Children learn language naturally when they are immersed in a language-rich environment. However, you as the English teacher can accelerate language learning for young children by using three literacy keys: comprehensibility, repetition, and fun.

**Comprehensibility**

*Comprehensibility* of language occurs when language is presented in a context-embedded approach. For example, when introducing the word *blue*, introduce the word in context, using objects, gestures (e.g., pointing), and visuals (e.g., posters, photographs, and book illustrations):

**Objects.** Using a bag of blue objects, you can pull the objects one by one out of the bag and describe them. Say, for example, “This is a blue piece of paper. This is a blue plate. This is a blue ball. This is a blue pencil.”

**Gestures.** Walk over to a student, point to his shirt, and ask, “Is George's shirt blue?” The children answer, “Yes.” You say, “Yes, George's shirt is blue,” to reinforce language by encouraging the children to say the language stems in unison.

**Visuals.** Open up a picture book, point to a bear, and ask, “Is the bear blue?” The children respond, “No.” Reinforce by saying, “No, the bear is not blue.” Point to a blue ocean picture and ask, “Is the ocean blue?” They respond, “Yes, the ocean is blue.”

Through the use of objects, gestures, and visuals in context, language becomes comprehensible for young children.

**Repetition**

In addition to needing a context-embedded approach to teaching, children need *repetition* to embed language concepts into their long-term memory. (Most children need 12–15 repetitions of a word before it stays in long-term memory.) Repetition occurs through context-embedded processes of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Use all four literacy processes simultaneously as you teach English. To teach the concept of blue, for example, consider adding the following activities to reinforce the literacy processes:

**Listening and speaking.** Continue to use the word *blue* throughout the day by asking, “Is this blue?” Sing or chant, “Is this blue?” Children sing back, “Yes, it is blue” or “No, it is not blue.” Build additional vocabulary around the word *blue* by asking, “Is this pencil blue?” Children answer, “Yes, the pencil is blue.” Ask, “Is this pencil red?” The children answer, “No, the pencil is not red. The pencil is blue.” Practice target vocabulary with the children over many days so that the vocabulary is embedded in their long-term memory and easily retrieved in conversations.

**Reading and writing.** Expose children daily to reading and writing processes. Write the word *blue* on the bag of blue objects or attach a label with the word *blue* on it. Write the word *blue* on the board. Carefully form each letter as you say the letters aloud. Then, use language experience by writing complete sentences on the board as children dictate them, such as, The pencil is blue. The ocean is blue. The frog is green.

Concepts stay in long-term memory as children practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

**Fun**

In addition to *comprehensibility* and *repetition*, young children need a variety of *fun* activities to keep them engaged in the learning process. When interest and motivation are high, children rapidly acquire language. Young children maintain interest through the use of games, art, music, dance, and other physical activities. You can also keep them engaged by using patterns, puppets, stories, and make-believe:

**Patterns.** Use patterning as a strategy for young children to practice the word *blue*. You can tape strips of colored paper to the front board in the pattern blue, red, blue, red, blue, red. Have the children say the colors aloud as you point to each piece of colored paper. Then ask, “What color is next?” Choose a child, who will use the language stem provided to say, “The next color is blue.” The child then comes to the board, chooses a blue piece of paper, and tapes it to the board.

You ask, “What color did Fatima choose?” The children answer, “Blue.” You say, “Yes, Fatima chose a blue piece of paper. Let’s say that together: Fatima chose blue. Let’s say the colors aloud as I point to them: blue, red, blue, red, blue, red. Now, what color is next?” You choose another child, who says, “The next color is red.”
Puppets, stories, and make-believe. Another fun way to teach the concept blue is by using a family of puppets who are going shopping. Mother puppet wants to buy blueberries at the store. Father puppet wants to buy a blue car. Boy puppet wants to buy a blue cap. Girl puppet wants to buy a blue dress. With the entrance of each puppet, the puppet must review several items of different colors before choosing blue. The children help the puppets buy their blue items in the following:


You show puppet an orange baseball cap and ask, “Is this a blue cap, boys and girls?” The children answer, “No, that is an orange cap.” Puppet shakes his head no!

Finally, you hold up a red cap and ask, “Is this a blue cap, boys and girls?” They answer, “No, that is a red cap.” Puppet shakes his head no!

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Finally, you hold up a blue cap and ask, “Is this a blue cap?” “Yes, that is a blue cap!” the children call out with excitement and laughter. You say to puppet, “This is a blue cap. Would you like to buy it?” “Yes,” says puppet while nodding his head. “Thank you for my blue cap,” he says as he happily leaves with his blue cap. The children clap. You continue the puppet show as each puppet shops for something blue.

Fun activities like patterning, puppet play, story, and imagination add immense pleasure to the language learning of small children. Coupled with comprehensibility and repetition, interesting activities enliven the minds of children, opening their world of English language acquisition.

Keep the three literacy keys in mind as you teach English—comprehensibility, repetition, and fun—and make literacy learning come alive for young children.