

Using the SIOP[®] Model with Young Learners: Lesson Preparation and Building Background

In this chapter and the three that follow, we present the SIOP[®] Model's eight components and 30 features and offer suggestions for using the SIOP[®] Model with young learners in pre-K and kindergarten. As mentioned in Chapter 1, although the SIOP[®] Model was not originally developed with pre-K children in mind, we will discuss specific ways that the model can be used effectively for meeting the unique learning needs of very young English learners.

Without question, learning is a primary goal in ECE programs, and the SIOP[®] Model provides a framework for ensuring that teachers' interactions with English learners will be optimal. When the features of the SIOP[®] Model are implemented to a high degree, the classroom environment is one that promotes respect for diversity,



fosters cognitive and language development, and focuses on meeting the individual needs of each student.

To be effective, teachers must get to know each child in the group well. An effective teacher interacts with the children individually and in small and large groups, all the while eliciting their ideas as a way to develop language and cognition. (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of language development.) The teacher also pays close attention to student progress and uses assessments such as observation, analysis of student work, and interviews with families as an ongoing part of the teaching and learning experience. He or she uses the information and insights gathered to make plans and adjustments to promote each child's individual development and learning as fully as possible.

Components of the SIOP[®] Model

In this chapter we will review the first two components, Lesson Preparation and Building Background, followed by a discussion of how the features of these components apply to young learners. In the next three chapters we will follow the same format with the remaining SIOP[®] components. As you read this chapter and those that follow, keep in mind that although they are discussed individually, the SIOP[®] Model's features are interrelated and support one another.

Lesson Preparation

As early childhood teachers prepare lessons, also called *learning activities*, they need to keep in mind what research tells us about the way young children develop and learn. For instance, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3, language development is the foundation for literacy, so there is much more emphasis on language development with young learners than on specific academic skill development. While skills are taught, they are done so in a language rich and developmentally appropriate context.

Lesson Preparation Features

1. Content objectives clearly defined, displayed and reviewed with students
2. Language objectives clearly defined, displayed and reviewed with students

The first two SIOP[®] features focus on objectives. They will reflect student learning outcomes, referred to as *standards* in K–12 and increasingly talked about in preschool as well. Illinois is the first state to implement preschool standards, and others may follow. Preschool standards should allow continuity with kindergarten standards, but not at the expense of attention to physical and social-emotional development (Bodrova, Leong, & Shore, 2004).

Although there are a number of modifications that we suggest teachers consider when determining content and language objectives for young children, having

objectives is important and is supported by research (August & Shanahan, 2006). Objectives are beneficial for a number of reasons. First, teachers need to have a focus for instruction in order to be more effective. When teachers are cognizant of the lesson's focus, they are more likely to teach the skill or concept during instructional time and to reinforce it during teachable moments throughout the day. Another reason for objectives is for students to know what they are learning. The NAEYC position statement says that indicators of effective early childhood instruction include "Children are active and engaged; the goals are clear and shared by all" (NAEYC, 2003, p. 2).

Many young learners, even some kindergarteners, are not yet readers. The posted objectives are written in child-friendly terms, but have visuals to provide meaning. In the examples provided in Figure 4.1 (on pages 33–35), notice that the first objective is for the teacher to use and is followed by a student-friendly objective presented the way it can be understood by children. If students are learning the concepts of *first*, *second*, and *last*, the pictures make the objective understandable. When introducing the objective, the teacher might have students stand in a line in groups of three and identify who is first, second, and last in line. The objective may also be reinforced with pictures to illustrate an activity such as snack time; first we line up, second we wash our hands, and last we eat. Classroom features such as cut out construction paper feet taped on the floor in front of the sink where children wait for a turn or approaching a playground slide might also illustrate the objectives of learning that three children standing in a line are in order of first, second, and last.

It is useful for children to see the content and language objectives posted throughout the week as a reminder of the focus of the week's learning. Posted objectives help students to be "clued in" to what they are learning, and they also provide exposure to the written words they will use.

Teachers sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between content and language objectives, especially in early childhood classrooms where much of the content children are learning is language related. (Please see Chapter 8 for an example of how teachers at Roundy Elementary use color coding to distinguish content and language objectives.) Content objectives reflect what the children will learn, such as the one for the lesson in Figure 4.2 on pages 36–37: *Students will identify emotions they feel such as excited and afraid*. The language objective in this lesson provides oral language practice and reinforcement of the content objective: *Students will discuss how to express emotions in a healthy way*. Language objectives promote student academic language growth since academic language is not something children typically encounter in their every day lives. It needs to be explicitly taught in school.

In one school where all teachers use the SIOP[®] Model, a third grader, Karina, told us that she didn't speak any English when she entered kindergarten, but she added that because of the language objectives on the board, "Well, that's how I got better in English." The evidence of this is anecdotal, but we found it insightful that not only was she aware of the language objectives but she attributed her language growth to them.

Resnick and Snow (2009) discuss several aspects of language—basic linguistics—that children should learn. These may be used as the basis for language objectives. To illustrate these, we have written sample content objectives (CO) from a variety

of topics and language objectives (LO) that show how to explicitly teach language through content. The aspects of language are (Resnick & Snow, 2009):

- **Phonology:** What does it sound like?
CO: Students will identify the initial sound.
LO: Students will say the sound aloud to a partner. This language objective gives children individual oral language practice.
- **Semantics:** What does it mean, and where does it belong?
CO: Students will group pictures of objects by category (toys, animals, people, clothing).
LO: Students will state why the picture goes in a particular category. This language objective demonstrates understanding of the relationship among items and gives students oral practice articulating their reasoning skills.
- **Syntax:** What kind of a word is it?
CO: Students will name and describe a variety of foods.
LO: Students will chorally read descriptions and point to the describing word in each one. This language objective provides children practice seeing that describing words, or adjectives, precede a noun when the teacher writes phrases students form while meeting the content objective, such as “the red apple,” “the yellow banana.” With exposure, children internalize syntactic patterns (Resnick & Snow, 2009).
- **Morphology:** What is its form and how can it change?
CO: Students will listen to a story and answer comprehension questions (Where did the dog go? Why was he sad?).
LO: Students will use past tense in telling their answers about the story. With the teacher’s assistance, children have an opportunity to see how past tense forms are used.
- **Pragmatics:** How is it used?
CO: Students will tell an addition story using the numbers 1 and 2.
LO: Students will practice taking turns when telling their math stories. This language objective gives children a chance to practice good pragmatics skills, namely listening to others and taking turns in a conversation.

Also see Chapter 3 for additional aspects of language that provide the basis for language objectives.

In Chapter 8 you will read about the importance of content and language objectives in the ECE programs featured. One teacher, Cathy Fox, says that posting the objectives and reviewing them with the students keeps her focused and also provides the students with a purpose for learning each day. Although she initially found writing objectives challenging, she believes this task has had the greatest positive impact on her instructional practice.

Following are some suggestions about selecting content and language objectives.

- *Objectives should be age appropriate.* Young children are not developmentally ready for abstract concepts, nor should they be expected to sit for extended

periods of time listening to the teacher or completing paper-and-pencil tasks. The early school years should be spent engaging in talk about topics of interest to the children and ones that capitalize on their curiosity; listening to books read aloud and talking about them; singing songs that subtly practice pronunciation of words and intonation of phrases; exploring new things; and interacting with peers while playing with interesting and engaging materials. Objectives should reflect these developmentally appropriate activities, which are intended to facilitate cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and physical development. Remember that language learning is a process, and English learners in particular need even more opportunity to practice using new words and hear the new language in natural ways (e.g., listening to books read aloud and talking with peers in real and fantasy play).

- *Objectives should be posted and shared orally with students.* The teacher may model by reading the objectives aloud and pointing to the accompanying pictures. Then students repeat what the teacher has said. As mentioned in the example of first, second, and last, the teacher explains the objectives, gives examples, and elicits background knowledge from the students about the objective. Figure 4.1 shows the teacher’s objective, *SW (Students will) match mother animals with their babies using pictures, stuffed animals, animal cards, or animal figurines*. As the teacher shares the objective, she elicits language by asking students to name the various animals, tell if they have ever seen one, and so forth. This also activates their prior knowledge, a feature of building background discussed later.
- *Objectives should be displayed pictorially.* As mentioned previously, there is value in environmental print, but with young children, particularly those less proficient in English, objectives are more meaningful if they are presented in a way that is understandable. A variety of forms may be used such as pictures with labels or simple sentences, or, for older children, complete sentences including using *SW (students will)*. Figure 4.1 shows samples of objectives from various subject areas. As you can see, objectives vary in their level of complexity depending on the students’ age, developmental level, and time of year, as objectives will become more complex across time.
- *Objectives should be addressed in a less formal way than in grades 1–12 classrooms.* Since “instruction” takes many forms with young learners, such as directed play, spontaneous teaching moments, and structured learning opportunities, objectives will focus on a skill or concept that may be woven into the day’s activities. In ECE settings, the same objectives may guide learning for several days or for a week. For example, one objective for the week in the lesson seen in Figure 4.2 was to express emotions in a healthy way. During play time, the teacher tells students, “I’m going to the art table if anyone wants to join me.” At the table, several students work on a Feeling Book, drawing faces on cards to express a variety of emotions. Over the course of the day, all students worked on a Feeling Book at one time or another. Also, throughout the day the teacher takes opportunities to ask students what they are feeling or how their actions make another student feel. So, the objectives are specific and shared with students, but taught in a less formal way than in elementary and secondary classrooms.

- *Objectives for pre-reading, pre-writing, and oral language lessons may be similar, but should still be separated into language and content goals.* Sometimes the lesson has a language focus and so the content objective will be language-related. For example, an initial phonics lesson may focus on the letter “m.” A content objective may be that students recognize the letter “m” in a list of letters. A language objective may be that they pronounce the sound of the letter “m.” Another lesson might include having children sound out a word with the letter “m” as the initial sound, which could be a content objective, while having children generate words that begin with the “m” sound could be a language objective. We suggest you not worry too much about distinguishing between content and language objectives in these cases, but maintain the routine of having both types so children are aware of the importance of language and expect both objectives in pre-K lessons and beyond.
- *Objectives should build on one another.* For young learners, objectives often reinforce previous ones so that there is continued reinforcement of skills. When a new objective is introduced that builds on a previous one, the same visuals are used to support children’s recall. For example, in Figure 4.1, the first objective introduces the concept of first, second, and last. Later in the year when the concept of prediction is introduced, the same visuals are used so that children recall how to order things. The teacher might summarize what happened first in the story, and then ask the children to predict what will happen next. The consistent visual support assists their recall of ordering as they give their predictions.

Once you have written your content and language objectives, you might use this checklist to evaluate them:

- The objectives are observable.
- The objectives are written and presented in language the students can understand.
- The content objective is related to the key concept of the lesson.
- The language objective promotes student academic language growth (it is not something most students already do well).
- The language objective connects clearly with the lesson topic or lesson activities.
- I have a plan for assessing student progress on meeting these objectives during the lesson.

Lesson Preparation Features

3. Content concepts appropriate for age and educational background level of the children

FIGURE 4.1 *Sample Content and Language Objectives*

Preschool and kindergarten teachers need to develop content and language objectives to guide instruction. They think about what children will know and be able to do at the end of a learning activity. Children, of course, cannot read complete sentences so the content and language objectives are posted in student-friendly form. The following examples show objectives for the lesson and the teacher's instruction followed by the same objectives represented in student-friendly form.

Teacher:

CO: Students will (SW) place three objects along a line and respond nonverbally to questions about the order of the objects.

LO: SW tell a partner the position of three objects, using the words first, second, and last.

Point to the pictures of 3 children playing. Ask, *Who is first, second and last?*

Show students objects and place them along a line. Ask, *Which is first, second and last?*

Tell a partner the position of your (object). Use the words *first, second, and last*.

_____ is first. _____ is second. _____ is last.

Student-friendly:



First



Second



Last

Teacher:

CO: SW match mother animals with their babies using pictures, stuffed animals, animal cards, or animal figurines.

LO: SW orally share with a partner or in a small group which picture of a baby animal goes with the picture of the mother animal.

Tell a partner which mother goes with each baby animal.

The baby _____ goes with the mother _____.

The mother _____ goes with the baby _____.

Student-friendly:



Mother and baby

Teacher:

CO: SW match consonant initial sounds of words to pictures.

CO: SW write letter-like symbols and letters to match pictures.

LO: SW orally name letters.

(continued)

FIGURE 4.1 *Sample Content and Language Objectives (continued)*

Student-friendly:



B

Teacher:

CO: SW draw objects for a food shopping list.

LO: SW read their lists to a partner.

Write a list for the grocery store. Read it to your partner.

Student-friendly:



List



Apple



Chicken

Teacher:

CO: SW act out a scene to predict what happens next in a story.

LO: SW listen to a story, look at the pictures, and orally. Predict what will happen next.

When teacher stops reading, tell or "predict" what will happen next.

I predict that _____.

I think that _____.

Student-friendly:



Think



Tell



First



Second



Last

(continued)

FIGURE 4.1 *Sample Content and Language Objectives (continued)*

Teacher:

CO: SW evaluate foods as likes or dislikes.

LO: SW orally state which food they like or dislike.

Place the pictures in the column of like  or don't like  then use the words to tell a partner what you like and what you don't like.

Students use the sentence stems: I like _____. I don't like _____.

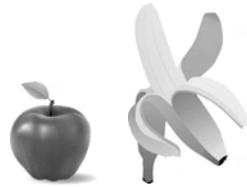
Student-friendly:



Like



Dislike



Food

When we apply this SIOP[®] feature to early childhood learners, we recognize that in pre-K, children may not have had prior educational opportunities. Therefore we need to interpret this feature so we consider the children's age and developmental level when choosing content concepts. We know that children develop at various rates and that individual development is often uneven across language domains. Because of this, teaching should match the child's developmental level and be based on assessment information. Briefly, assessment methods used to gather information about each child include observation, a clinical interview (an extended dialogue in which the adult seeks to discern the child's conceptual knowledge or strategic thinking), an examination of the child's work, individual assessments, and discussions with the family (NAEYC, 2009). Once a child's developmental level is determined, instruction is individualized to make it appropriate and meaningful for the child.

Lesson Preparation Features

4. Supplementary materials used to a high degree, making the lesson clear and meaningful

The modifications for this feature are in degree rather than in kind. With students in elementary school, we encourage SIOP[®] teachers to use supplementary materials rather than rely on paper-and-pencil tasks. With young learners, however, the

FIGURE 4.2 *Adapted from Chanty Lim's Feeling Book Lesson*

SIOP[®] LESSON PLAN

Class Level: Pre-K
Class Periods: Center Time
Subject: Emotions (Social-Affective Development)

Topic:	Feeling Book
Content Objective:	• SW identify emotions they feel such as excited and afraid
Language Objectives:	• SW discuss how to express emotions in a healthy way
Key Vocabulary:	Feeling, emotion, excited, afraid
Materials:	Card stock paper squares, pencils, marker, mirror, pictures of facial expressions.

SIOP[®] Features:

Preparation	Scaffolding	Grouping Options
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adaptation of content	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Modeling	<input type="checkbox"/> Whole class
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Links to background	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Guided practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Small groups
<input type="checkbox"/> Links to past learning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent practice	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partners
<input type="checkbox"/> Strategies incorporated	<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehensible input	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Independent
Integration of Processes	Application	Assessment
<input type="checkbox"/> Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Hands-on	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Writing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meaningful	<input type="checkbox"/> Group
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Speaking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Linked to objectives	<input type="checkbox"/> Written
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Listening	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Promotes engagement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Oral

Resources:

Building Background:	<p>Whole Class—The teacher reads the content and language objectives. She asks the children when they feel happy and when they feel sad. Then she introduces the words <i>excited</i> and <i>afraid</i>. The teacher gives a personal example, such as “I feel excited when I go to Disneyland.” At this point, the goal is to get the words and ideas introduced. If the children are unclear about what a certain emotion is, such as <i>excited</i>, simply give an example or show a picture and move on.</p> <p>Conclude the time by singing the song, “If you’re happy and you know it...” (stamp your feet, raise your hand, etc)</p>
Presentation:	<p>Small Group—The children create a Feeling Book to illustrate emotions by drawing faces to represent the feeling on cards. The Feeling Book consists of 4 to 5 card stock pages and each card has a blank circle that represents a face, seen in Figure 4.3. The teacher begins by showing a sample Feeling Book to the children. Then she asks each child, “What is a feeling you have sometimes?” A child responds with a word such as <i>angry</i>. The teacher asks the child to draw a face that expresses the emotion the child named. If they cannot think of a visual representation of the feeling, the teacher shows the child pictures of angry facial expressions or holds up a mirror to the child’s face telling him to make a sad face, for example. When the child completes the drawing, the teacher asks, “What feeling is this?” The child tells the teacher and she writes the word under the face to label the emotion.</p> <p>The teacher discusses with children healthy ways of expressing emotions. She asks, “What should you do when you’re angry?” and they discuss ways of expressing anger in healthy ways.</p>

(continued)

FIGURE 4.2 *Adapted from Chanty Lim's Feeling Book Lesson (continued)*

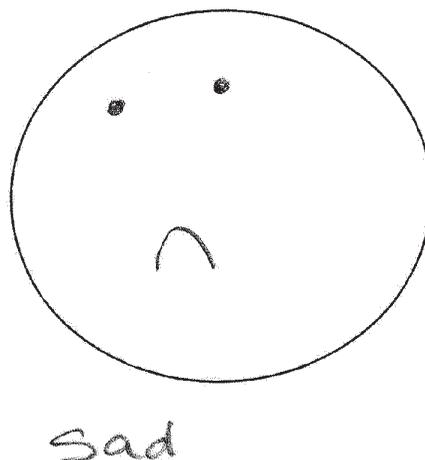
Practice & Application:	When a child has finished drawing 4 or 5 expressions on the cards, she takes each drawing and asks the child, "When do you feel... (sad, happy, afraid, etc)?" Each child is encouraged to answer using a complete sentence. The teacher provides the prompt, "Sometimes I feel (happy, sad, nervous) when..."
Review & Assessment:	<p>The teacher staples the cards together to form a Feeling Book. She reviews each of the feelings with each child. She uses the key words repeatedly throughout the lesson and at the conclusion. The teacher assesses the children's understanding of the key vocabulary and concepts through her discussion with them using their Feelings Books.</p> <p>Throughout the day, the teacher takes opportunities to reinforce the objectives. For example, when children have a conflict about playing with toys, the teacher asks how they feel when _____ happens and how they can express that feeling in a healthy way. If a child says, "I don't like you sitting so close", praise him for using his words to express feelings rather than pushing.</p>
Extension Activities:	The Feelings Book may be used in a number of ways for oral language practice. As a follow-up to the lesson, ask parents to have their child explain his or her book to them (in either language) using the words that express their feelings. Also, in class, children may be asked to retell about their feelings, when they feel a certain emotion, and so forth. They might work with a partner to share their book or with the teacher in a small group. During whole class time, the teacher might review by asking, "Who has a drawing of angry (sad, excited, happy)?" The children show the corresponding drawing.

classroom is filled with books, blocks, puppets, dress-up clothes, props, art supplies, and other manipulatives for counting, categorizing, and so forth. The classroom is organized into multiple learning areas such as a book area; kitchen area; computer area; carpet area for playing with trucks, puzzles, and blocks and for group activities (reading, singing, sharing); discussion corner; music center; and science area.

Each of these areas has supplementary materials that assist with making the learning objectives clear and meaningful. It is important to add new items periodically to stimulate children's interest and maintain their attention. For English learners, visuals and models are especially important to render meaning to what is being discussed or taught. In the lesson involving children creating a Feeling Book of drawings representing emotions, presented in Figure 4.2, the teacher had a sample Feeling Book to show the children. For all children, but particularly for English learners, a model of a completed book or other product is essential so that they can see what the expectation is. Computers provide an opportunity for children to see and hear stories that can be read multiple times for meaning and at the same time expose the listener to models of standard English grammar and pronunciation.

Lesson Preparation Features

5. Adaptation of content to all levels of student proficiency

FIGURE 4.3 *Drawn by Sydney L.*

As a part of effective instruction for young learners, teachers adapt what they are teaching to the language proficiency level of each student. For early childhood situations, this feature must be interpreted as adapting the content to the students' developmental level as well. In the lesson in Figure 4.2, you will see that the teacher planned ahead to adapt the content of the lesson for both language proficiency and developmental level.

The teacher asks each child, "What is a feeling you have sometimes?" Some children respond with a word such as *happy*. The teacher then asks a child to draw a face that expresses the emotion the child named. Some children may not be able to identify emotions, so the teacher adapts by showing pictures of people's faces with each one expressing a different emotion. After the pictures stimulate the children's thinking, she asks again, "What is a feeling you have sometimes?" The teacher encourages each child to answer, "Sometimes I feel ... (happy, sad, nervous)." Some students will be able to answer with a complete sentence while others will repeat the sentence frame the teacher provides. In drawing a representation of an emotion, some children are capable of naming of an emotion and drawing the expression. For those who can't, the teacher holds a mirror for the child to look into to see his facial expression, for example, a sad face or a nervous face. After drawing an expression and identifying the emotion, the teacher labels the picture (see Figure 4.3), and then asks the child when he feels that emotion. The teacher also asks the paraprofessional to translate when a child is unsure of the directions, if a one is available. The same adaptations are made as children complete the 5 cards. Once the books are completed, they become reading material for the children to use in class or at home.

SIOP® Lesson Preparation Features

6. Meaningful activities that integrate lesson concepts with language practice opportunities for reading, writing, listening, and/or speaking

Recent research studies have shown the importance of providing young children with high-quality schooling; this is especially advantageous to low-income minority students (Raudenbush, 2009). One aspect of high-quality teaching is making sure that activities are meaningful to the children and offer an abundance of language practice opportunities, including using language in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Lessons and activities are made meaningful in a number of ways including:

- *Making language understandable.* Taken literally, an activity is not meaningful if it involves language that the child does not understand. Teachers need to use comprehensible input techniques and also provide verbal scaffolds (see Features #10–12 and 14 in the chapters that follow) to make the message—written or verbal—understandable for English learners. For some of you, the sentence, *¿Qué hacen los maestros cuando los niños no entienden lo que dicen?* would require some scaffolding and clues to be meaningful. Whether spoken or written, the sentence is not understandable to you without some support provided. The same situation occurs throughout the day for English learners. They literally cannot make meaning from what the teacher says or what is written. Sometimes translation is required for the language to be meaningful and in other situations, techniques can be used to make English understandable.
- *Using culturally appropriate activities.* With multiple cultures represented in a class, it may be challenging to integrate each child’s specific cultural practices into the activities or lessons. Nevertheless, effective teachers of English learners have sensitivity toward and an appreciation of the children’s family and community practices. In SIOP® classes, teachers look for ways to integrate the children’s cultures, such as by adding multicultural books to the classroom library. Also, activities are made meaningful when children are encouraged to express their knowledge through drawing and telling stories that reflect their culture and their experiences outside of school. Teachers should celebrate children’s contributions and should *never* “correct” a child’s expression of his or her culture, regardless of how inadvertent or subtle that correction might be.
- *Following children’s interests.* Children are encouraged to self-select activities that are of interest to them rather than having an excessive amount of structured class time or teacher-directed activities. When children are interested in an activity, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that contribute to their own development. Requiring a child to practice a skill yields a much less productive result than providing opportunities for the child to choose from a variety of activities such as reconstructing models, exploring books, or doing an art project that supports the lesson’s objective. In one classroom we observed during center time, a child selected a book about Cinderella. The language objective for the week was to discuss how to express emotions in healthy ways. The child looked through the book independently and then attempted to get the attention of two other girls (“look at Cinderella, *mira, mira*, look at my book”). She then went to the paraprofessional and they looked through the book together, speaking mostly in Spanish. The paraprofessional asked questions such as “How do you think he feels? Is she afraid? What do you think she will do? Is that a good

idea?” and so forth. After about 10 minutes of interacting with the paraprofessional, the child took the book and said, “I want to go to the book corner to read.” She walked toward the book corner, but then went to the house area, grabbed a purse, and went to sit next to the teacher to show her the book. She asked in English, “Which princess do you want to be?” They talked about the book in English, looking at the pictures for approximately 5 minutes. In those 20 minutes, the child’s attention was maintained because of her interest in the book. She had opportunities to practice oral language in both English and Spanish, express ideas, identify and discuss emotions (the content and language objectives), identify words, and hear the teacher’s and paraprofessional’s ideas about the story. A very productive child-directed learning time!

Building Background

In this component, the idea is to build upon children’s own background knowledge as we take them to a higher level of understanding or introduce new concepts to them. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) emphasizes the importance of providing young children with a learning environment that respects their culture and language and fosters their relationship with their families and community. Effective teachers build on what the children bring to the classroom, acknowledging that culturally diverse children have experiences that may not reflect the typical middle-class experiences that are part of most books and school environments. These teachers need to recognize that while their own experiences may be quite different from those of their children, nonetheless, their children’s experiences are valued and their diversity is respected.

Building Background Features

7. Concepts explicitly linked to students’ background experiences

Teachers should plan to take time during lessons to ask students what they know about a topic. Before reading a story about a girl going to her grandmother’s house, ask about their experiences visiting a grandparent. Besides providing important oral language practice opportunities for the children, it piques their interest in the story when the teacher makes an explicit link by saying, “Those are interesting adventures. Well, we’re going to read about a girl who visited her grandmother. Let’s see if her experience is like yours.” Perhaps most importantly, when children talk about their experiences, it helps the teacher get to know each child better and provides insight about them and their lives. During the lesson in Figure 4.2, the children made a Feeling Book by drawing faces that showed emotions, such as nervous or happy. The teacher could have simply pointed to the drawing, asked for the name of the emotion, and moved on. Instead, the teacher skillfully tapped into the students’ own feelings and experiences. She pointed to a face on which Marco had drawn a smile and asked, “What kind of face is this?” When Marco replied that it

was a happy face, she wrote the word *happy* under the face and asked, “When do you feel happy?” Marco said that he is happy when William, a classmate, shares with him. (This is valuable information to have. If Marco has a rough day, the teacher might ask William to play with him. Also, when pairing children together, she now knows that Marco and William work well together. Marco’s answer also might indicate that he is sensitive to social interactions because he mentioned a relationship rather than saying he is happy when he gets a new toy.) She went on to ask about other emotions and Marco replied that he is sad “when they put gang writing on the house” and nervous “when dad gets mad at me.” Another child’s comment provided a teachable moment for the objective. William drew an angry face and said that he got angry when Maurice broke his robot. The teacher talked with him about how to express anger in healthy ways, as by using words instead of hitting.

As you can see, building on the students’ experiences yields a number of positive outcomes.

- Since oral language development is an important part of early learning, discussion about their background provides children with a chance to practice using oral language.
- Lessons are made more relevant when children can see a link between their experience or interest and the concept of the lesson.
- It helps the teacher get to know each child as he or she shares ideas and experiences and talks about family.
- Discussions reveal children’s academic knowledge and skill level. If the lesson is an introduction to a unit on transportation, asking children what they know about the topic informs the teacher about each child’s level of understanding. Some children may know that transportation involves trucks, cars, and trains; others may know specific names of cars and trucks; while others may not be able to contribute much to the discussion because their knowledge about transportation is limited. The discussion provides the teacher with useful assessment information, revealing a starting point for instruction.
- Positive student–teacher relationships are developed when teachers show genuine interest in children and give them an opportunity to talk about themselves during lessons and throughout the day.

Building Background Features

8. Links explicitly made between past learning and new concepts

Young children are exposed to an abundance of new information, language, and skills. English learners must work harder to negotiate meaning than their native English speaking peers because they must navigate a classroom where a new language is spoken. For this reason, early childhood teachers must provide a bridge for children between past activities and new ones. There are various ways

to refresh children’s memories, but the process must be explicit so that they see the relationship between previous learning and new learning. For instance, the teacher shows a picture of a truck and asks questions to review past learning: *Who remembers when we talked about transportation yesterday? What kind of transportation did we talk about? What song did we sing about trucks? Do you want to sing it again? Ok, it goes. . . .*

Another way to link past learning with new concepts is to show the materials that were used previously so that the children recall prior activities and are prepared for the new lesson. A simple direction like, “Turn and talk. Tell your partner something we did yesterday” is a valuable way to help students recall a prior lesson and also practice oral language skills. The retelling process is an important academic skill as well.

Building Background Features

9. Key vocabulary emphasized (e.g., introduced, written, repeated and highlighted for students to see)

Vocabulary development is critically important to children’s overall language development. To be successful in elementary school and beyond, children need to accumulate a vocabulary of thousands of words. Yet children from families who live in poverty, including English learners, have dramatically less rich experience with language in their homes than do middle-class children (Hart & Reisley, 1995; NAEYC, 2009). Therefore, it is incumbent upon schools to provide an optimal language environment for these children. According to Resnick and Snow (2009), “Every day, preschoolers and elementary students should expand their vocabularies by learning a handful of new words. This puts them on track to learn hundreds of new words every year—a reasonable expectation as they progress through school.” (p. 8).

Words may be learned incidentally or taught explicitly. An example of explicit teaching took place when children worked on the Feeling Book, and words were used to label each emotion. Another example of explicit teaching would be a lesson that uses the emotion words to focus on phonological awareness, such as initial sounds (*happy, nervous*), or how phonemes change word meaning (*sad* versus *mad*). The emotion words were taught incidentally when the girl was looking at the Cinderella book and the vocabulary words were woven into the discussion with the teacher and assistant. Other ways that teachers can help children learn new words include the following:

- Write a caption on pictures that children draw. Ask the student to tell you what the picture represents and then write a sentence using the child’s words.
- Point out new words used in conversation or in books (see example in Figure 4.4).
- Draw attention to words that have been introduced in one context and appear in another.

- Select three colors and three pieces of clothing as target vocabulary words for a week. Put these on a poster that you can use as a prop while saying, “Everyone with a red shirt can go wash your hands” (line up, etc). When the words appear in a book or song, show the children.
- Play word games with children, such as rhyming word games (e.g., ask children to change the first letter and try to make a new word so *hat* could become *cat*).
- Paraphrase for struggling speakers. For example: Student: *He goed*. Teacher: *Oh, he went to the bathroom?* Student: *Yes*.
- Add new words to posters or Word Walls, but make Word Walls that illustrate the terms as well as show the spelling. That way when a word appears in a book or conversation, you can draw students’ attention to the Word Wall and the illustration will help them recall the meaning. Displaying words on a child’s desk also is a good way to individualize that child’s personal vocabulary goals.

As the feature description indicates, it is important to write words and post them for students to see and refer to along with their visual representation. English learners may not yet have the auditory acuity to hear all the sounds of English since some English sounds do not exist in their home language. Illustrations with words are very helpful to them because even if they can’t read, per se, they begin making an association between the written and spoken word.

FIGURE 4.4

Story: Goldilocks and the Three Bears

Teacher’s script:

Today we are going to read a story that I think you will like. As we read the story, I want you to notice when we come across one of our words for this week (points to the words on the board): feeling, excited, afraid. Can you say those words with me? Feeling. Excited. Afraid. Very good. What is a feeling? We’ve talked about this. Remember when we made our Feelings Book? What is a feeling? [some student responses, “like sad” etc]. Yes, a feeling is an emotion, something we feel like sad or happy or afraid. We talked about different feelings you have. What was a feeling you had in your Feelings Book, Maurice? [S replies]. What about you Marisa? [S replies]. Everyone, turn to a partner and tell a feeling you wrote in your Feelings Book. [students share] Right, those are feelings. In today’s story, we’re going to read about a girl who has different feelings or emotions in the story. One feeling she has is that she is afraid. What does it mean to be afraid? [S, scared]. Right, to be scared. Show me what you look like when you’re scared or afraid. [children respond]. Ok, what do you look like when you’re excited? [children respond].

Ok, we’re going to begin reading our story and I want to you listen for those words as the story is read. What are the words again? (pointing to the board, signals for children to say along) Feeling. Excited. Afraid. Very good. Let’s be good listeners and raise your hand when you hear our words in the story. Looking at the cover, what do you think the story will be about? [children give a variety of responses; brief discussion is followed by reading of the story]

Concluding Thoughts

As you reflect on this chapter and how the first two components of the SIOP® Model relate to preschool classrooms, remember the following important points:

- Language, socio-emotional, physical, and cognitive development are the foundation for all activities for young learners.
- Content and language objectives guide teaching. They help the teacher focus and let children know what they are learning.
- Vocabulary development is strongly related to overall academic success. Time and attention should be given to learning new vocabulary words.
- Activities should be developed that will support successful learning experiences; this will help children develop positive attitudes toward school.