

Enhancing Children's Language Development in Preschool Classrooms

Facilitating Peer Interaction

The preschool years are important for the development of many skills used later in life, but some of the most valuable lifelong skills children acquire during this time are social interaction skills. No longer is the preschool child satisfied with playing quietly alongside other children or with an engaging adult. Instead he or she becomes more socially motivated and begins to reach out to other children for more involved, cooperative play.

Children do many things during their play with peers. Children practice developing language skills during peer interactions, and they are socially reinforced for their efforts.

Goal: Facilitating peer interaction

- Children increase the time they spend talking and interacting with each other.
- Children share and learn information from other children.
- Peer interactions provide children with recurring opportunities and meaningful contexts to practice newly acquired language skills.
- Strong social communication skills are critical for later school success.
- Peer models facilitate the language learning process.

When: During meal time and free play

How: Through encouraging conversation during mealtimes and recognizing opportunities to expand social interactions and include more children in ongoing play and discussions.

Strategies:

- Be sensitive to children's nonverbal and verbal attempts to join ongoing interactions.
- Direct children to communicate and interact with peers; prompt children to ask other children for assistance or directions instead of adult meeting child's needs.
- Encourage group discussion by asking questions, soliciting opinions, and sharing common personal experiences.
- Assign roles or characters during pretend play if children seem unable or too shy to join ongoing play.
- Provide opportunities and specially select activities for children to be "teachers", i.e. teach each one another simple skills, "read" books to small groups, or lead a group during a cooking or science lesson by "reading" icon directions.
- Draw attention to other children in a group by making comments and overtly including them in ongoing discussions and play.
- Comment and praise children's attempts at peer interaction.
- Facilitate children's abilities to use words instead of actions when emotionally upset with other children; teach the proper vocabulary by commenting on one's own feelings and emotions of self and others.



Children serve as peer models for each other, providing relevant examples and meaningful feedback. Effective communication skills are important for children to interact with their peers and build friendships. By facilitating children's abilities to be successful in their interactions with other children, adults lay the foundation for the development of important social skills that enable children to build secure relationships with others.

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>