MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCE (MLU)

Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) is the average number of words a person uses in a communication message (or utterance). We don't use the term sentence here, because it might only be a phrase or a string of words. An increase in MLU shows us that the child is progressing toward becoming a fluent communicator. Progress with this will affect literacy as well as communication outcomes. (as the child/student gets better at putting together their thoughts, They will get better at understanding when others put together thoughts and better at putting my thoughts in writing).

To elicit conversations to measure MLU: The suggestion in most textbooks is to tailor the choice of materials to the child's developmental level, using free play with toys with younger and less talkative children and using activities that would promote decontextualized conversation with older children.

The children produced fewer multi-word utterances in a clinician-directed routine play condition involving a construction activity (making an animal) than in child-directed free play with a variety of toys. (Bain, Olswang, and Johnson (1992))

Ways to model increased MLU and techniques:
- **Self-Talk:** Verbalize what you are seeing, hearing, doing, and/or feeling.

Ex: "I am washing my hands", "The water is warm"

- **Parallel Talk:** Talk about what the child sees, hears, does, and feels.

Ex: "You're petting the dog." "That feels hot"

- **Expansions:** Take the child's utterance and expand it into a closer approximation of a grammatically correct sentence.

Ex: The child says "eat"… The teacher says "Eat banana"

Child: "baby sleep" Teacher: "The baby is sleeping"

- **Expatiation:** Expand the child's utterance and add something new.

Ex: Child: "Want milk" Teacher: "The milk is cold"

- **Buildups and Breakdowns:** Expand the utterance, break it down, build It up.

Child" "baby sleep"

Teacher: "Yeah, the baby is sleeping." "sleeping in the bed" "The baby is sleeping in the bed"

Child: "Baby sleep bed"

- **Recast Sentences:** Only add grammatical information.

Ex: Child: "The doll is sick" Teacher: "She is sick"

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Jones and Bartlett Learning, August 2011