

Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms

Using Literacy to Target Verbal Language Goals

Reading the same book each day for a week provides children the chance to become truly familiar with a story because of the multiple readings and extended learning opportunities. Children who might be absent, distracted during story time, or have language learning difficulties are more likely to grasp story lines and key concepts enabling them to be active participants during story time. As children become familiar with stories, they learn and practice important language skills. These include being able to predict, understand causal and temporal sequences (i.e., learn story elements), retell stories, recall details, use vocabulary words in various contexts, answer more complex questions about stories, and learn new dialogue or social scripts.

Sample Week: Add different dimensions to expand the story experience and learning each day.

Day 1: Read the book. Introduce parts of book (author, title, illustrator); ask children to guess what the book might be about based on title and cover illustrations; introduce key concepts and vocabulary; read the book. Plan a hands-on art experience reinforcing basic book theme following story reading.

Day 2: Read the book with props. Ask children if they remember what the book was about. Restate title, author and illustrator. Review key concepts and vocabulary before and during book reading. Support the characters' roles and/or the sequence of events in the story through the use of props (puppets, actual objects, flannel story board). Make story props available for children to reenact during free choice play or add props in drama area to extend a theme from the story.

Day 3: Read the book with children predicting simple events. Minimal support should be necessary in order for children to understand story; instead, encourage children to help tell story with simple probing questions or by using the cloze strategy. That is, when reading a predictable, familiar text, teachers provide first words in a recurring story line and encourage children to "fill in the blank" or respond to complete the line in the story. From *The Three Little Pigs*, a teacher reads and cues children with "and the Big Bad reads and cues children with "and the Big Bad Wolf said 'I'll huff and I'll puff...." or "but the Little Pig said, 'Not". Plan hands-on, extension activities following story reading time (e.g., a science experiment, written literacy activity, craft/art project).

Day 4: Children take turns reading book. Allow several children an opportunity to be "teacher" and read the story to their classmates and teacher. Minimally support children in their efforts; this should be a very fun time being "teacher." Encourage fellow classmates to help facilitate at story time.

Day 5: Children reenact book, making up own version of the story. Add movement to the story. Assign roles and provide props to make a "play" of the story.



Best Type of Book:

- Strong story plot
- Simple text
- Novel concepts
- Recurring lines
- Innovative presentation
- Imaginative illustrations
- Classic fables and stories

Wilcox, M.J., Murphy, K.M., Bacon, C.K., and Thomas, S. (2001). Improving language teaching practices in preschool classrooms. Infant Child Research Programs, Arizona State University, Tempe Arizona. <http://icrp.asu.edu>