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## ABSTRACT

The role of the toy demonstrator in a home-based, mother-involved intervention effort (Verbal Interaction Project) is presented in this handbook for staff members. It is believed that the prerequisites for functioning in the toy demonstrator's role are a sense of responsibility, patience with the children and their mothers, and willingness to be taught. The toy demonstrator's duties consist of twice-weekly home visits to introduce and stimulate verbally oriented play between mother-child pairs using project toys and books. The toy demonstrator must attend a weekly group conference to learn the verbal interaction techniques for each new toy or book. During this conference, the toy demonstrators evaluate toys or books used in previous home sessions. The VISIT (Verbal Interaction Stimulation Techniques) approach used in the program has proven successful in stimulating low-income mothers and their preschool children to interact verbally in ways that benefit the child's later success in school. (DB)

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TOY DEMONSTRATOR'S "VISIT\*" HANDBOOK

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\*Verbal Interaction Stimulation Intervention Techniques

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P. L.

## TOY DEMONSTRATOR'S "VISIT\*" HANDBOOK

## INTRODUCTION

Chatty Chatty, School Whiz Bang

It may not be the happiest news in the world for the average harried young mother to hear that her two or three year old child's penchant for constant chatter is his key to later school success, but this indeed seems to be the case. The little child who converses with his family actively from an early age is likely to do well in school and with school subjects. His intellect seems to be fostered by meaningful, interesting dialogue with other family members, especially if this occurs at the most natural time -- when the child is just beginning to speak. He himself demands responses from people around him when he, in essence, asks to be instructed in the family's language for the experiences and objects beginning to be familiar to him. His thirst for this kind of instruction lasts a long time -- probably at least from about two years to about four years. After this, if he has not received the answers and dialogue he pressed for, he is not so likely to push for the dialogue himself. Moreover, without the foundation of words for familiar actions, sights, sounds and feelings, he seems to be handicapped by school age in his "conceptual" learning ability, which rests on his ability to build reasonably elaborate structures of ideas based on those simple verbal foundations. Thus, a preschool child without an early active dialogue with a family member loses out not only in his later interest in knowledge but in the intellectual development so important for doing well in school.

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## MOTHER'S CHOICE: CHATTER ON, CHATTER OFF

Who is the family member most likely to be honored with the preschooler's demand for dialogue? Who but our old friend, the Average Harried Young Mother? In the majority of families it is she who has an awesome choice of which she is completely unaware. She can either encourage and respond in detail to the chatter, and thus foster her child's intellect, or cognitive development; or she can shut it off, kindly or not, in various time honored ways known to harried young mothers. Mothers are especially likely to be harried under the pressures of living on a small income. So it is the little children of low income families who are most likely to be deprived of family verbal interaction at a time when they most need it to prepare them for later success in school.

## MOTHER-CHILD HOME PROGRAM STIMULATES THE DIALOGUE

Few mothers will knowingly handicap their children's chance to grow intellectually. We at the Mother-Child Home Program believe we have seen demonstrated through our research that if a mother knows of the importance of verbal interaction to her child, and is shown how to encourage it, she will make the choice of encouraging it for her child, no matter how burdened she is by life circumstances. When she does so, she appears to be as capable as less pressured mothers of fostering her child's intellectual growth.

We discovered this two years ago when we experimented with a new method of "stimulating" mothers and children to verbal interaction. Since our aim was to provide the child with meaningful, interesting dialogue with his mother

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(and hopefully other family members), we provided toys and books, and Toy Demonstrators to show mothers how to use them for verbal interaction, to a number of children. It worked. By measuring the children's mental ability before and after doing this for seven months, we could see that most of them made large mental gains.

"VISIT" = Verbal Interaction Stimulation Intervention Techniques

The change was apparently caused by the verbal interaction between mother and child set off by the toys and books, which were called Verbal Interaction Stimulus Materials, or VISM, for good reason. The Toy Demonstrator rarely lost an opportunity during Home Sessions with mother and child together to demonstrate by actually playing with the child many ways of using the VISM for developing the child's language knowledge. She showed the mother how to encourage the child to want to talk, how to use a particular toy or book to give the child many different kinds of informational words, and how to guide him into the kind of thinking around use of the VISM which would lead to increased language and cognitive ability. The Toy Demonstrator's methods are called Verbal Interaction Stimulation Intervention Techniques, since the Toy Demonstrator intervenes (or makes changes) in the child's life to the extent that she stimulates (sets off) verbal interaction between mother and child through her specific methods, or techniques. The "VISIT" (Verbal Interaction Stimulation Intervention Techniques) will be described in more detail below.

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## Non-Professionals As Toy Demonstrators

The Mother-Child Home Program was repeated in 1968-1969 and this time the Toy Demonstrators were not professional social workers as they were the year before. Instead, they were of varied background and education -- some had never finished high school, and some had been teachers. Some were paid by the Program for their services, and some were volunteers. There was indeed great variety among our non-professional Toy Demonstrators. But supervised by the social workers who had done the job the first year, they seemed to be working very well indeed. And this was confirmed when we measured the new children's ability. Once again, they made large mental gains.

## Toy Demonstrator's General Job

The Toy Demonstrator's job was thus demonstrated as being one that almost any woman could do -- provided she was blessed with a good sense of responsibility, patience with both children and mothers, and willingness to be taught. She had to set aside time each week not only to visit each mother-child pair two times weekly but to attend a weekly group Toy Demonstrator Conference to learn the verbal interaction techniques for each new VISM. She had to keep track of the VISM for each child; to keep records; to use good judgement in consulting between conferences with her supervisor, by telephone if necessary; and most of all, to fit herself into the special needs of both the mother and child she was visiting.

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## Toy Demonstrator Sparks Verbal Interaction

The unique aspect of the Toy Demonstrator's job is that she gradually learns to utilize specific methods, or techniques, of verbal interaction to demonstrate to the mother in play with the child. Generally, she learns to name, and encourage the child to name, a number of important features of the toy or book: its colors, shapes, size and texture differences, relationships, numbers, causing things to happen, words that classify. She describes her own actions in playing with the VISM and encourages the child to describe his own, especially such activities as fitting, matching, and making sounds.

She uses words in many ways to remind the child to think about what he is doing during the Home Session. She brings his attention back to what they are doing together. She tries to arrange the play so that he has choices to think about and make. She points out the times when self-control and doing things in the right order will help him have a better time with the VISM. She helps him to use words in remembering other experiences like the one he is having with a particular toy or book and especially in using his imagination with the VISM. In addition, in reading the books with the child, she asks him questions about the illustrations to help him reason things out. She also invites him to join in the reading when she comes to familiar words and phrases.

Generally, she encourages him to talk by asking him questions, listening to his answers, and answering his answers. She encourages his wish to learn by praising him when he does well, ignoring his mistakes, being ready to help him when he really needs help.



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Above all, she encourages him when he shows signs of wanting to do things in untried ways and tries to put into words his curiosity, his imagination and his independence. To put it only slightly differently, she encourages his creativity at every chance she has.

Thus, the Toy Demonstrator uses the VISM as the jumping off point to demonstrate to the mother a large number of activities which will help the child develop cognitively through verbal growth.

Throughout her fun in playing and reading with the child, the Toy Demonstrator keeps constantly in mind that her main job is to show the mother how to act in the same way with the child. She retires into the background during the Home Session as quickly as she can draw the mother into the same kind of verbal interaction with her own child.

## Guide Sheets To Verbal Interaction Techniques

To help the Toy Demonstrator remember the verbal interaction techniques, she receives a mimeographed Guide Sheet applying to each new VISM (toy or book) at her weekly Toy Demonstrator Conference. It is a Guide to the Verbal Interaction Techniques as applied to the new VISM. As can be seen by turning to one of the actual Guide Sheets in this book, all the verbal interaction techniques described above are illustrated on the Guide Sheets, using as examples many features of the new VISM to be introduced in the next home Session.

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The Toy Demonstrator adds each new weekly Guide Sheet to this Handbook, until all home Sessions are completed for the Home Program year (September to June). Thus she accumulates 23 Guide Sheets (for Program I or Program II) of Verbal Interaction Techniques, one for each VISM introduced to the child. By the time she receives the last few sheets, she knows the verbal interaction techniques pretty well and is probably able to think up her own ways to use them with each new VISM instead of being as dependent on the Guide examples as at the beginning. But she is still likely to glance at old Guide Sheets once in awhile to help her in Review Sessions, with the child, when he brings out old VISM to play with.

## Toy Demonstrator On The Job: A Sample Home Session

Toy Demonstrator's description of actual session:

"Joe sat down on the couch between his mother and me, having had a few moments to look at the book before his mother joined us. We centered the book pretty much on his lap as he began pointing to the illustrations he wished to name or discuss. Joe has a pixie-like, teasing quality which often manifests itself at some time during a session; it did so again today. He was eager both to give information and to request it. He needed very little direction as he went through this book for the first time, and maintained his interest throughout the session. His mother and I followed his lead as he paged through the book, his attention caught by a variety of items on the profusely illustrated pages.

Very often Joe would name items which attracted him, and would say: "What's that?" When he next encountered the same thing he needed only the response, "Tell me!" before he would give the correct answer. The teasing quality appeared early when he pointed to two girls and called them "boys", immediately after he had correctly identified the sexes.

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Several times his mother restrained him from hitting the pages with too much gusto, but he seemed not to be upset by this occasional restraint. I read the text underneath the illustrations, and after a few pages, turned the reading over to his mother, who easily followed my lead. In retrospect, it seems that he displayed most enthusiasm over the more active, busy pictures, occasionally exclaiming wordlessly after turning a page and observing a fresh, busy illustration. We continued through the book, allowing him freedom to turn the pages as he wished, waiting for his initial response, reinforcing or discussing what he said and asking for additional comments, while his mother read the text at the bottom of the pages."

## A Final Note to Toy Demonstrators

You are about to embark on a quietly important adventure. You will be introducing materials and methods to mothers which may change the whole course of their children's lives. We wish you well!

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