

Preschoolers' language development is partly tied to their classmates' language skills

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Young children learn how to speak and understand language from the words parents speak at home and teachers speak in preschool. A new longitudinal study has found that their preschool classmates also play a part.

The study, by researchers at the University of Virginia and Ohio State University, is published in the May/June 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development*.

The researchers took a look at more than 1,800 preschoolers in over 450 pre-kindergarten classrooms in 11 U.S. states. They tested children's skills in "receptive language" (including their understanding of vocabulary and grammar) and "expressive language" (including their speaking skills, which also involve vocabulary and grammar) in English at the start and end of pre-kindergarten.

Children's abilities to both speak and understand words developed faster when they were with classmates with better language skills. Going to school with [children](#) who had better language skills was even more beneficial for children who began preschool with higher language skills, and for those who were in classrooms that were well-managed.

"[Classmates](#) are an important resource for all children, especially for children who begin preschool with higher [language skills](#)," suggests Andrew J. Mashburn, a senior research scientist at the University of Virginia and the study's lead author. "This is likely because these

children are better able to capitalize on their peers' skills for learning language. These results also indicate that teachers can promote children's [language development](#) by effectively managing children's behavior, which creates an environment in which children feel comfortable to converse with and learn language from one another."

Given the growing recognition that young children's language abilities affect their readiness for school and later school success, this study offers ideas for designing and structuring preschool classrooms.

Source: Society for Research in Child Development ([news](#) : [web](#))

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