



Taking Language to the Next Level

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When young children first begin talking they use language to communicate about their immediate world--the "here and now." For example, they label objects they see (e.g., "kitty") or describe events that are happening right now--("baby crying").

Around three to five-years of age, children are ready to develop more complex language skills that allow them to talk about things that are much more abstract (for example, what *might* happen in the future, what people are *thinking*, why an action occurred, etc.).

As children's language and cognitive skills develop, they can:

- talk about things that are not present,
- conjecture (talk about why, when, and how things *might* happen), and
- talk about intangible

things (feelings, possibilities, past and future events).

Moving beyond the "here and now." The ability to talk about things that are not in the immediate environment is often referred to as "decontextualized language." It requires the use of more complex language forms such as embedded sentences, expanded noun and verb phrases, and other more sophisticated language (Curenton, Craig, & Flanigan, 2008; Curenton & Justice, 2004; Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001; Westby, 1991).

When children hear or use language that refers to things and events that are not in the "here and now" they are required to get ideas across

almost exclusively through precise use of vocabulary and grammar.

The child cannot call upon the immediate environment or the "context" to help explain the meaning of the language. For example, when you and a child are looking at a picture of children playing and the child says "he likes to swing"

you both know that the boy on the swing in the picture

is who the child is talking about.

But if you have already read the book and closed it, the child might need to give more information to let you know which boy in the picture he is talking about ("That boy in the blue hat likes to swing").



Taking Language to the Next Level *continued*

When you are talking about things in the “here and now” you can boost the meaning of your words through gesture, intonation, facial expression, contextual cues in the environment, and shared knowledge between the speaker and the listener (Paul, 2001; Westby, 1991).

Literate language.

Decontextualized language, in contrast, has to rely on just the words being spoken (or read) without much help from gestures, context clues, etc. When language is decontextualized it puts more of the burden on the words themselves to communicate clearly.

Children have to use more complex grammar and vocabulary, including specific elements sometimes referred to as “literate language.” Below are a few “literate language” components:

- specific nouns (“the farmer”, rather than just “the man”)
- elaborated noun phrases (the big tall fir tree, rather than just “the tree”)
- elaborated verb phrases (“ran as fast as his feet would carry him”)

- adverbs (very heavy, swam quickly, etc).
- conjunctions (and, but, etc.)
- mental verbs (know, think, pretend, etc.),
- embedded sentences (the car that has cool wheels is fast)

Encouraging literate language.

These elements of “literate language” sound complex and a bit technical, but when you decontextualize language for children, the children naturally learn to use these elements so that they can tell you about things clearly, even when they are talking about things that are not right in front of them.



Here are some specific things you can do around picture books to take children to the next level of language development:

- talk about the book before you read it (for example, “This book is called *The terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day*. I wonder what happened to the boy to make his day so horrible?”)
- talk about the book during the reading (“Wow, Farmer McGregor certainly doesn’t like Peter Rabbit in his garden!”)

- talk about the book after a book is read. (“Living in Alaska sounds like fun. What would you like to do if you went there?”)
- talk about things that happened in the past, or that might happen in the future. (“I think the new playground should have monkey bars”)
- talk about things that are not in the immediate environment (“What does Miss Fadeema’s room look like?”)
- talk about *why* and *how* things might happen (conjecture) (What might have caused the bus to get a flat tire?”)
- talk about what people *think* and *feel* (mental states) (“He’s yelling. I’ve felt like that before”)
- have the children retell the story from memory
- have the children retell the story with a new ending that they make up
- have the children make up a new title for the book, and tell why

When you talk about an idea or event outside of the here-and-now (“How is your house different from the pioneer girl’s house?”) it provides an opportunity for the child to hear more complex language, and encourages the child to use advanced language forms. This more advanced “literate language” is important because it is

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the language of books and school (Westby, 1991).

The language forms used in decontextualized communication are similar to how language is used in books. So you are building a bridge between everyday talking and the



language used in school and in "chapter books" when you decontextualize language during picture book reading.

These techniques work with all children. Children with delayed language skills do not use literate language forms to the same degree as typically developing children (Greenhalgh & Strong, 2001) but

parents can be successfully encouraged to use decontextualized language, which facilitates literate language understanding and use in children with language delays (Morgan and Goldstein, 2004). Using the ideas suggested above can help *all* parents get their children ready for school and for reading.

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I Scream, You Scream, We All Scream for Ice Cream!

Hundreds of years ago, the Chinese poured a mixture of snow and saltpeter over the outside of containers that were filled with syrup. Eating this syrup became a delectable treat! In the same way that salt raises the boiling-point of water, it lowers the freezing-point to below zero. It is said that Marco Polo observed this practice and took the idea home to Italy, traditionally a country that specialized in making "ices."

In 1744, a peculiar dessert called strawberry ice cream was served at the Governor's Mansion in Annapolis, Maryland. Records also show that George Washington bought a "cream machine for ice" in 1784 to use at Mount Vernon, and that Thomas Jefferson brought back an ice cream recipe from France in 1789.

Try this simple way of making ice

cream with the children. **Note:** This recipe is for a single serving.

WHAT YOU NEED:

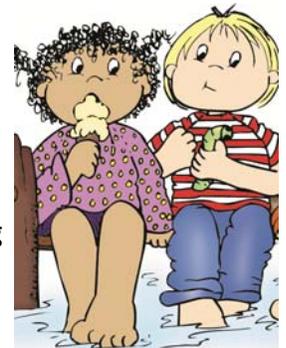
- 2 sandwich size resealable bags
- 1 gallon size resealable bag
- ½ cup of half-and-half
- ¼ teaspoon of vanilla
- 1 tablespoon of sugar
- crushed ice
- ½ cup of salt
- mittens or gloves (optional)

WHAT YOU DO:

1. Pour half-and-half, vanilla and sugar into one of the small plastic bags.
2. Seal the bag *carefully* and then place it inside the other small bag. Double bagging helps to ensure that no salt gets in and that no mess is made.
3. Fill the large plastic bag about half full with crushed ice.
4. Pour the salt over the ice.

5. Put the small bag into the large bag and seal it *tightly*. Be sure to explain to the children that the salt will help the ice stay very cold so the cream will freeze faster.

6. Have the children turn the bag over and over.



6. Squeeze it, shake it, turn it upside down - just keep it moving! Moving the bag keeps the ice crystals from forming all in one place.
7. If the bag gets too cold to handle, break out those winter mittens. After ten minutes, the ice cream should be ready to eat right out of the bag.
8. For a special treat, add some crushed strawberries.

Super Summer Reading!

COUNTING BOOKS

Featured Title:

The Icky Bug Counting Book

By Jerry Pallotta

This creepy-crawly book counts from 1-25 using a variety of insects. The illustrations are rich and realistic and bring the bugs to life for children!

Counting in the Garden
Kim Parker

Mouse by Mouse: A Counting Adventure
Julia Noonan

Animals to Count
Brian Wildsmith

One Big Building: A Counting Book About Construction
Michael Dahl

G is for One Gzonk: An Alpha-Number-bet Book
Tony DiTerlizzi

Click, Clack, Splash, Splash
Doreen Cronin

Ten Little Fish
Audrey Wood

Circus 1-2-3
Megan Halsey



KINDERGARTEN

Featured Title:

Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten

By Joseph Slate

Miss Bindergarten excitedly prepares for the first day of school as her 26 prospective students (one for each letter of the alphabet) do the same. This book is great for any child who is anxious about the first day of kindergarten.

Annabelle Swift, Kindergartner
Amy Schwartz

Welcome to Kindergarten
Anne F. Rockwell

The Twelve Days of Kindergarten
Deborah Lee Rose

When Dinosaurs Go to School
Linda Martin

Kindergarten Kids
Ellen B. Senisi

Countdown to Kindergarten
Alison McGhee

First Day Jitters
Julie Danneberg

The Night Before Kindergarten
Natasha Wing

When You Go to Kindergarten
James Howe

Look Out Kindergarten, Here I Come!
Nancy L. Carlson

ALPHABET BOOKS

Featured Title:

The Turn-Around Upside-Down Alphabet Book

By Lisa Campbell Ernst

This book turns the alphabet on its ear! Each page contains a large letter enclosed in a square that, when turned different directions ~ transforms into an entirely different object. When "J" is rotated clockwise, it becomes an elephant's trunk, a candy cane, and a monkey's tail.

The Wildlife ABC and 123 Book
Jan Thornhill

The Hidden Alphabet
Laura Vaccaro Seeger

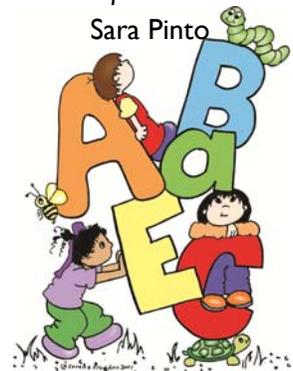
The Dog from Arf! Arf! to Zzzzzz
The Dog Artist Collection

K is for Kissing a Cool Kangaroo
Giles Andreae

Jeepest Creepers: A Monstrous ABC
Laura Leuck

Achoo! Bang! Crash!: the Noisy Alphabet
Ross MacDonald

The Alphabet Room
Sara Pinto



Communicating with Parents from Diverse Cultures

Building and maintaining open communication is key in all aspects of life. It is especially important to do so with the families in your program. At times this may be a challenge if you have families with diverse cultural backgrounds. Taking the time to understand and appreciate the unique qualities every family brings to your program is essential. Here are some basic suggestions:



☑ **Build and maintain strong relationships.**

Strong relationships provide a foundation of trust between you and your families. Positive communication with parents on a daily basis will help to build this relationship.

☑ **Communicate and maintain an attitude of openness.**

It is important that families understand you and that you understand them. Ask questions, offer explanations, and communicate in a respectful, non-threatening, and unbiased manner. Be sure parents know they can come to you know matter what the issue.

☑ **Identify the family “broker.”**
This is someone who can communicate key information

to the family if there is language barrier. Use caution if the child is used as a family broker.

☑ **Identify family history of migration.**

New immigrants will often be less acculturated. They may have fewer resources and may be less familiar with life in the United States.

☑ **Understand and appreciate different world views.**

For example, different world views about 'time' can often create barriers. Not all cultures understand the purpose of setting and keeping appointments.

☑ **Participate in cultural events.**

By participating in these events you can gain a better understanding of other cultures. Suggest that parents tell you when an event is taking place. Consider posting flyers and inviting all of your families to attend.

☑ **Offer compassion.**

Understand that culturally diverse families may be dealing with stresses beyond

parenting. Lack of resources, poor support systems, socioeconomic status, and racism can be some other possible stressors.

☑ **Offer support and assistance.**

Get to know the resources available in your area and help families access them when possible.

Additional Resources:

▶ CLAS (Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services) Early Childhood Research Institute
<http://clas.uiuc.edu>

▶ What is Cultural Reciprocity? Tips for Practitioners from Zero to Three
http://www.zerotothree.org/cpel/tip_2002_12.html

▶ National Extension Parent Education Model of Critical Parenting Practices
http://www.cyfernet.org/parenting_practices/foundations.html

▶ National Center for Cultural Competence
<http://www.georgetown.edu/research/guccd/nccc.index.html>

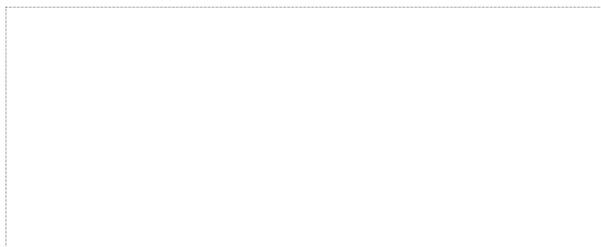
▶ University Affiliated Program Childrens Hospital Los Angeles
<http://www.usc.edu/hsc/ihip/uapl/resources.html>



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Early Literacy Does Not Mean Early Reading

Our current understanding of early language and literacy development has provided new ways of helping children learn to talk, read, and write. But it *doesn't* advocate the teaching of reading to younger children.



Formal instruction that pushes infants and toddlers to achieve adult models of literacy (the actual reading and writing of words) is not developmentally appropriate.

Early literacy theory emphasizes the more natural

unfolding of skills through the fun and enjoyment of books, the importance of positive interactions between young children and adults, and the critical role of literacy-rich experiences.

Formal instruction to require young children to read is counter productive and potentially damaging to children, who may begin to associate reading and books with failure.

It's far more important that young children acquire good social and emotional skills! Academic skills will naturally follow when these skills are in place.

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