

# Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms

## Developing Personal Narrative Skills

Teachers and other adults use mealtimes to “socialize” and “catch up” on the children’s news of the day. During children’s early skill development, adults introduce narrative skills through modeling or telling a simple, personal narrative about a special event that occurred to them during the school day (or during a previous day). Good, clear models are essential in order to introduce children to the basic story elements and terms that help to provide structure and temporal sequence (e.g., “first,” “next,” “last”) in stories.

Adults then ask children to tell them about events during the day. The adults may have witnessed the event, but did not participate along with the child. This will provide the adults with some context in which to guide and support a child’s story attempts. For better child narratives, adults can help to provide children a focus or theme in their narrative attempts through comments about specific events or items. For example, “It seemed like you and Michael were having so much fun in block area. You were laughing so loud. Tell us what was so funny.” Or, “I saw Teacher Maria put a band-aid on your elbow. What happened on the playground?”

**Goal:** Develop personal narrative skills  
•Children relate events with a beginning, middle and end.

•Children relate events with explicit causal and temporal sequence among events.

**When:** Mealtime, daily basis

**How:** Through being an interested, supportive communication partner during regular conversations and providing opportunities for children to practice skills during interactions

**Strategies:**

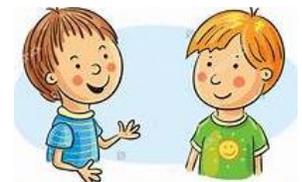
**Model personal stories** (e.g., Tell a 4-5 sentence story about what happened on the way to school or other interesting story that happened during the school day. “Guess what?! When you were on the playground, I answered the phone. It was the one of the firefighters that visited our class last week. He called to tell us that the cat that lives at their station had her kittens. She had four kittens yesterday.”

**Scaffold children’s attempts** by restating utterances, expanding ideas, and providing words to describe a child’s gestures (e.g., “Oh, it hurt right there!” “Your doctor gave you a shot?”).

**Ask questions and make comments** that continue conversations (e.g., “What happened next?” “That sounds scary!”).

**Use prompts** for more information (e.g., “Tell me more.”).

Teachers and adults can help children in their narrative skill development, most significantly, by first being a truly interested conversational partner. Teachers need to talk with the children at the children’s eye level and seem interested in what the children are saying. Several strategies, many of which are described previously, further improve and help scaffold the quality of children’s narratives. Again, these include restating and expanding children’s utterances and making comments and asking probing questions to prompt children to add to their stories and continue providing details.



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>