development. Through these, children learn new words, new sentences and even new concepts. If the rhyme has words with similar word endings, it helps in auditory discrimination, such as in the following rhyme:

It was FUN
Sitting in the SUN
Going for a RUN
Eating a BUN, and so on.

Songs and rhymes can be made more interesting by giving them rhythm using simple musical instruments like a dhapli, thali, dholak, rattle or even a katori and spoon. A song or rhyme accompanied by actions makes an enjoyable variation. Consider the following example:

**MY RABBIT**

My rabbit has two big ears
(the children hold up their first two fingers to make ears)
and a funny little nose
(the children curve their hands to make a pointy nose)
He likes to nibble carrots
(the children make nibbling motions with fingers)
and he hops wherever he goes
(the children make hopping movements)

In what ways do you think this rhyme helps the child’s language development? What new words is it adding to the child’s vocabulary? How do you think a child who has seen a rabbit will enjoy it compared to one who has not?
Yes, this rhyme is likely to expand the vocabulary of children by teaching them new words. The accompanying actions help in making the new words that children have learnt, meaningful to them. For example, hopping movements help children in understanding the meaning of ‘hop’. In this way, children acquire new concepts. A child who has had personal experience of something will learn the related concepts more easily than one who has not. In other words, the rhyme will obviously be more meaningful to a child who has seen a rabbit hopping and nibbling carrots, than to one who has not. Ideally therefore, with reference to this rhyme, the caregiver should arrange to show the children a rabbit. If that is not possible, she should at least have a picture of a rabbit to show them, and describe or demonstrate what is meant by words like ‘nibbling a carrot’ and ‘hopping’.

24.3.4 Stories

Have you ever narrated a story to a young child? Did you notice how it held the child’s interest? A child asking to be told a story, even one that she has already heard a dozen times before, is a common experience for any caregiver. Agree to such requests. Storytelling is an activity that should be carried out frequently with children. When narrating stories to children, you must modulate your voice to make the story interesting. For example, your voice must become loud and deep if the lion is talking and soft and trembling if the rabbit is speaking, fast if the rabbit is running and slow if the tortoise is crawling. You must also modulate your facial expressions by widening your eyes and baring your teeth when the lion is speaking and making a crying face for a scared rabbit. It is also important to make appropriate sounds like lion roaring, cat mewing, dog barking, goat bleating, child crying etc. Gestures also are used for holding the child’s attention—the tiger’s claws, the pouncing cat or the monkey peeling a banana.

Children should be encouraged to ask questions both during and after the storytelling sessions. In fact, after you have told the children a story, you should talk to them about it. Children often become involved in the story and identify with the characters in it. You should encourage children to speak out whatever the story brings to their mind. Listening to what the others are saying helps the child to see things from another’s point of view.

Dramatizing, that is, enacting the story, is a very interesting related activity. Help the children recapitulate the story and act-out the role of different characters in it. This group activity promotes social development in children. It also helps children in satisfying their emotional needs. Can you say how? Yes, by identifying with the character and acting out the role, the child gives vent to her pent-up feelings. For instance, you may find a child who is strictly disciplined at home, acting out as a bossy lion.

Can you mention some of the other advantages of storytelling and dramatization? You are right. Through these, children learn new words and concepts. These activities also stimulate imagination. Can you say how?

Another interesting variation is getting the children to make a story. You can initiate the story by making an opening statement like “Once upon a time there was a girl named Radha.” Each child adds a sentence, for instance, “Radha had a small dog”, “Radha loved her dog”, “One day she was taking the dog for a walk”, and so on. In this way, the story builds further till it gets concluded. This kind of an activity, apart from promoting language development, also stimulate creativity in children. You may find, however, that such an activity emerges as successful and enjoyable only after a fair amount of practice. You are likely to discover that children take time to adjust to an unfamiliar task. So you might have to explain, with examples, repeatedly. You may also have to draw the children out. Make sure not to ridicule a child or else she is likely to become hesitant in participating in the activity in future. Once children understand what is to be done, and are encouraged to contribute, the result is an enjoyable, stimulating activity. Did you notice that this holds true for the activity of dramatizing the story as well?

You shall read more about story telling in Unit 25 of Block 6.

24.3.5 Riddles

Simple riddles can be used for enhancing language skills. You can make up riddles like:

“I have a long trunk
I am big and grey
Who am I?

Or

“I am round and red
and juicy
I am used for making vegetables tasty
Who am I?”

As a modification of this activity, you may place a few picture cards in front of the child. Ask a riddle about one of the pictures. The child has to identify the card which has the answer. For instance: “It is used for cutting vegetables” (knife), “You can ride on it at a fair” (merry-go-round), “It is cold and tasty” (ice-cream), or “It has four legs and a tail” (dog).

Children can also be encouraged to develop their own riddles. This will require them to describe something and verbalize its attributes. As a result, their descriptive and communicating skills will be strengthened. This activity will be more appropriate for the older preschoolers.

24.3.6 Picture Reading

For his activity, cut pictures, preferably colourful ones, from magazines and newspapers and paste them on cardboard. These may be pictures of common things like household objects, fruits, vegetables, flowers, animals etc., or some activity. Ask the child to describe everything she sees in the picture. Help by drawing her attention to details and gently enquiring, for instance: “What’s the monkey doing?” or “Are the two flowers the same size?” Such an activity increases the child’s power of observation which is an important pre-reading and pre-writing skill. It also strengthens her descriptive skills and helps her develop the ability to communicate. You may also like to try a modified version of this activity. Take a picture of some activity or scene, such as a child playing with a ball, a monkey sitting on a tree or people shopping in the market place. Encourage the preschooler to construct a story around the picture. Initially, you will have to help her considerably in making up a story, by asking questions. Your questions should prompt her to not only describe the scene depicted in the picture, but also to talk about what happened before and what will happen next, for instance: “Why is the monkey crying?” and “What will the monkey do now?” Apart from facilitating language development, such an activity will also promote creativity in the child.

24.3.7 Activities for Fine Motor Coordination

Do you recall the activities for fine motor coordination about which you read in a previous Unit 21 of this Block? Can you tell how these activities help children in learning to read and write? Yes, reading is done mainly from books and children must be able to turn the pages of the books they are handling. These activities help the child develop better control over the finger muscles. A good control is obviously necessary for being able to write.

24.3.8 Activities for Eye-hand Coordination

As you know, eye-hand coordination is essential for being able to write. And so, activities should also be organized to develop eye-hand coordination of the child. Activities for developing fine motor skills about which you have already read, help in promoting eye-hand coordination too. In addition, activities such as placing seeds or stones on outlines of figures, pouring water from one container to the other, putting caps on bottles, fitting picture cutouts into their appropriate slots in puzzles, lacing shoes, buttoning dresses etc. help to develop eye-hand coordination among children. You may try out these, as well as the following activities with a child in your family or neighbourhood.

- You have read about involving the child in threading a picture on a cardboard through the holes provided. You may modify this activity in the following way: Outline the first letter of the child’s name on a heavy cardboard, using dots about half an inch apart. Punch holes on these dots, and let the child thread these holes
Remember to use a thick thread. You may want to stiffen the tip of the thread by dipping it in glue and then drying it. This makes it easier for the child to pass it through the eyelets. If the child wants it, this can be done for all the letters in her name.

- Take something which has a simple shape and is easy to hold. Sprinkle some sand/chalk powder on the floor and place that thing on it. Teach the child how to, and then let the child trace the outline with her finger.

Alternatively, give the child a chalk to trace the item on the floor. With an older child, you may modify the activity to tracing pictures and words. Take care to use pictures with clear, heavy outlines or an alphabet book/chart that has large letters. Place a thin paper over the picture/letter and let the child trace the outline with a crayon/pencil.

- Using easily available objects such as pebbles and leaves, make a pattern on the floor/table, asking the child to copy the same.

- Give the child a piece of charcoal, brick or chalk and ask her to copy patterns on the floor. You may make any simple pattern for her to copy, for instance, the ones in the illustration.

24.3.9 Putting Labels to Things

Stick pictures of common things on cardboard and under each, write the name, as in the following illustration.
Every time the child sees the picture, she also sees the word written underneath, which she gradually comes to recognize. You can also stick these names/labels to things which the child sees daily, for example door, window, and glass. In addition, you may strengthen the ability to recognize printed words and their association with actual objects by the following activity. Stick labels to things in the room. Also write these names/labels on different slips of paper, and put these slips in a box. Ask the child to pick-up a slip and find the duplicate of the word written on it in the room. Children feel more involved with their own names. This interest can be made use of by the worker at the child care centre, by writing down the names of children on small slips of paper, and printing these onto their dresses. These could also be pasted on the table/floor and children could leave their lunch packets or plates or any other items over their name slips. This way they learn to recognize their own names and identify their's as different from others' names.

An interesting variation of this activity of putting name labels can be to have picture puzzles. Pictures of objects with names written down neatly below the picture can be cut into two or three pieces to form picture puzzles. Ask the child to join the pieces to complete the picture. Gradually, the pictures can be removed and only names of objects used as puzzles. Such an activity will promote the child's understanding that letters are put together to form words.

24.3.10 Activities for Visual Perception and Discrimination

An important pre-reading and pre-writing skill is the ability to see the details in objects, and notice similarities and differences among them. This is known as visual perception and discrimination. Can you suggest some of the activities for developing the ability? Yes, the activity of describing a picture in detail, about which you read in the previous Section, is one.

Matching, grouping and discrimination activities about which you have read in the previous Units of this Block are relevant here as well. Like these visual discrimination activities, the auditory discrimination activities that you read about in earlier Units, and earlier in this Unit, also facilitate reading readiness.

Here are some more suggestions for activities. Which of these are you familiar with?

Which one is different

This activity requires you to have sets of things, where one object is different from the rest in some way. The child is asked to point out the one which is different. When she has done so, ask her in what way that differs from the others. A few examples of this activity are:

- identifying from a set of three things, of which two are similar and one different in one respect, the one that is different. For example, two black circles and one red circle or two white cows and one brown cow.

- identifying from a set of three or four similar objects, one that may have a different shape or size, for example, three long pencils and one short pencil or three squares and one triangle.

- identifying from a set of four objects, one that is different because of its different position, for instance, three carrots standing straight and one lying on its side or three elephants standing facing the left side and one standing facing the right.
Furthering Language

- Identifying from a set of four letters of the alphabet, one that is different. The letter that differs should closely resemble the others, for example b, b, p, b or c, e, e, e or o, o, o, c. With older preschoolers, you may use this activity to further the child's understanding of capital and small letters by having sets like b, b, B or C, c, c, c and asking the child to identify the letter which differs from the rest.

What is missing

Show the child pictures of common objects with some essential part missing, and ask her to identify what is missing. For instance, the picture may show a cycle without a tyre or a doll without an arm. This activity furthers the child's ability to pay attention to essential features and details.

What are the differences

Show the child two near identical pictures differing only in a few details. Ask the child to point out the differences. This helps the child to learn to compare closely, pay attention to details and observe differences.

24.3.11 Reading Aloud

One of the most important pre-reading goals is to develop an interest in the young child in reading. How can this interest be inculcated? Yes, children do develop an interest in reading as they observe their caregivers and older siblings enjoying reading books. However, there is no substitute for being involved in something personally. Young children should be introduced to picture books and to picture story books. A picture book has little or no text, and is meant for younger children.

These books have large scale pictures of familiar objects which a child can point to and gleefully recognize. As far as possible, initially it is a good idea to have the objects depicted in the picture book, at hand to show to the child as she sees the picture of the same. These will help her to relate the object (three dimensional) to the flat picture (two dimensional). Not many of us appreciate that this comprehension develops only with practice. The child may have frequently seen an apple, but we should not expect her to identify a picture of an apple the first time she is exposed to pictures. She needs repeated exposure to develop this understanding.

In a picture story book, illustrations are integrated with the text. The story, in fact, can be 'read' from the pictures alone. The text is normally large and bold for easy reading.
As you must have observed, picture story books for young children are kept very short and simple, while older children can tackle lengthier and more complex stories. Nevertheless, for preschoolers the story should be such that reading it is completed in one session.

Picture books and picture story books help the child understand that the black marks on the page tell a story, communicate, as do the pictures.

Picture story books with pictures and bold printed words can be read out to children in small or large groups. With younger children, smaller groups should be preferred. As the caregiver reads the story, she should move her finger along the words so that children understand the link between the spoken and written word. This also helps them realize that when reading a page, one reads words from left to right and from top to bottom of the page.

Later on, these books should be given to children to ‘read’. Of course, they will not be able to read like you, as yet. As the children turn the pages, they recall the story and associate some of the written words with it. It is important to make books available to the children in the child care centre. A corner of the room can be made into a book corner (library), where children can select books of their choice and read them. Do remember that children should not be prevented from handling books for fear that they may damage them. Instead, they should be taught how to handle books properly. Further, these books should be bound and not tear easily. As you know, a major advantage of giving books to children is that it develops their interest in reading. This will be useful when they start going to the primary school. In fact, this will help them for a lifetime.

Developing pre-reading and pre-writing skills should be a part of the other preschool activities and linked with games, songs and stories. Developing these skills should not be like school teaching for older children. Young children are not ready to learn by the formal school methods. Putting pressure on the child can be more harmful than helpful. At times, parents and teachers alike fail to appreciate that learning during preschool years should be through play. They expect the preschooler to develop reading and writing skills, rather than pre-reading and pre-writing skills. Preschoolers these days are often expected not only to be able to write letters of the alphabet, but also to spell words correctly. Pressurizing the child to perform, when she is maturationally not ready to do so, causes strain and frequently results in a lasting fear of formal learning.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Read the following questions carefully and answer in the space provided.

1) Describe, with examples, any three ways in which the caregiver can help in the language development of the preschooler when exploring the environment.
2) What are two of the ways in which the activity of picture reading or describing a picture helps in the preschooler’s language development?

3) Given below are a few activities. For each, write in the space provided how it helps in the language development of the preschooler.

a) Stringing beads/lacing shoes

b) Pointing out differences in two pictures, which are identical except for a few details

c) Sticking names/labels to common things

d) Using picture books/picture story books

4) Should preschoolers be taught how to read and write?
24.4 CHILDREN WITH DELAYED SPEECH

You have read about speech problems in Unit 19 in the previous Block. As you know, workers in preschool centres at times come across children who do not talk much. In such an instance, the worker should first try and find out if the child is talkative at home, or is normally quiet both at home in the centre. It is quite likely that many children come from homes where talking is discouraged. As a result, such children may have delayed development of language. We should however remember that while the slow language development of the child may be due to lack of stimulation at home, it may also be due to some hearing problem or a physical defect, like a cleft palate. A child with such problems must be referred to a doctor. Another reason for delayed speech could be mental retardation. The worker should visit the child's home to find out if she sat, crawled, walked, babbled etc. at the right age. If not, she possibly has some form of retardation. Another cause for delayed speech could be an underlying emotional problem. Regarding this aspect too, the worker in the child care centre will need to talk to the parents and discuss what should be done.

If the root cause for delayed speech seems to be inadequate stimulation at home, then the key lies in organizing a variety of language activities in the centre. The parents and other family members may have to be educated about the need and ways of encouraging children to talk. These preschoolers should be encouraged to speak rather than use actions for communicating. It has been observed that such preschoolers are usually unable to express themselves in complete sentences. For example, the child may just say “Doggie come” when she wishes to say: “I saw a big dog in the morning.” Children with such incomplete language need to be given a lot of opportunities to listen and to speak. They must be encouraged to narrate stories, sing songs, make riddles, and participate in other language activities. They should be motivated to talk to other children. The worker must speak clearly to such children, so that they pick up the correct forms of words.

The worker will necessarily have to spend more time interacting with such children. She will also need to plan more individualized activities for them. For instance, normally she may narrate a story and follow it up with a discussion on the characters and the events in the story, with a group of children. But to bring a child with limited language skills at par with the rest, the worker will find it more beneficial to engage in this kind of an activity individually with that child. Gradually, the worker may have the satisfaction of observing that her constant stimulation and encouragement have been fruitful!

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1) Lata, a worker in a preschool centre, observed that one of the children, four year old Samir, rarely spoke in the centre. This had been the case for the past two months, ever since he had started coming to the centre. He remained quiet and whenever he had to speak, said only a word or two. He was at par with other children of his age in physical development. A routine health check-up conducted some days back revealed that there was no medical problem. Lata went to Samir’s house and talked to his parents. She found that Samir was very quiet at home as well. She concluded that the basic reason for Samir’s low use of language appeared to be his being actively discouraged from talking.

In your opinion, what should Lata do to help Samir’s language development?
24.5 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, you have read about how caregivers can further the child's language during the preschool age. An important aspect is encouraging the preschooler to talk. The caregiver should answer her questions, ask her questions and pick-up conversations with her. Seeing the caregiver interested in what she is saying, encourages the preschooler to talk. While the caregiver should introduce words to help the preschooler enlarge her vocabulary, this should be done in a light and playful manner. The preschooler should not be ridiculed for any grammatical error in her statement. If at all, the caregiver should correct it indirectly by extending her statement.

Reading and writing are an essential aspect of language. Preschoolers need to be exposed to some planned learning experiences that will prepare them for reading and writing.

A number of activities can be planned and carried out with preschoolers that help in furthering their language including pre-reading and pre-writing skills. These include auditory discrimination activities, songs and rhymes, stories, riddles, picture reading activities for fine motor coordination, activities for eye-hand coordination, putting labels to things, activities for developing visual perception and discrimination, and reading aloud.

We should remember that learning during preschool years should be through the play-way method. Preschool children should be expected to develop pre-reading and pre-writing skills, and not reading and writing skills. Pressurizing the child to perform before she is maturationally ready to do so, does not help; it only harms.

A worker in the preschool centre at times comes across a child who is very quiet. In such a case, the worker should visit the child's family, find out the reasons for the same and try to take corrective measures. If the root cause appears to be inadequate stimulation for language development at home, the worker should educate the parents and other family members about the need and ways of furthering the child's language. At the centre, she should engage the preschooler in a variety of language activities and encourage her to talk.

24.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) a) False. In fact, we should encourage children to ask questions.
   b) True.
   c) False. Group activities are important, but so is talking to preschoolers individually. The latter is not a waste of time.
   d) False. The preschooler should not be admonished for making grammatical mistakes. These are normal and will be outgrown.
   e) True.
   f) True.
Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) — By encouraging the preschooler to talk about/describe what she is seeing or hearing for example, a dog running.
— By answering her questions, for example, “How does a train move?”
— By drawing the child’s attention to various things and asking her questions about them, for example, how clouds move.
— By drawing the preschooler’s attention to different sounds in the environment, thus helping in the development of listening skills, for example, a dog barking and a goat bleating.
— By drawing the preschooler’s attention to details of different objects and helping her observe similarities and differences, for example, different types of flowers.

Mention any three of the above. You may give any appropriate example—it need not be the one given here or in the text.

2) — Increases the preschooler’s observation power which is an important pre-reading and pre-writing skill.
— Strengthens her descriptive skills helps her develop the ability to communicate what she has observed.

3) a) Improves fine motor coordination and eye-hand coordination—necessary for turning pages, and being able to write.
 b) Improves visual perception and discrimination which is an important pre-reading and pre-writing skill.
 c) Strengthens the ability to recognize printed words and their association with actual things.
 d) Helps to develop an interest in reading. Helps in understanding that pictures and printed words are means of communication. Helps in realizing that one reads from left to right and from top to bottom of the page.

4) No. Preschoolers are maturationally not ready to do so. Putting pressure on them to read and write will simply cause strain, and may result in a lasting dislike towards reading and writing.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

— Talk to Samir’s parents and other family members in the house, and educate them about the need and ways of encouraging him to talk.

In the centre:
— Encourage Samir to use speech rather than actions for communicating.
— Encourage him to participate in language activities such as narrating stories, singing songs and making riddles.
— Spend more time interacting with him. Plan more language activities on a one-to-one basis with him.
— Motivate him to talk to other children.
— Speak clearly to him, so that he can pick up the correct form of words.