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Enhancing Oral Language Experiences in the Pre-Kindergarten Setting

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ENHANCING ORAL LANGUAGE EXPERIENCES
IN THE PRE-KINDERGARTEN SETTING

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by
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August, 1992

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The purpose of this study was to investigate how an oral language emphasis benefits pre-kindergarten children in preparation for entry into kindergarten. This study investigated the concept of enhancing oral language activities in the classroom. Growth in the cognitive, social, and emotional areas in pre-kindergarten children was noted.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American society today is more highly technologized than ever before. We have proceeded into what experts call the 'information age.' To prepare workers for this fast paced society, more and more demands are being placed upon public education to prepare young people for a society that will require critical thinkers and problem solvers (Educating Americans for the 21st Century, 1983).

Ramifications from those demands are filtering down to pre-kindergarten education, which is the forerunner to a child's formal school experience. State governments have just begun initiating pre-kindergarten programs for the four-year-old entering public school. In a position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1992), the following is stated:

Curriculum issues are of particular concern to early childhood educators in light of the increasingly widespread demand for use of inappropriate formal teaching techniques for young children, over-emphasis on achievement of narrowly defined academic skills, and increased reliance on psychometric tests to determine enrollment and retention in programs. (p. 2)

At this time, pre-kindergarten programs are still in the discovery stage of regulated public education, and there

is a lack of unification in how best to develop an effective pre-kindergarten program. One major issue of concern and debate is curriculum design. Some experts support an academic focus, which emphasizes a teacher-directed, academic, and skills-oriented curriculum (Hillerich, Manning, Olilla, & Samuels as cited in Wilson & Thrower, 1985). Other experts support a child-centered focus, which emphasizes a focus on the social and communication nature of learning (Allen, Cullinan, K. Goodman, & Y. Goodman, as cited in Wilson & Thrower, 1985). Thus, researchers, as a body of experts, have not reached congruency on how best to proceed with pre-kindergarten curriculum, yet pre-kindergarten educators have a pressing need for a more sound, definitive direction.

In their attempt to determine the most effective curriculum emphasis and focus, educators need to look at both solid pre-kindergarten research and characteristics of today's pre-kindergartner. "True educational reform will only come about when we make our education appropriate to children's individual growth rates and levels of mental development" (Elkind, 1988, p. 60).

Children are arriving in class with various cultural backgrounds, innate abilities, socio-economic differences, and a unique, individual experiential base (Heny, 1987). Children naturally bring to the classroom the customs, languages, and cultural traditions from their home

environment. Unfortunately, many children also bring emotional and social problems attributed to dysfunctional homes in which there may be abuse, neglect, and disharmony.

Due to the increased responsibilities of juggling work and child rearing, many parents have less time to interact with their children (Elkind, 1987; Heny, 1987; Shane & Walden, 1978; Richardson, Casanova, Placier & Guilfoyle, 1989). Thus, many pre-kindergartners arrive at school with a lack of age appropriate verbal and social skills.

In their pursuit of a sound curriculum design, educators also need to investigate the research concerning pre-kindergarten education. One area of research that may help give needed direction to educators is oral language development. Oral language development forms a foundation of learning (Wilson & Thrower, 1985). Further, oral language development may be emphasized throughout the day and within all these activities in which pre-kindergartners engage, such as play time, music, drama, story time, snack time, and art. The teacher is instrumental in creating an environment conducive to meaningful oral language growth based upon a strong conceptual understanding of its importance (Kostelnik, 1992.)

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate how an oral language emphasis would benefit pre-kindergarten children in their preparation for entry into kindergarten.

Limitation of the Study

Limitation of the study pertains primarily to students in the pre-kindergarten class with a chronological age of four or five years. The suggested activities for the aforementioned age group are selected from developmentally appropriate curriculums. Since it is necessary to limit the length of this project, examples of selected activities were limited.

Definition of the Terms

The following terms with particular significance to this study have been used to clarify meaning for the reader. Most of the terms have been defined by researchers in the field and have been appropriately cited. Where there were insufficient definitions to clarify the intent of this paper, the writer defined the terms.

Conversation. A communication interaction that shares ideas and information (Duchan & Weitzner-Lin, 1987).

Developmentally Appropriate. Refers to offering content, materials, and methodologies that are commensurate with the child's level of development and for which the child is ready. It means concrete hands-on experiences for four-year-olds in preparation for movement to such symbolic levels as letters, numbers, and pictures (Kostelnik, 1992).

Emergent. Evolving as something new. Arising as a new or improved development (Webster's Dictionary, 1986).

Language. Usage of words to stand for ideas. It serves the child's immediate needs of abstraction and problem solving both cognitively and socially (Calfee & Drum, 1986).

Learning Centers. Designated interaction areas of drama, tactile, art media, and construction within the classroom. Also, to include designated curriculum areas of math manipulatives, fine motor development, science exploration, and language development materials (Hine, 1992).

Literacy. The state or ability of being able to read and write (Webster's Dictionary, 1986).

Play. Child-directed exploration of the school environment (ESPAW's E.C.E.C., 1989).

Pre-kindergartner. A student enrolled in an educational program preceding the kindergarten year at a center-based school. The student's chronological age is four to five years old.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter the effects of academic expectations upon children will first be discussed. A rationale for enhancement of oral language development will follow.

An Academic Focused Pre-kindergarten

Society, today, is swept up in the fast pace of a technological world. Competing in a global environment, society has redefined the expectations of our nation's schools in preparing students for entry into the work force. In pursuit of greater competency and a desire to improve performance expectations, schools and parents have begun to exert pressure on children to learn academics at an earlier age (Elkind, 1987; Schweinhart, 1988).

Our government, due to mounting "evidence that preschool children are sensational learners . . . has espoused early childhood education" by providing financial support (Moffett, 1981, p. 103). With financial support come regulations and expectations in regard to curriculum development. One finds greater emphasis placed on the learner to adapt to a curriculum that reflects societal expectations with disregard to the importance of what is being learned (Fox, 1987; Shane & Walden, 1978).

An academically oriented kindergarten curriculum is implemented with four-year-old and younger children in many pre-kindergarten programs. Reading programs across the

country are being regulated as part of the curriculum to teach reading at the kindergarten level (Chall, 1987; Wilson & Thrower, 1985). Such curriculum realignment is impacting pre-kindergarten education as children are now expected to begin reading in kindergarten (Chall, 1987; Shane & Walden, 1978). Reading at a younger age may place pressure on children's academic performance in the classroom.

Problems with an Academic Focused Pre-kindergarten

The family unit has changed dramatically in the past few decades due to the proliferation of divorce. Many families are now headed by single parents. Children coming from single parent families communicate with one less adult. Many families require two working parents to maintain their lifestyle in a fluctuating economy. With both parents at work, young children are shuttled out of the home and off to school at a very important time of their life--early childhood (Elkind, 1988). Thus, there is less time for meaningful dialogue. The evolution of these new family styles and values "become the middle class norm" (Elkind, 1988, p. xii).

With the influx of technology, homes today are swept up in accumulating televisions, video cassette recorders, computers, and video games. Family time is juggled between nurturing children, viewing television programs, renting video store movies for home viewing, and competing with computer games such as Nintendo and Pac Man. Time spent

interacting with home technology machines is valuable time lost from interacting with children. This lost time is no longer spent on helping children learn language in their homes (Elkind, 1988).

In school, young children are taught curriculum procedures appropriate for older school-aged children (Chall, 1987; Elkind, 1987). Children's ability to learn any subject matter at a younger age is a practice of "misinterpretation which lies behind much of the miseducation practiced in the schools today" (Elkind, 1987, p. 59). When children are instructed too early in academic subjects, "miseducation" is a stressful consequence (Elkind, 1987). Children are "put at risk for short-term stress and long-term personality damage for no useful purpose" (Elkind, 1987, p. 4).

Placing children in stressful situations causes self-esteem to decrease. Children become fearful of participating in activities as their self-esteem is lowered for lack of success in learning. Since self-esteem is the greatest indicator of academic success in the classroom, this creates a very valid concern (Elkind, 1987, 1988).

Humphrey (1988) maintained that pressure placed upon children to perform or compete causes distress, anxiety, and a state of conflict. He further states children's reactions to environmental stress interrupts the learning process. Withdrawal or frustration are examples of behavior changes.

Individual frustration level is reached at the point of decreased performance in muscular movement preventing one from handwriting, thinking, or speaking fluidly. He states:

Anxiety is considered a learnable reaction that has the properties of a response, acute danger, and a drive.

Anxiety in the classroom interferes with learning, and whatever can be done to reduce it should be used as a spur to learning. Evidence from clinical studies points clearly and consistently to the disruptive and distracting power of anxiety effects over most kinds of thinking. (p. 46)

Taking tests causes anxiety for children. Tests are administered to assess children's reading readiness, language mastery, and competency in measuring the strengths and weaknesses of children's academic performance. The results of these tests may cause teachers to label children as low achievers, disadvantaged, and at-risk students. The consequence of early labeling may affect the nature of the children for the duration of their school experience (Richardson, Casanova, Placier & Guilfoyle, 1989).

A natural part of the pre-kindergarten period is the children's adjustment to being away from home. Separation from the home environment is highly stressful and causes anxiety within many children. Compounding this anxiety is the teacher's obligation to meet academic curriculum regulations through testing and creating an academic focused

environment. Thus, there may be a conflict between teacher focus and child need. This is very destructive to learning for children as immediate needs must be addressed by a nurturing teacher before learning will occur (Humphrey, 1988). Childhood stresses can become accumulative. Humphrey includes classroom noise level, individual physical performance tasks, teacher correction of children's behavior, developmental disability, and the specific subject activity known as reading. Stress factors can cause behavioral changes that negatively affect the social, emotional, and health characteristics of children. Stress can inhibit and close the brain to learning. A threatened child downshifts, or shuts off speech, or becomes stage frightened (Hart, 1983).

As "present learning depends on previous learning, and biases stored in the brain of each individual" (Hart, 1983, p. 100), it would logically follow that the type of pre-kindergarten program a teacher selects is essential to keeping open the door to learning.

Oral Language Focused Pre-kindergarten

The challenge for teachers in early childhood education is to optimize the learning for each individual child. With their entry into the pre-kindergarten program, more and more children are coming into the classroom with language and cultural differences.

This lack of meaningful social interaction is resulting in children entering the classroom with deficient oral language and social skills (Moffett, 1981). The aforementioned factors must be considered when developing an effective curriculum for the pre-kindergarten.

In view of the fact that today's children pose a challenge for the classroom teacher, teacher knowledge and attitude must be positive in order to form an optimum learning environment that is responsive to and appropriate for each individual learner. It is important for teachers to emphasize oral language development with each learner. Classroom learning occurs naturally when children use oral language to compose meaning and gain knowledge. The use of oral language is naturally interwoven with content learning in the pre-kindergarten classroom. Oral language is a natural way to develop future readiness for literacy (Bromley, 1992).

Theories about language and learning emphasize that speaking and listening are interactive processes which directly affect each other (Bromley, 1992; Klein, 1985; O'Keefe, 1983). Klein (1985) states that teachers must structure meaningful talk environments with a sensitivity to the child's own language usage and functional ability to communicate. He continues to stress the importance of a classroom environment that is supportive of developing oral

language skills and integrating them with an oral language base essential to future learning of reading and writing.

Since children arrive in the classroom at different stages of language development, it is necessary for the teacher to provide a supportive environment that fosters communication. Children who feel comfortable in a secure classroom atmosphere will talk and interact more frequently. The teacher who provides opportunities to expand oral language expression must communicate positive and appreciative attitudes as well as encouragement to optimize learning (Katz, 1985). For language achievement, the teacher must select activities that directly affect student learning (Hart, 1983). These activities must allow for and promote oral language interaction among youngsters (Siegler, 1991).

Teachers also need to keep in mind that if they do all of the talking, students are not expressing themselves. A consequence of teacher talk is the fact that negative learning occurs. "It is the students who need to talk" (Hart, 1983, p. 154). When students are listening, there is very little opportunity in the classroom for children to gain practical language experiences. The mistaken teacher believes that talking to children is teaching children and are unaware that less than 20 percent of what they say is remembered or retained (Bromley, 1992). A rich oral language environment provides numerous opportunities for

children to talk among each other and with the teacher. The setting should allow experimentation, manipulation, and play with oral language.

Students also need to talk with their teachers and peers to learn how to communicate effectively with each other. The social communication aspect allows the essential skills of presenting and receiving ideas, as well as exchanging information (O'Keefe, 1983). Creating a pre-kindergarten environment that optimizes oral language usage is the responsibility of the teacher. Oral language is the foundation of learning. Therefore, it is logical that the place where a teacher would begin in a pre-kindergarten program is with enhancing oral language experiences. Oral language enhancement is a prerequisite to the academic focus and provides benefits to the whole child.

Benefits for the Whole Child

Cognitive Development

A basic understanding of the cognitive process is necessary for understanding concept formation and its relationship with the oral language development. Cognition is understanding information acquired through practical learning experiences (Webster's Dictionary, 1986).

The brain is a highly complex organ. The organization of incoming information into brain patterns is called schemata, which is the plural for schema. Schemata are knowledge categories such as concepts, information, and

ideas that are developed in the mind and are based upon experiences. The brain's continual organization of newly encountered experiences to previously stored patterns of informational experiences is known as a period of development (Hart, 1983). Before the schemata interaction is processed in the brain, biological functional systems of accommodation and assimilation must be balanced in order to induce a change in behavior that creates a state of equilibrium. The aforementioned is a simplistic review of Piaget's theory of brain information processing (Phillips, 1969; Piaget, 1966). When oral language is integrated with an experience, the brain must absorb the information and modify the meaning. The experience of talking by way of extensions, questions, and comments helps to broaden and expand schemata (Fields, 1989).

While Piaget's approach to mind development is 'structural,' Vygotsky focused on the 'functional' importance of self-centered speech. Internalization is the term Vygotsky uses to connect concrete thought to language. By listening to adult conversation children hear words that assist in concept formation (Kozulin, 1990; Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky declared communication is the primary function of speech that involves conversation.

Conversation is a skill that is used throughout one's life and is the basis for the more formal speech in which children engage in academic learning processes.

Understanding the relevant functions, meanings, and structure of speech makes it possible for students to process new knowledge to the previously established knowledge base--their schemata (Templeton, 1991).

Young children's cognitive development is thus accomplished through the cooperation and collaboration with others by discussing their actions, by discovering the how and why, by restructuring and reanalyzing, and by developing personal meaning in a group situation. Working in groups helps children identify issues and problems. The discussion with peers over issues and problems involves the use of critical thinking. Collaborative projects may foster peer acceptance and acknowledgment (Burton, 1986).

Since communication is one function of oral language development, and oral language development is a prerequisite for reading and writing, teacher instruction in one aspect, such as speaking, will always have an effect on the other aspects of listening, reading, and writing. Teachers who have quiet classrooms and concentrate only on disseminating formal language subskills are denying learning opportunities.

By listening to stories read aloud, children develop an appreciation of forms, styles, and the content of narrative. Storytelling, sharing, and small group discussions expand language and cognitive skills (Templeton, 1991). The reading of stories allows teacher and students to examine

story structure, which involves the beginning, the middle, and the end. When reading stories, children need the opportunity and encouragement to talk about what was heard. Talking helps the child discover meaning in a story by linking it to previous schemata. New vocabulary words are learned through identification, naming, and labeling. Peer exchanges of information through oral language expression help validate meanings and contribute to the expansion of language development (Templeton, 1991).

Later, applications from discussions, listening, and story reading will lead to the application of story dictation. Story dictation of the children's words, written in relation to their own experiences, should be prepared by the teacher. Story dictation allows for the print structure to be processed. In turn, story dictation will lead to the application of story writing by the student just as reading books, followed by language discussions, leads to the application of re-telling stories (Bromley, 1992). Reading is an activity that can be mastered only after the skill of hearing and speaking are fully developed.

In a study of pre-kindergartners, Mason (1980) defined a successful reader as having acquired concepts of letter symbols, letter sounds, and printed words as labels of objects. Reading environmental print is a precursor to emergent literacy. The aforementioned concepts are developmental in an environment of instruction and

alternative experiences. If the concepts are expressed orally by children, the teacher can expand the experience through verbal interaction. The "experiences of recognizing words on signs, learning the alphabet, printing, and naming letters provide a background for making good guesses for how to spell short words and how to pronounce the first letter of short words" (Mason, 1980, p. 221). The Mason study emphasized that letter knowledge, sign reading, and printing are precursors to the higher reading skill of letter sound analysis. The experiences each child encounters with the aforementioned concepts helps the child form scripts about reading, as well as build on the language and knowledge base of experiences. The rules of phonology and linguistic patterns will take years of language and knowledge refinement (Ausberger, Martin & Creighton, 1982; Calfee & Drum, 1986; Mason, 1980; Siegler, 1991).

Exposure to print and pictures helps pre-kindergarten students learn to interact with literature. Writing symbols included in play correspond with spoken representation (Dyson, 1990). Through observing, hypothesizing and questioning strategies, teacher-student interaction occurs with literature. Understanding author meaning requires relating symbol content to relevant past experience (Dyson, 1990; Fields & Lee, 1987; Gruenewald & Pollak, 1984). The oral language experiences form the base for reading comprehension as well as a resource for communicating

meaning. A broad experience base of the individual child means a broad base of comprehension and vocabulary (Bailey, 1990; Calfee & Drum, 1986; McLane & McNamee, 1990).

Academics can be addressed in a developmentally appropriate curriculum through relevant situations. Realistic or relevant opportunities with concrete materials provide optimum literacy learning and are dependent on proper organization of the environment (Hine, 1992; Kostelnik, 1992; NAEYC, 1990). Reading stories aloud, linking talk with meaning for concept formation, and building vocabulary through interaction expands oral language development. Children's academic talking experiences will help acquire an awareness, interest, and self-participation in literacy development. In summary, a strong oral language base in the pre-kindergarten program will enhance the kindergarten knowledge base.

Social Development

Vygotsky supported a theory of early child speech as ". . . essentially social" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 19). Social conversation is a necessary function of communication. It is a skill used throughout one's life. It gives children the opportunity to use language in a way that clarifies what they are speaking about, keeps the attention of whoever is listening, and allows social interaction. Talking amongst themselves and with their peers allows brainstorming of ideas that can be discussed, reworded and provide new

meanings (Ausberger, Martin & Creighton, 1982; Fields, 1989).

Children need many opportunities for structured and unstructured talking activities in order to promote social and cognitive growth (Klein, 1979). Social interaction allows for the functions of language to develop. Children will learn to speak clearly, make eye contact with the listener, use space effectively, and move their bodies appropriately (Templeton, 1991).

Another area of social development that can be emphasized is conversation etiquette. Teachers can model conversation courtesy when they introduce a visitor to the classroom or use words and expressions such as "Excuse me for the interruption . . . ," or "Thank you very much for . . . ," or "Would you please . . . ?" These models of courteous communication will, through imitation, teach children social politeness (Ausberger, Martin & Creighton, 1982; Fields, 1989).

An important aspect of social development is the relationship of peers to children. Peers provide children with the ability to form friendships. This provides a feeling of satisfactory security when interacting. It helps children feel happy in the developed friendships. It helps children gain opportunities in learning the social skills of conversation. Children who are actively engaged in classroom activities often engage their peers. This results

in acceptable classroom behavior (Burton, 1986; Calfee & Drum, 1986).

Emotional Development

By encouraging children to express themselves and exercise their everyday language abilities, a teacher helps them develop a better sense of who they are and where they are going (Templeton, 1991). The teacher can help children balance realistic information from that which is not real. With the invention of television, children are the recipients of an explosion of information. Most of this information comes in the form of visual images. The images are passed before the children's eyes, but the meaning is often misunderstood. Through the balance of reality versus fantasy and visual images from everyday life, oral language forms a bridge between reality, fantasy, and the child's experiences (Fields & Lee, 1989; Moffett, 1981).

Knowledge is expanded through the depth of understanding, exploring, and discovering. This knowledge allows children to grow up as their own unique person. "Each child is a law unto himself" (Hart, 1975, p. 144). In order for children to grow into their own self, the teacher must allow them time during activities to talk. Talking will allow children time to clarify, plan, make decisions, vent anger, display frustration, and express other feelings.

The child's interests, fears, and feelings are revealed through communication. Teachers must be supportive and

value what the child has to say as well as be genuinely interested. A teacher must be available for listening to children. It is important for the teacher to understand that every child's dialect is worthy of respect as a valuable part of communication (Bromley, 1992; Fields, 1989; Kostelnik, 1992; Templeton, 1991).

Teachers can help seek out children's hidden feelings by encouraging them to think aloud through talking aloud. Teachers can encourage children to label feelings. Songs and art are ways in which these feelings can be expressed. Talking about the creative process in a finished art product helps children build and extend their language bases. Through expression, the child learns to appreciate one's self (Norton, 1989).

With encouragement from their teacher, children can accomplish a learning task and gain self-confidence. This self-confidence will carry over into the aspects of learning, social peer development, and accomplishment of academic tasks. Using oral language interaction throughout the pre-kindergarten day validates children's learning and self-esteem. Children who have high self-esteem and are encouraged to learn through motivational techniques develop initiative. When initiative is strengthened through stimulation of language and cognitive processes, children develop a sense of competency and self-esteem. These personal characteristics carry into children's play. A

teacher who gives children time to play helps them develop a sense of industry about their work (Elkind, 1987). Self-esteem is the key to successful learning. Positive self-esteem is a key characteristic in emotional development (Clemens, 1983; Elkind, 1987; Fields, 1989).

Early childhood education is a very important period in children's lives. A tremendous amount of information about the world is experienced daily by children. Children who have oral language experiences enhanced will benefit cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Children will achieve optimum learning success which, in turn, will cause the entrance into kindergarten to be successful.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURE

The purpose of this project was to investigate the theory that appropriate oral language experiences will benefit pre-kindergarten children. The review of literature discussed the demands of an academic-focused pre-kindergarten program and the expectations therein. The enhancement of oral language development and its benefits upon the whole child were investigated.

Use of oral language development is naturally interwoven between the emotional, social, and cognitive areas. For composition clarity of this study, the benefits were divided into separate categories.

The review began with a search of the ERIC descriptors of emergent literacy. This included educational theories, cognitive development, and developing activities as they would specifically apply to pre-kindergartners or kindergarten age group.

Activities discussed in the following chapter are both specific and general in nature. Activity selection was based on enhancing oral language development and its future application in literacy. Implementation of this study was conducted in a Head Start pre-kindergarten setting.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROJECT

The following learning activities were selected as a result of this project. Implementation of each activity does not require excessive teacher preparation time nor expensive purchases. The criteria for selection of materials and activities was based upon active child involvement that contained opportunities for enhancing the oral language experience. Oral language enhancement in the classroom means communication and learning (Templeton, 1991). The pre-kindergarten classroom provides the forum for children to learn words, meaning, and concepts through oral interaction.

Selected activities may provide unlimited learning opportunities for children as oral language development is integrated across the curriculum. Each activity is discussed with a specific area but that should not limit its interrelatedness to other areas. Using an integrated approach to learning allows numerous opportunities for building concepts and promoting learning success. Activities with multi-variations and open-ended experiences allow children freedom of choice, creativity, discovery, experimentation, interaction, and opportune teacher guidance (Norton, 1989; Schiller & Rossano, 1990; Smith, 1972). Since oral language is naturally interwoven among content learning in the pre-kindergarten classroom, it is a natural

way of developing readiness and reinforcing the learning of vocabulary words, sentence structure, and the elements of the story (Bromley, 1992).

Oral Language Enhancement Activities

Children need time to talk in an enhancing and encouraging atmosphere. Creating the classroom environment is as important as the activities used to promote and enhance oral language development. An environment that enhances speaking is both positive and relaxing, placing no pressure or stress upon the child. Children must feel free to speak and feel confident enough to contribute knowing that their ideas will be accepted by others. If children are to learn by using language, they will need lots of opportunities and encouragement in non-restrictive ways (Clemens, 1983). Oral language interactions involve the student, the teacher, and classmates. The classroom should allow cooperation and collaboration with opportunities to be leaders as well as followers, while using language to serve the role purpose. Language is a necessary function to be used for learning. However, language usage must be learned first by the pre-kindergartner in a well designed environment (Bromley, 1992).

Sharing

One important activity that promotes language interaction throughout the pre-kindergarten day is sharing. Sharing is the voluntary reporting of an experience from the

child to others. It gives children an opportunity to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings. It also places them at the center of attention when they are given the uninterrupted time to speak briefly about a topic. Teachers need to allow sharing to occur throughout the day. The act of sharing contributes to fluency of thought and speech. An example of sharing is relaying an experience during story time or presenting some news that may have arisen at home or on the bus, or during outside time. Sharing is a way to practice social communication (Fields, 1989).

Reading Aloud

A medium that requires active listening is reading aloud. Reading aloud involves the selection of a prop such as a book, flannelboard story, or creative dictation.

Reading from a book can involve the reading of poetry, rhymes, and any type of narrative material. Reading aloud can be done with such activities as draw-and-tell stories.

Draw-and-tell stories involve a sheet of paper and a marker and the teacher draws a graphic symbol of the story as she tells it. There are books available on drawing and telling. Another type of story that is similar is called cut-and-tell stories. These can be read as the teacher uses scissors to cut out designs and patterns that are printed in books that involve draw-and-cut stories. Read from a book or experience chart dictated and created by children of the class. Pictures from magazines and catalogs can be cut out

and pasted on the pages of the book. These pages can be mounted in magnetic photo albums for children to review, and can be placed in the classroom library.

Read a book about a farm or a zoo animal. Select a record with a lively beat and have children imitate and dance in the fashion of the portrayed animal.

Rhymes such as poetry with rhyming words, nursery rhyme books, and Dr. Seuss library books provide children with the opportunity to practice responding with their own rhyming words. Accept all responses by repeating the rhyming word so children can hear the likenesses and differences at the end of the word. Children enjoy filling in missing words such as "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jumped over the _____."

In addition to filling in missing words, children can do actions to words. Provide an unlit votive candle in a short, unbreakable holder or fashion an unbreakable holder out of pipe cleaners to represent a candle; have children say the rhyme and jump over the candlestick as the word "jump" is expressed. This stimulates concrete reasoning with word association and memorization. Another fun activity is helping children make up their own rhymes. This age group enjoys playing with words (Thompkins & Hoskisson, 1991).

Storytelling

Children enjoy telling each other stories. The stories begin with verbal impressions and sharing of experiences. Soon children are together in pairs or small groups, scattered around the classroom, enthusiastically telling each other stories from wordless picture books. Story telling is a form of creative dramatics (Bromley, 1992).

The developmental sequence of reading behaviors of children in a less mature reading category, are characterized by using the pictures of the book to gain meaning and a message from the source. The child focuses primarily on the pictures and not the print. A more mature reader attempts to focus on the print instead of the pictures. Children learn to develop skills by describing, comparing, and valuing what they see in the illustrations of the book (Bromley, 1992).

Puppets and props such as hats, different costumes, or pieces of material or scarves can enhance storytelling. It can also make children feel comfortable and help them make the stories they tell more meaningful, imaginative, and exciting. Use of objects and props reinforce oral language development (Bromley, 1992).

Storytelling can involve any fairy tale, fables, myths, fantasies, and hero stories. A specific example would be for the teacher to tell the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Volunteers can pantomime the actions of the

story characters. Props can also be used to enhance acting out the story. As children become more familiar with the story dialogue, to enhance language development the teacher will permit children to insert their own dialogue such as, "It's too hot (or cold)!" or "It's too big (or small)!" or "This is just right!" Role playing is an important aspect of developing imaginative and creative discoveries of being something other than one's self. For example, one can be a policeman or a ferocious tiger when role playing.

A specific activity is called "spinning a yarn." A ball of yarn is needed in the circle of children. Begin the story with a story starter such as "Once upon a time in the land of dinosaurs . . . " (or bananas or toys, teacher selects the topic) or "Yesterday, I saw a blue monster at the grocery store and he said to me . . . " While starting the story the teacher passes the ball to a child in the circle. The child adds another line to the story and passes the yarn ball to another classmate. That child then passes the ball and adds another sentence and the story is created. Passing the yarn ball or even a rubber ball to create a story is a nice way for a teacher to monitor how many children have participated orally (Schiller & Rossano, 1990).

Children are natural storytellers and need the opportunity to express themselves through the story medium.

Storytelling lends itself to the oral language experience of retelling a story through self-interpretation.

Retelling Stories

Storytelling and the reading of literature lends itself to the oral language experience of retelling stories. When a child is able to choose characters, setting, and manufacture a plot that contains an ending and differentiate real experiences from imaginary ones, that child is orally demonstrating the ability to comprehend stories written by authors (Norton, 1989; Templeton, 1991).

The retelling of stories is a creative experience involving verbal and non-verbal communication. The retelling of stories involves the essential communicating ability of listeners to recall story elements. An example of retelling a story is the Three Billy Goats Gruff book, read aloud by the teacher. By creating a bridge out of masking tape on the floor, the teacher can allow children to take turns acting out the part of the troll and the three goats in the story. A piece of material can be used to hide the troll under the bridge. To make the experience more concrete the teacher can access a troll doll and a stuffed animal goat or a similar facsimile, while children provide dialogue (Templeton, 1991).

Reading aloud involves the listening aspect. Storytelling involves usage of language embellishments. Story retelling involves language abilities such as

expressing ideas in thought units, developing ideas in sequence, and choosing good action words (Templeton, 1991).

Creative Drama

Creative dramatics is an activity that also flows naturally from children and involves a level of trust. Creative dramatics can involve a small group or a large group moving about physically. To instill trust, dramatic activities that begin with finger plays or puppetry are needed for the pre-kindergarten age group. These dramatic actions, engaging the whole child, are necessary as trust increases and personal risk diminishes. One of the best ways to introduce children to the dramatic presentation of literature is to select a nursery rhyme or a short poem as a first adaption. The production can involve a minimum amount of physical action to get started. Later, as children's levels of trust develop and inhibitions become lost in spontaneous expression, the teacher can propose a reader's theater or story theater whereby children act out story lines narrated by the teacher or, eventually, by fellow students. Story theater or reader's theater gives life to the story and allows students to feel and live the parts they are acting out (Sampson, Van Allen, & Sampson, 1991).

Story Dramatization

The teacher can select a book by Ezra Jack Keets, The Snowy Day, and let one or more volunteers in the class act out the lead character by looking for a snowball in the

pocket, by making a snow angel, or other related story actions while the teacher reads it. The story can be retold later with children's oral help (Schiller & Rossano, 1990). Another way to incorporate story dramatization is to let children act out parts while classmates guess what they are doing. For instance, the teacher helping a student who needs some direction could whisper the word "horse" into the student's ear. The child can then act like a horse in action and in sound. Other children in the small group or entire class can guess the actions of that child. Children enjoy imitating animals (Sampson, Van Allen, & Sampson, 1991; Templeton, 1991). Story dramatization is a form of story reading and creative dramatics.

Fingerplays

Fingerplays are important aspects for developing oral language expression and help children think about language with actions. Fingerplays are finger or arm motions that accompany a short narrative, poem, story, or song. Often, fingerplays are great for transitions from one activity to another within the classroom or while students are waiting for a bus, waiting for lunch to be delivered, or if there are a few extra minutes at the end of the school day. A couple of examples of fingerplays are the rhyme "Hickory, Dickory, Dock," with the arm moving and swinging like a pendulum. Another example is "I'm a Little Tea Pot," and a class favorite is "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on a Bed."

Usually in finger plays, conversation grows very animated as children are more involved with hand actions instead of verbalization (Schiller & Rossano, 1990).

Puppetry

Another activity in which children can easily amuse themselves is utilizing language in puppetry. Puppetry is a creative medium in which children can express themselves by acting out their moods and emotions without being personally responsible. Puppets are an effective and charming way in which to draw out an otherwise reluctant child (Norton, 1989).

Animal, people, and food puppets can be bought or self-made. Self-made puppets can be as simply made as attaching paper plates to tongue depressors and allowing children to draw their own puppet face. Curling one's hand into a fist and drawing on a face with washable markers is another way to create a puppet for children to connect to, with dialogue. Sock puppets are common in the classroom. Finger puppets can be created out of peanut shells. Find peanut shells that fit the children's fingers and let them create the facial features. With the teacher or a friend give the children time to talk with their puppets (Schiller & Rossano, 1990).

Pantomime

It is through the medium of pantomime, also called miming, that stories can be recalled and portrayed through

kinesthetic movement. Simple pantomime can engage young children in displaying their feelings, ideas, or story portrayals. Portrayal of a leaf in a storm or a wave upon the ocean, and body expression to get a point across can be done in unison, small groups, or in dyads or pairs. Pantomime or miming teaches children the act of communicating non-verbally. It also allows the variation of pretending to be something.

Interpretation is a form of pantomime in which narration of a story or poem is read along with the actions. Children can be encouraged to create spin-offs of a story or poem of their own and be inventive (Templeton, 1991).

Choral Speaking

Choral speaking is the interpretation of poems or literature by two or more voices speaking as one (Norton, 1989). Choral speaking and reading helps children listen for their parts, remember what they should say, and interpret words and word patterns. Pre-kindergarten children, who are not able to read, enjoy this activity by reciting memorized verses, rhymes, and refrains. Rhythm and tempo help children develop an interest in words, word meaning, the beat, flow, and tempo of speaking. An example of choral speaking would be a Mother Goose rhyme such as "A Jolly Ole Pig." Another example would be "One, Two, Buckle My Shoe." Choral speaking helps children understand meaning

and develop the cognitive process of memorization (Norton, 1989; Sampson, Van Allen, & Sampson, 1991).

Singing and Chanting

Singing and chanting is highly recommended for future literacy learning. The behavioral action of singing and joining in with chants is an excellent reading-along activity (Moffett, 1981; Norton, 1989). Examples of songs are: "There Was an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly" which demonstrates memory expansion and recall; "The A-B-C Song" for letter naming and identification; and "If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands" for mood elevation (Templeton, 1991). An example of chanting is the repetition of words with a natural beat such as "One, two; two, two. Three, four, four, four, four, four. Five, six; six, six, six, six, six, six. Seven, eight; eight"

Using the aforementioned activities will enhance the pre-kindergartner's oral language experiences and provide children with cognitive, social, and emotional benefits that will effectively prepare children for entry into kindergarten.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

As the debate to define a sound curriculum for the pre-kindergarten setting continues, emphasis and focus should be placed upon enhancing the oral language experience. Through oral language utilization, the classroom academic needs can be met. Children become adept at expressing themselves to obtain and meet their own needs. When oral language is used as a direct program within the pre-kindergarten setting, the project of enhanced activities supports the review of literature and provides benefits for the whole child--emotionally, socially, and cognitively.

The following implications are from a pre-kindergarten setting in a Head Start program. Due to regulations, teachers administer assessment tests three times a year. At the beginning of the year, tested students would sometimes demonstrate behavioral changes with tears of frustration from test stress as well as anxiety from first-time separation away from parents. Test administration seemed to dictate teacher-selected activities for completion of task-oriented goals. Task-oriented activities were presented to the student with the organization of centers, tabletop manipulations, and sequential-task experiences.

The pressures of teacher time and implementation of governmental requirements in the class day has caused the following question to be raised: What is the best way to

prepare pre-kindergarten children for successful entry into an academically focused kindergarten program? The following emotional, social, and cognitive implications are a result of implementing a strong oral language base in a pre-kindergarten setting.

Emotional Implications

This past year, Head Start administered only one assessment test before the beginning of the school year. This had a positive effect on the classroom children. The fear of assessing was eliminated. The time required to administer the assessments upon the children was spent in classroom child-directed activities. The classroom atmosphere turned into a fun, relaxing environment that promoted learning experiences. Activities were presented in a menu fashion allowing children to make their own choices. By making choices, children could meet their own success needs.

Through oral language expression, children were able to link thinking and talking with activity choices. Labeling, naming, and identifying feelings linked to actions with teacher guidance resulted in successful development of the oral language.

The fulfillment of self-needs led to self-confidence in child-directed choices as well as raising the level of self-esteem when encountering new experiences. Emotionally, by fulfilling self-needs children were able to take personal

learning from each situation. With teacher guidance in activities and teacher encouragement of participants' self-expression, children were able to talk about encountered activity experiences. In turn, this helped children grow emotionally. The emotional growth extended into social growth as one could see children expressing themselves to peers with a new level of self-esteem. The higher level of self-esteem transcended into self-expression in the cognitive area.

Social Implications

Throughout the classroom school days, as a teacher, this author consciously practiced talking less. The consequence of less teacher talk shortened large group time. During interaction, a greater frequency was concentrated in small group activities. Children interacted more with teacher and peers when in small groups. Children felt less threatened socially in a small group than in a large group. Large group time was spent on fun activities such as chanting, singing songs, finger plays, and learning rhymes as well as storytelling and dramatic presentations. Small group time concentrated upon children using oral language expression with very few peers. Time was allowed for talking and communication extensions.

In large or small groups, children would share. The sharing consisted of dictated words and/or story experiences about something that happened at home or school. Feedback

from peers and peer approval was promoted during this group time. Sharing was encouraged in the classroom throughout the entire day, not just during the activity--"Sharing Time."

Sharing is an integral part of the pre-kindergarten setting. The outcome of a teacher concentrating on enhancing oral language experiences through encouragement, motivation, and stimulation of the verbal or non-verbal interaction expanded the goal of sharing. However, teacher intervention and interaction became less demanding as children began to turn to each other in conversation. Such self-expression was a sign that social growth was improving, as communication among peers became more frequent.

When children first entered the pre-kindergarten classroom, many of them were engaged in parallel play. They selected activities and worked side-by-side without communicating with each other. A few months into the program, many students demonstrated social play. During social playtime, children were required to develop the necessary communication skills to join a group situation, invite others to join in their play, and verbally express solutions to problems that would arise through social sharing of toys and activities. The problem solving solutions of social play situations lent itself to the expansion of language linked to cognitive growth.

Cognitive Implications

Elimination of testing required teacher selection of activities that would demonstrate and contribute to the academic growth of the child. With teacher control of selected activities, centers were utilized to present learning in a menu fashion. Children were permitted to self-direct work at their own learning rate or level of cognitive interest. In this way children were able to fulfill self-needs and take personal knowledge from each encounter.

Teacher controlled centers allowed interaction between the teacher and student to be one of exploration and discovery in nature. Such interaction was extended to peers throughout the school day. It must be noted that the attention span of children grew in a natural manner. When children tired of an activity, another activity could be selected. If children were more comfortable in remaining at a certain activity for a long period of time, they were allowed to do so. Such freedom provided cognitive self-fulfillment.

A few months into the program, it was noted that students would self-select books and ask the teacher to read to them. This was acknowledged and reinforced by reading and rereading as children requested. Often books would be read over and over and became very repetitious to the adult. Templeton (1991) explains this as very natural but critical

for text memorization. Soon, as stories were re-read, the child would insert words when the teacher paused and this later developed into the child finishing complete sentences.

After time passed, it was noted that children could be found self-selecting books, sitting down, and verbally reading pictures. As shown in the review, children would then begin reading the script or pretend to read the script accurately, page by page. Children extended pretend reading of a book to peers. Observant peers would then imitate the reading experience. To extend this activity, the teacher would use a tape recorder or camcorder to produce the book reading and narration from children. For feedback, the presentation was replayed on the tape recorder or a video cassette. Feedback reinforced the cognitive link to language through repetition and rewarded children for their accomplishment. In addition, children were accomplishing future self-selection and future memorization of reading material.

On a daily basis, reading and writing activities were available to children at centers. Children were offered a variety of medium and materials in each center on a rotation basis. Students visited the centers whenever a need to express themselves through print occurred.

Through communication, this teacher would offer choices to children. Choices allowed ownership which resulted in a validated action. Choices stimulated children's cognitive

growth as cognitive thought works in conjunction with language expression. The more times activity experiences, mentioned in Chapter IV, were encountered, the more involved students became with the learning process. Students developed the need to be more involved in higher complex activities.

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