area is best accomplished through sensitive educator modeling and feedback (scaffolding), co-operative activities, and sharing time in which aspects of pragmatic language are practised. It is also effective to model problem-solving - *What do you do when someone takes something that is yours? when someone calls you a name? when someone hurts you?* It must be emphasized that it takes time for children to build competency in the rules and conventions of communications. They learn by having models of appropriate responses, through trial and error, and from specific feedback.

Lucy Calkins notes, "In schools, talk is sometimes valued and sometimes avoided, but – and this is surprising – talk is rarely taught … Yet talk, like reading and writing is a major motor – I could even say the major motor – of intellectual development."[31]

Assessment of Oral Language

Many educators find children's oral language development a challenging area to assess. One of the most effective ways is to listen to children while they are engaged in play and to interact with them to prompt language. It may help to ask:

- *How is this child using language in the classroom?*
- *What behaviours does she/he exhibit as a speaker? As a listener?*
- *What is the child's strengths as a language user? What are the needs?*

Educators may want to record or script children's language to have a concrete sample to show growth.

- A script of a retelling of a familiar story is a concrete way to capture children's language including syntax, vocabulary, and usage of language to create meaning.
- A script of a child interacting with another will show their use of vocabulary, syntax, and purpose.

- A script of a child sharing thoughts with others indicates vocabulary use, organization of ideas, awareness of audience, and how they use language to help the audience understand their talk. For some children, gestures and movements may be part of their communication and should be recorded as these indicate attempts to help the audience understand meaning.

When these scripts are captured at certain points in the year, they can effectively illustrate growth over time. Some educators prefer to tape or video children's talk.

Oral language developmental continua are useful in identifying the stages of oral language development and also in monitoring growth and in particular the stages for language acquisition for English Language Learners.

As educators evaluate their program they may ask:

- *Do I spend time listening to children talk?*
- *Do I model attentive listening?*
- *Do I have a system for recording children's talk?*
- *Do I ask questions that demand more than a yes/no response?*
- *Do I model the kind of language and thinking that I want children to use?*
- *How do I support children who are struggling with language?*

In evaluating the program, educators may ask:

- *Are there things in the classroom that invite exploration, wondering, and questions?*
- *Is there a large enough block of time to allow children to interact with others during play?*
- *Are there materials at centres that create situations where children have to work together?*