

Activities for Supporting Oral Language Development: Level III

Activity One: Telephones in Dramatic Play Areas

The addition of a telephone to real world dramatic play areas such as the pretend classroom grocery store, pet shop, or restaurant, or doctor's office, fosters use of language for a specific purpose. Through this activity, children gain:

- Practice in using language for real world purposes.
- Practice in asking questions.
- Experience in conversing with other children and with adults.

Directions: Following are some suggestions for modeling use of the telephone in a variety of dramatic play areas.

1. Grocery store. Make a pretend call to yourself to ask about whether certain items are available in the store. You might also ask about prices of specific items.
2. Pet shop. Pretend to call and ask if certain kinds of pets are available for sale in the pet store. Ask about how to care for a various animals, what they eat, how often they should be fed, and so on. Ask how much certain animals cost. Give a description of a kind of animal you are looking for and ask if they have one. Ask for descriptions of specific animals that are for sale in the store.
3. Restaurant. Call to ask when the restaurant opens or closes. Ask to make a reservation. Ask if they deliver, how much they charge for particular food items, and whether there is a delivery charge.
4. Doctor's office. Call to make an appointment. Call to ask the doctor's advice about an illness or complaint. Ask when the doctor's office opens and closes. Tell the doctor about your symptoms and ask for advice as to what you should do.

Activity Two: Story Boxes

Dramatic play activities and the story retellings are both excellent ways for children to practice and extend their language skills. This activity combines both of these through the creation of boxes of props that can be used with favorite stories.

- Encourage children's speaking skills
- Encourage children's interpersonal and conversational skills
- Encourage children's ability to use "book language"
- Encourage children's creativity

Directions: Select one of the children's favorite storybooks. You might choose a well-known story, such as "The Three Little Pigs," "Snow White," or "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," or newer stories, such as "The Mitten" by Jan Brett (1989), or "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" by Eric Carle (1969).

1. Collect objects that could be used by children as props while retelling or acting out a particular story. For example, for "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" you might collect three bowls of various sizes, three spoons, three sizes of towels for use as pretend beds, and so forth.
2. Place all objects with a copy of the book in a box or other container.
3. Introduce children to the contents in the box and ask how they might use the objects in their pretend play. Accept children's suggestions for other objects that might go in the box.
4. Store story boxes in a location convenient for children.
5. Continue to add props, as you find them, to existing story boxes.
6. Create new story boxes for stories containing rich language patterns—ones that children particularly enjoy retelling and dramatizing.
7. Also watch for books that call for different kinds of props, such as the book *Christina Katerina & The Box*, about a little girl and her friend who create all kinds of play areas from a refrigerator box: club house, car, boat, ballroom floor. A good book to pair with this one is *Roxaboxen*, a book about a group of children who use rocks to mark the pretend streets, houses and buildings in their imaginary town. Books such as these portray children using language for many purposes, and serve to spark the creativity and language of the young children hearing these stories read aloud.

Activity Three: Sharing New Version of Old Stories

Conversation is almost always sparked when a familiar story takes a new twist. Sharing different versions of the same story can:

- Motivate conversation about the story and pictures.
- Help children notice likenesses and similarities in pictures and stories.
- Help children develop a beginning understanding of parts of a story: characters, settings problem, goal, events, and conclusion.
- Add to children's enjoyment of stories and books.

Directions: Obtain two or more versions of the same story. Well-known children's stories such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, *The Three Little Pigs*, and *Cinderella* are good choices because children can usually, quite readily, notice the similarities and differences. Listed below are ideas for conducting this activity using versions of the *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

1. Read one of the traditional versions, such as Paul Galdone's (1972) *The Three Bears*. Invite children to use props to dramatize the story as discussed in activity two.
2. Read James Marshall's (1988) version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and ask the children to "read" these books on their own and with each other.
3. Set up a display of other versions of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. Invite the children to "read" these books on their own and with each other.
4. Read the book *Somebody and the Three Blairs* by Marilyn Tolhurst (1994). Ask the children if they know a story that is very much like this one. Let the children talk about how this book is alike and different from *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.
5. Share the wordless picture book *Deep in the Forest* by Brinton Turkle (1976). Invite the children to tell what is going on in each picture. The children will want to talk about how this book is similar to *Somebody and the Blairs*. During another visit to this book, offer to serve as recorder while the children dictate words to go with each page of the book. Write the words on a large sheet of chart paper so that children can see their spoken words as they are printed.

Activity Four: Promoting Language Skills Through Computers

When children sit together to operate the computer, language develops naturally! The following kinds of language skills emerge as children explore the software with each other:

- **Discussing:** Whose turn is it? How does this work? What will happen if...?
- **Telling:** This is how this works. Watch what happens when.... Try it this way.
- **Questioning:** How did you do that? How do I...? What will happen if...?

Directions: Make room in your computer center for at least two children to share each computer.

1. Encourage children to work with their friends at the computer.
2. Children can “sign-up” for a turn at the computer.
3. Encourage children who are comfortable working with a specific program to teach that program to other children.
4. Encourage children to talk about what they see on the screen, and what they are trying to do.
5. Model predicting behaviors as you pause to join a group at the computer. “Oh, what will happen if you click on the chimney?”
6. Model discussing behaviors, when necessary: “What kinds of clothing can you choose from for that girl? Are there any hats? Who would wear those kind of shoes? Would a little girl wear those shoes? Why not?”