



CREATING A QUALITY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Language for Learning

Use this video supplement while watching the Language for Learning videos. Each of the three videos focuses on how language supports children's cognitive and social/emotional development in child care settings across the varying ages: infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and school-agers.

How to Use the Video and Video Supplement Guide

Child care centers, family child care providers, and agencies that offer assistance to child care facilities can use this information to supplement the content discussed in the videos. Much of the guide follows the outline of the videos, but additional information and examples are provided in this format. You may decide to watch all three videos and read the entire video guide or choose to view the video about a certain age group and review only that specific information in the guide.

The video guide includes questions. Some responses in the guide are meant to be suggestions for facilitators and participants, but participants also can generate other ideas to provide quality care. You may want to review specific sections of the video again before considering the questions specific to those interactions. Thank you for viewing the videos. We hope the information shared with you generates new ideas to consider for your program.

Considerations While Viewing the Video

During the video, viewers may have many ideas and thoughts to consider. It is important to remember that each video in the series has a particular area of focus. Though viewers might want to consider all the factors that contribute to a quality child care program, we recommend keeping the specific content in mind while watching, so the viewer can pay attention to the key considerations of the focus area. For example, one video focuses primarily on sanitation; even though there may be scenes of positive interactions between staff and children, the main discussion points surround handwashing and basic sanitation. Furthermore, viewers may notice elements that may seem problematic for meeting various requirements across different agencies. Some may even point out an issue or concern, or disagree with how a situation is handled. Acknowledging the fact that no child care program offers “perfect care” and the goal of this series is to show quality across a variety of settings, rather than depicting an ideal or unobtainable standard, may help address these concerns.

Language for Learning

The purpose of the Language for Learning videos is to illustrate the role of the teacher in using language to support children’s development. The interactions you will see include positive language, expansion, questioning, and redirection. Teachers use these techniques to expand children’s knowledge, encourage complex thinking and problem solving skills, and help children develop appropriate behavior and positive social skills. The videos also emphasize the importance of using positive language during interactions with children. This is because a supportive and caring environment, where children feel respected, encourages active participation in the learning

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process. The video supplement will examine some of the specific language needs for each of the age groups across the three videos.

Outline of Video Supplement Content

- I. Infants and Toddlers
- II. Preschoolers
- III. School-agers
- IV. Group Activities for Child Care Providers
- V. Resources

I. Infants and Toddlers

Because many infants and toddlers spend most of their waking hours in child care settings, teachers play a critical role in exposing children to language. At this age, children are developing skills to understand and use language. Teachers who use simple but descriptive language to frequently label the common objects and actions the children experience help children build an understanding of the world. Teachers also contribute to early expressive language skills by responding to children's communication, such as when they pick up a child who is crying or coo or talk back to a child who is vocalizing. These interactions are some of the earliest ways that children learn to communicate with others. As older infants and toddlers begin to use meaningful language or gestures to express themselves, teachers can encourage and build their skills by responding with longer and more complex sentences to reiterate children's thoughts and asking questions that encourage conversation. Positive interactions are the best way to meet children's emotional and social development at this age. When teachers are responsive to the children and language is positive, these interactions contribute to a warm and supportive environment that optimizes children's learning.



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Review Questions

- 1 *What types of information are conveyed to the children in the video when teachers talk about the display and materials the children are using?*

The children in the video are learning to identify their names, their peers, and the names of objects in the classroom. Some teachers also include descriptive language about objects, such as when one teacher names the colors and shapes the children are sorting. When the teacher asks a child where her family is and then verbalizes the response, she is reinforcing the concept of a question and an answer. All of these interactions are engaging to

the children because they provide concrete experiences, which add to, or reinforce, children's expressive and receptive language skills. The interactions are warm and positive, which encourage children to interact with their caregivers.

Consider the opportunities for teaching during play and routines in your classroom.

Teachers need to be aware of the constant opportunities to build the language and cognitive skills of infants and toddlers. Young children are absorbing so much information, and it is up to adults to provide language to build children's vocabularies and model pleasant social conversation. These interactions can take place during play activities and daily events, which serve to provide a context that is familiar and engaging to children.

2 *How did teachers introduce nature/science and math/number concepts to the infants and toddlers?*

Even at this early age, children are interested in the natural world and building knowledge about shapes, numbers, and counting.

By taking children outside daily when the weather permits and allowing infants and toddlers to experience grass, plants, and the breeze, these teachers are helping the children engage with the natural world. Early math and number concepts are appropriate for infants and toddlers when they include identifying shapes, simple counting, or identifying numbers. These experiences help create a foundation that children build on in their preschool and school-age years.



3 *What specific techniques are used to guide children to positive behaviors?*

In one interaction, a teacher praises children for hugging their classmate. When one child touches the younger child's nose, the teacher responds positively by saying that that is his nose, but then redirects the child to find her own nose. This interaction serves to reinforce that gentle and kind contact is desired. While some adults may be tempted to tell a child not to touch another child's face, for fear that the child may accidentally injure the younger child, the teacher in the video skillfully acknowledges the child's interest in the infant's nose, and then redirects the child to a more appropriate game of finding her own body parts.

Redirection also occurs when an infant tries to pull a book away from the teacher and child reading it. Without overwhelming this young child with an explanation, the teacher simply finds another book to give to the child.

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In another interaction, a teacher uses positive language to instruct a child to keep his feet on the floor, rather than climb on the shelf. As toddlers develop better gross motor skills, they are likely to engage in this type of age-typical behavior; by consistently stating the desired behavior (“feet on the floor”), rather than focusing on negative behaviors (“we don’t climb inside”), the teachers are able to remind children of what they should be doing. The tone is helpful and supportive, and the child responds by following the instruction. He is then easily directed to another more appropriate activity.

It is important to note that there are times it is appropriate for teachers to use raised volume and words like “no” or “stop.” When this language may prevent injury because a child is in danger, it is acceptable to attempt to stop the behavior in this manner. This type of interaction is most effective when positive language and redirection are used most of the time.



II. Preschoolers

Preschool children have complex language and social skills. They are able to express their interests, feelings, and needs. They are also better able to understand the feelings and needs of others. The role of the teacher in supporting preschool children’s cognitive and social/emotional development is in recognizing the child’s current capabilities and guiding interactions to appropriately meet the children’s needs, while also challenging them to engage with new concepts or learn new skills. Using the techniques shown in the video, including questions that encourage conversations, explaining reasoning concepts, having children explain their problem-solving process, encouraging literacy and numeracy skills, and teaching nature and science concepts, teachers can use language to support children’s cognitive development.

Review Questions

- 1 *How are social conversations during play used to encourage children to think and talk about their play?*

The teachers in the video engage in many social conversations with the children. They often ask children about their activities then respond to the children’s answers by adding more information. This leads to more complex conversations as children express their interests and teachers continue to build on the information that children have. These conversations serve to expand children’s knowledge but also to model a pleasant social environment.

- 2 *How are reasoning concepts introduced during play activities?*

In the video, you see activities that are clearly planned to help children practice reasoning, such as the patterning cubes and sorting natural objects activities. Talking with children while they

Use language techniques to support preschoolers’ cognitive development: include questions that encourage conversations, explain reasoning concepts, have children explain their problem-solving process, encourage literacy and numeracy skills, and teach nature and science concepts.

complete these activities directs their use of materials and serves to assess their grasp of the concepts being practiced. Planning activities such as these helps ensure that children continue to practice reasoning skills. The video also shows teachers talking about reasoning concepts with children emergently during play. This occurs informally when a teacher observes a child's interest during play and begins a conversation related to that play to discuss concepts.

3 *How do you promote literacy and numeracy and teach nature science concepts in your class?*

In the video, one teacher takes advantage of the children's interests to point out the letter that they see on a restaurant's sign and to encourage a child to help identify the pizza as hot. In both these activities, teaching occurs during the course of a play activity and the children are engaged because the subject is interesting to them. This type of teaching is particularly effective with preschool children, who learn best while engaged in play activities.

Teaching about numbers occurs during group times in some clips, and the children are actively involved and interested. In these situations, children are able to experience practical applications for math, for example, when they help count the number of children present and compare the number of boys vs. girls or vote to decide which book the teacher will read. Other experiences allow children to use numbers and other math concepts during play or as part of their daily experiences in the classroom. All of these experiences are well-suited to the developmental needs of the group and help children develop familiarity with numbers and comfort with math concepts.

The children in the video are very engaged with nature/science learning. Teachers support the children's interests and engage them in conversations while providing hands-on and concrete experiences with plants, animals, and other materials in the nature/science center and garden/yard outside.

4 *How do teachers assist children in working through social conflicts?*

Preschool children have the capacity to negotiate many peer interactions on their own; however, many are still building skills to communicate and negotiate with peers when conflicts occur. Consider the situations in which children are not communicating well during clean up, and a child approaches the teacher for help when a dispute arises over the plastic tweezers outside. In both interactions, the teachers remind the children of appropriate



Preschool children learn best while engaged in play activities.

language to use, help the children find a solution, and ensure that the solution is carried out. In both cases, the children receive positive attention once they are working together. This type of approach offers children many more tools than when teachers simply tell children to share or take materials away when children are having difficulty sharing. Over time, children are then better able to use these tools to find positive solutions on their own.

III. School-agers

School-aged children are capable of understanding complex concepts and have the social skills to negotiate many peer interactions independently. While group care for this age group is not the primary setting for their education, school-age programs can be a unique support for children's development by providing enriching activities, basing curriculum on children's interests, and providing social support for them.

Review Questions

- 1 *How do teachers of school-age children reinforce the nature/science, literacy, and math/number concepts that children may be working on at school?*

During play and planned activities, teachers purposefully include questions to direct children to these concepts. One teacher uses the children's emergent interest in learning about recreational activities of older generations to construct an activity that allows children to practice language and writing skills. Rather than just discussing the children's ideas, the project is allowed to expand to include research, documentation, and discussion. The activity is meaningful and interesting to the children but also provides an opportunity to practice writing skills. The teacher can then choose to finish the project, or, if the children are still interested, he can tie in additional activities, such as considering the age of the people responding and charting or graphing responses.

A family child care provider turns an unwanted situation (animals eating her peaches) into a nature and science project for the children. The children had the opportunity to observe peaches growing on the tree, pick them, and help in planning their use in a cooking project. The children then took part in cooking and eating a peach cobbler. This type of project encourages learning about where fruit comes from, what wild animals eat, and cooking; it reinforces both science and math concepts.

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2 *Aside from helping children with conflicts, how do teachers promote social development in the school-age group?*

The providers in the video have close relationships with the children they care for. They maintain a positive and supportive environment through praise and by listening to and respecting the children. These relationships foster confidence in the children, so that they can feel supported in expressing their feelings and beliefs. Teachers emphasize team work and help ensure that children have the tools they need to get along well and listen to one another.

In addition to helping children with social conflicts, teachers can also plan opportunities to work on social development. One teacher in the video plays a game in which children are asked questions about how they would respond to different social scenarios. This activity is engaging to the children because it is challenging, and it is also fun because the activity is carried out during a basketball game. While the children may perceive they are simply playing a game, the teacher is also reinforcing positive social behavior.

IV. Group Activities for Child Care Providers

After viewing the videos and discussing the questions in the video guide, consider facilitating small or whole group activities with teachers and program staff to practice using positive language with children. These activities include:

- Activity 1: Transforming Negative Language Activity
- Activity 2: Using Language to Support Cognitive Development
- Activity 3: Problem-solving after a Classroom Observation to Enhance Language and Interactions

Transforming Negative Language Activity

Purpose: Using positive language and guidance techniques, such as redirection, with young children allows them to learn what is expected without drawing additional attention to the undesired behavior. Minimizing unnecessary negative messages is important in the development of positive self-esteem and reserving directly negative statements for times when children could be harmed as a result of their actions make it more likely that they will begin to understand the importance of these statements and respond accordingly. The use of negative language—such as frequent “No’s,” “stop it’s,” and “Uh-uh’s”—often results from an unconscious habit of telling children what not to do, rather than explaining what behavior is expected. Sometimes it can be challenging to make a distinction between behaviors that pose a real threat to children’s safety and behaviors that may not be acceptable or desired, but are simply age typical and not dangerous. This activity is designed to help teachers and home providers become more aware of their

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own tendencies when responding to children’s behaviors and also to think about options for using positive language in various situations.

Directions: For each scenario decide whether the language used is positive or negative and why. If the language is negative, think of more positive ways each situation could be handled.

Scenario	Is an alternate, more positive response needed? If so, what words could be used?
An infant mouths a book and is told, “Don’t eat it, uh-uh, read it.”	
During clean up time, a toddler tries to pick up the bowl of water on the art table used for rinsing the paint brushes. Some water splashes out of the bowl. She is told, “You can’t put that up; I’ll do it.”	
A statement is made to a sleepy child: “It is not time to go to sleep; don’t you go to sleep. It’s lunch time so wake up!”	
A teacher tells an older infant, who is trying to grab a toy that another child is holding, “Uh-uh, you need to be nice. I told you she has that toy right now.”	
During a finger painting activity with a group of toddlers, some of the children lick their fingers and taste the paint. Teachers make statements such as “Stop putting your hands in your mouth; you know that is not food” and “Yuck, don’t be nasty.”	
There is a toddler in the classroom who likes to climb, and she often has to be helped down from the table top or other furniture. The child stands next to a table but is not actively climbing. She is told: “You don’t need to climb on the table. There’s nothing up there for you to play with.”	
A young toddler stands on the seat of a rocking toy and is told, “No, no, on your bottom; sit on the blue horse.”	
A toddler approaches a younger infant in a play area. He is told, “Leave the baby alone; I don’t want you to hit him.”	
Can you think of a situation when you wanted a child to do something differently? What was the situation and what instructions or statements were made?	

Answer key/information for the activity facilitator of the Transforming Negative Language Activity

Scenario	Ideas for responding
Infant mouthing book	As this is a behavior that is common and frequent with this age group, telling the child to look at the book, shake the rattle, etc. or giving the child something that is appropriate to chew on is preferred.
Toddler making a mess while trying to clean up	Think about acknowledging the child's attempt to help first and then guiding the child to another task. You also could make a statement that the adult needs to pick up the bowl because it is messy and avoid using negative words such as can't, don't, or stop.
A young child is sleepy before the usual rest time	Infant and toddlers do not always stay on the same schedule; being aware of individual needs is important. Asking the child if he or she wants to finish lunch would be appropriate, but trying to keep the child awake is not.
Children want the same toy	This behavior is common and frequent with this age group. Try offering another toy to divert the child's attention and/or simply tell the child that the other child has the toy without prefacing the statement with negative words or assuming that the child was not being nice.
Children taste finger paint	As this is a behavior that is to be expected with this age group, telling the children how to use the paint and making sure they are engaged in the activity is preferred. Then if the behaviors continue and cannot be redirected, offering another activity would be appropriate.
A child's tendency to climb is addressed prior to the behavior	Even though some children do have predictable behaviors, avoid "assumption of guilt" statements. These sorts of statements can actually make it more likely that the child will remember and engage in the undesired behavior after hearing about it.
A toddler climbs onto an elevated surface	This is a dangerous behavior, even if age typical, so quick intervention and direct statements such as "no" are appropriate. Of course, positive language can also be used.
An older child shows interest toward a younger child	As this is a behavior that is common and frequent with this age group, encouraging positive peer interaction is ideal. Instead of preventing an interaction from occurring, give instructions such as "Gentle touches." "Be careful, easy," and so on to help children learn how to act with one another.

Using Language to Support Cognitive Development

Purpose: The classroom provides many hands-on experiences for children to explore and make their own deductions about the world around them. Teachers can evoke reasoning and problem-solving opportunities through facilitating discussions and asking questions during free play as children use all types of materials. This activity is designed to illustrate how teachers and home providers can use materials with children to stimulate learning-related language and interactions.

Directions: This is an activity for a small group. If you have a larger group, divide into several smaller groups. Each group is given a selection of materials, some specifically designed for a learning area (shape or number related, science concepts such as magnetism) and also more generic materials (building toys, pretend food) that can be used to demonstrate logical concepts.

Members of each group practice using these materials to provide language-rich experiences that stimulate reasoning. The following are examples of some language that can be used by adults to encourage children to talk about what they are doing and thinking.

1. As children use materials, ask open-ended questions such as “How does that work?” and “What is happening?”
2. Encourage children to make predictions about outcomes, “What do you think will happen?”
3. Encourage children to use deduction and make interpretations, “What do you think of this?” “Why did that happen?”
4. Ask questions to encourage children to talk about their solutions to problems. “What do you need to do so it won’t fall over?” “Why are all of those the same?”

Open-ended questions encourage children to imagine, elaborate, and become better problem solvers and creative thinkers. Below are some additional examples of ways to ask open-ended questions:

- What do you think about . . . ?
- In what way . . . ?
- What would you do . . . ?
- How can we . . . ?
- How did you . . . ?

Problem-solving after a Classroom Observation to Enhance Language and Interactions

Mentoring strong language scenario: You are a mentor teacher in a child care facility and have been asked by the director to observe in a four-year-old classroom of a newly hired lead teacher. Based on your knowledge from working in the facility, you know this classroom has access to many resources and can see in the classroom that the teacher has provided many appropriate learning materials in the various activity areas. You also observe that children are allowed much time to play with the materials throughout the course of the day, and you also note that the teacher has good systems in place to ensure proper handwashing and basic care



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routines are handled appropriately and efficiently.

Though the teachers are nice, friendly, and caring, the observation shows that examples of intentional, guided language rarely occurs. In this environment, you observe that the teachers talk about concepts like same/different, matching, colors, shapes, etc. with this group. However, you notice that the teachers rarely encourage reasoning or ask questions so children can think critically about a concept or experience. For example, you do not see examples of language used by teachers in the “Language for Learning—Preschoolers” video. You wonder if the teachers in this classroom simply do not understand the types of language they could model and facilitate with children. You feel that with a little work this program can go from a “nice” program to a strong program with many enriching learning experiences and interactions.

How might you provide helpful information to the teachers regarding using language with children? What types of questioning techniques would you suggest and/or model for this classroom?

Mentoring strong language and modeling appropriate behaviors

scenario: As a mentor teacher in your child care facility, you observe in another preschool classroom to help the facility prepare for its upcoming assessments. It does not take long to realize that the teachers continually use directives to try to modify children’s behavior and that these tactics do not seem to be working in the older two-year-old/younger three-year-old room. During center time, routines, and group times, you notice that children sometimes become disengaged during play and run around the room, bother each other, or simply wander from place to place. Even though the tone the teachers use is appropriate, you hear them continually use phrases like:

- You need to be sweet to your friends.
- Stop that.
- Don’t run.
- Sit down.
- Stop running around; go wash your hands.
- Give that toy to me if you can’t share.
- He had that toy first so you need to find another toy.
- If you can’t play nice, you will have to go to another center.

Though the teacher interactions and tone of voice are not harsh, you can tell that after a few more hours that the teachers could likely become stressed or frustrated and the tone could become stronger, louder, or “not as nice.”

Thinking of skilled ways to model appropriate interactions and appropriate play with peers and materials, what resources and advice would you offer this younger preschool classroom so that the classroom operated more effectively and that children had opportunities to play, learn, and get along well with each other?



V. Resources

Helpful documents and related resources are found at:

References

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