

Using Powerful Interactions with Children To Support their Thinking, Knowledge, and Language

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Agenda

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- Powerful Interactions
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- Stage 2: Connect
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- Strategies for extending learning
 - Help children see themselves as thinkers
 - Mirror Talk
 - Solve problems together
 - Ask questions

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Powerful Interactions

Step 1: Be Present

Pause to prepare and quiet your mind. Being present lets you make more intentional decisions about what to say and do, what to record, and how to extend the child's learning in the moment and/or after the fact.

- Pause and prepare
- Do a quick "Me Check."
- Can I quiet the static?
- Do I need to adjust to connect with this child? How?

Step 2: Connect

Let the child know that you see him and are interested in what he is doing. This reawakens the trusting relationship you've built with the child and makes him more available to learn from you.

- Slow down, stay in the moment.
- Keep learning about children.
- Listen to children.
- Personalize your interactions.
- Show respect.
- Guide children's behavior.
- Keep trust growing.

Step 3: Extend Learning

As you nurture your relationship, stretch the child's knowledge and understanding. Encourage the child to take one or two baby steps by stretching his thinking, adding to his vocabulary, expanding his knowledge, or improving a skill.

- Help children see themselves as thinkers.
- Respond to curiosity.
- Use Mirror Talk.
- Have conversations.
- Inspire imaginative play.
- Solve problems together.
- Use rich vocabulary.
- Laugh with children.
- Ask questions.
- Link the new to the familiar.

Stage 3: Extend Learning

Help Children See Themselves as Thinkers

Focus on thinking as you interact. One way is not better than another. Focusing on thinking is NOT about coming up with the “right” answer. The goal is to help children become more aware of the thoughts in their heads and more confident about expressing those thoughts to others. Avoid making thinking a competition to see who thinks the best!

- **Infuse the words think and thinking as you talk with the child.**
“You look like you’re thinking very hard.” ... “Think about what you’d like to do on the playground today.” ... “As I read this story, keep thinking about our trip to the farm yesterday.”
- **Pose a direct question to invite the child to share his thoughts.**
“What are you thinking about?” ... “I’m wondering what you’re thinking. Would you like to share your idea?”
- **Use a gesture to indicate thinking**, such as pointing to your forehead, looking with your eyes, scratching your head, or resting your chin in your hand.
“Hmmm, I wonder what I can do with this blue block?” ... “That’s a good question; let me give it some thought.”
- **Before you ask a question that requires thinking, prepare the child.**
“I’m going to ask you a question, so put on your thinking cap.”
- **Give the child time to think before responding.** Don’t jump in too soon with the answer.
“How many is that? I’m going to give you a minute to think.”
- **Help the child to remember to think first before responding.**
“Take another moment to think, and then let me know your thoughts.”
- **Tell the child when you notice her thinking.**
“I noticed that you had to think really hard to figure out how to put that puzzle together.”
- **Share your thinking!** Tell the child about your own thought processes.

Dombro, Amy Laura, Jablon, July, Stetson, Charlotte (2011) Powerful interactions: how to connect with children to extend their learning, Washington, D.VC.NAEYC

Stage 3: Extend Learning

Mirror Talk

Mirror Talk is a technique in which the adult describes what the child is doing or seeing. When an adult uses Mirror Talk, she is acting like a broadcaster. She watches the action and describes it to the child, without expecting a response. The teacher does not ask the child questions during parallel talk.

Examples of Mirror Talk (also known as Parallel Talk, Broadcasting, Information Talk):

If a child is playing with colored blocks, a teacher using MirrorTalk might say:

“Oh, you put the yellow block on top. Now you’re sliding the green one next to the long red block. The tower is getting taller!”

If a child is playing with Sesame Street characters, a teacher using Parallel Talk might say:

“Here comes Oscar the Grouch. He’s riding in the car with Cookie Monster. Cookie Monster is in the back. He’s looking around while the car goes faster and faster.”

Mirror Talk help adults and children develop a relationship. The strategy of Mirror Talk gives the adult a starting place, something to talk about. The adult makes comments on the child’s actions and follows the child’s lead. If the child is upset, Mirror Talk helps him to feel respected and validated. If the child is engaged in play, she enjoys the time and attention.

Mirror Talk helps children who are shy or have limited language.

Mirror Talk is a good way to begin talking with any young child, at any time. The child has the opportunity to develop receptive language, but there is no expectation that the child will respond. These techniques can be especially effective with non-verbal children, with children who are shy, and with English language learners. It builds language for all children.

Adults often feel self-conscious or awkward when they begin to use Mirror Talk.

To use MirrorTalk the adult learns to talk in a new way---describing, not questioning. But speaking is only part of it. Observing the child’s action carefully is the key.

Beginners using Mirror Talk often overwhelm children with too much description.

In the beginning, it’s easy to concentrate so hard on becoming a good describer that the natural pace and flow of conversation is overlooked. The adult doesn’t need to comment on every single action. Commenting on every second or third action creates a more natural conversational pace and gives the child a chance to respond, if he chooses.

Stage 3: Extend Learning

Solve Problems Together

- **Be curious and persistent.**
- **Identify and define the problem**
- **Use multiple strategies.**
 - Brainstorming
 - Trial and error
 - Applying prior knowledge
 - Trying alternatives
 - Getting help.
- **Analyze and evaluate.**
- **Reflect.**
- **Tips for solving problems with children:**
 - Use the word “problem.”
 - Take advantage of everyday problems.
 - Offer interesting problems to solve.
 - Use problem-solving vocabulary: *challenge, strategy, solution, brainstorm, experiment, test, trial and error.*

Stage 3: Extend Learning

Ask Questions

Questions that have more than one right answer, or ones that can be answered in many ways, are open-ended or divergent questions. This way of asking questions stimulates more language use, acknowledges that there can be many solutions to one problem, affirms children's ideas, and encourages creative thinking. Open-ended questions open up conversations. When you ask an open-ended question, you don't know what the child's answer is going to be. Close-ended questions usually limit conversation to a one or two word response, and sometimes they end the conversation. Examples:

Close-ended questions

What color is this?

How many teddy bears are on the block?

What's your doll's name?

Open-ended questions

You used a lot of blue on your painting. What does it remind you of?"

What are those teddy bears thinking about?"

Your baby is so beautiful! Tell me about her.

Children must have a high level of verbal skills to respond to open-ended questions. Because open-ended questions have a wide-range of possible answers, children are able to respond only if they have a fairly high level of verbal skills, vocabulary, and self-confidence. If the child has limited verbal skills, use parallel talk, repetition, extension, or ask a close-ended question.

The success of open-ended questions depends on the adult's ability to understand the child's interest or focus. The adult may be used to asking questions aimed at assessing how much a child knows (about color, number, shape or alphabet) and may find it difficult at first to ask engaging questions with no right answer. Close-ended questions usually end conversations. Open-ended questions that are too general or unfocused may be difficult for the child to respond to and may also end the conversation.

Open-ended questions that are challenging can develop children's thinking skills : Challenging children by posing thought-provoking, open-ended questions that are rich and clear can stimulate and push at the edges of children's development. These questions are often expressed in conditional form "What will happen if you...?"

Types of open-ended questions that are challenging include:

- Making predictions - *What do you think will happen if you keep adding blocks to your tower?*
- Stretching thinking - *How would we get around if there were no cars, trucks, buses, planes, or boats?*
- Considering consequences - *What would happen if you left your drawing outside and it rained?*
- Assessing feelings - *How would you feel if that happened to you? How do you think Juan feels?*
- Thinking about similarities and differences - *How are these two blocks the same? What makes these things go together?*
- Applying knowledge to solve a problem - *What could you do to keep the paint from dripping on the floor?*
- Evaluating - *What made you decide to pick this book to read? How did this make you feel?*

For Dual Language Learners: Ask open-ended questions in the child's home language. This will help the child develop her cognitive skills and her home language skills. When using the child's second language, open-ended questions may be very difficult to understand and answer if the child is at a beginning level of language development. Close-ended questions, in contrast, provide limited vocabulary and simple choices that are easier for beginning English language learners to understand. As the child acquires language, the adult can gradually ask more complex close-ended questions and eventually move on to asking open-ended questions. "It helps if teachers use 'yes/no' questions with beginning English language learners, because these questions are easier than 'what' questions, and 'what' questions are easier than 'where' or 'when' questions. 'How' and 'why' questions are the most difficult for new speakers of the language." McLaughlin, Barry "Fostering Second Language Development in Young Children: Principles and Practices, National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, 1995.

"Never ask a child a question that you already know the answer to."

David Weikart, former President, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Open-ended Question Starters:

Tell me about...

How do you know that...?

What do you think...?

Show me how you...

I wonder why...

Can you tell me more about why...

How did you...

Why did you...

How do you know?

What did you do first?

What can you tell me about...

Can you think of another way...

What do you think?

What do you think would happen if...

What could you do instead?

How did you do that?

What does it remind you of?

What can you do next time?

Tell me what happened.

What do you call the things you're using?

How are you going to do that?

Is there anything else you could use?

What is it made of?

What do you think will happen next?

What could be added?

What else can this be used for?

What else is like this?

How can you do it faster?

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