DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 528 PS 013 633

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TITLE The Parent Workshop. Communication Skills. PCRP Fall 1983 Working Edition.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 51p.; One of a series of Pennsylvania Comprehensive Reading Program (PCRP) Publications.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Communication Skills; Learning Activities; Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Education; *Parent Workshops; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; Story Reading; Teaching Guides; Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS PF Project

ABSTRACT

These parent workshop materials are designed to clarify fundamental issues and relationships pertaining to parents and literacy development in children. The workshop structure provides an opportunity for parents of preschoolers to contribute to growth in conversation and to help in the development of literacy skills. Arranged into five sessions, session 1 instructs leaders on planning and setting the tone for the workshops. In sessions 2 and 3 parents share their reactions to the assignment, analyze their observations, and learn new ways of responding to children. Sample transcriptions are provided to illustrate what can happen when an adult consciously uses conversational responses to extend, clarify, and share in the child's point of view. Session 4 focuses on reading with children. Parents are asked to complete an assignment in which they are given an opportunity to observe systematically and participate in the story making process. In the final section, parents analyze their stories with respect to: (1) reading a story, (2) identifying the story elements, (3) the child's mastery of the story, and (4) suggested strategies the parent might employ to encourage further development. (LH)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

The Parent Workshop

PCRP

FALL 1983 WORKING EDITION

The Parent Workshop

By Dr. David Butt
The Pennsylvania State University
1983

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

"The Parent Workshop" is one of a series of PCRP publications. Dr. David Butt of the Speech Department of The Pennsylvania State University prepared the publication for Project CARES (Communication Arts Resources and Education Services). It was published as part of the PCRP Handbook for Teachers and Administrators in 1980. Now, for the first time, it has been printed as a separate publication and is available statewide.

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THE PARENT WORKSHOP: TALKING WITH CHILDREN

This parent workshop is designed to clarify fundamental issues and relationships pertaining to parents, literacy development in children and the PCRP. The workshop structure provides an opportunity for parents of preschoolers to understand and hopefully become excited about the options available to them for "talking with" their children and as a result contribute to growth in literacy.

In broad perspective, literacy competencies are considered (1) as the child's understanding and use of language and verbal concepts in thinking and communicating; (2) as the child's understanding of 'what books are all -bout," particularly his interest in being read to and his willingness to try reading on his own; (3) as the child's ability to engage in story making with others and eventually to produce stories by himself.

What parents do with children can make a dramatic and lasting impact on what children do for themselves. With respect to literacy, if parents read, there is a good possibility that their children will read; if parents explain ideas and concepts in detail as they converse with children, there is a high probability that their children will employ similar verbal concepts in their conversation; if parents take time to make stories and spin yarns, we can reasonably expect their children to continue the processes on their own.

Many parents have not thought carefully about the contributions they might make to a child's development of literacy skills. Parent talk, in

particular, can contribute to the development of a child's thinking in a variety of ways:

Parent talk announces and calls attention to events:

"Look, it's a red bird."

Parent talk redirects attention:

"Watch, over there. No, there. It's a yellow finch."

Parent talk specifies critical attributes:

"The birds are flying to the feeder, and then they're flying away."

Parent talk calls attention to relevant features:

"The titmouse has a little tuft on its head. See. There's a sparrow. It doesn't have a tuft."

Parent talk ties events in the present to events in the future:

"The nuthatch just landed on the feeder. Notice how it's feeding upside down. I wonder if it will eat the suet? It's getting ready to fly off. I bet he's going to the big oak tree over there. Look, there he goes. He did, didn't he?"

Parent talk provides explanations:

"Winter is really a terrible time for the little birds. It's so cold and the snow covers all their food. They need for us to put seed in the feeders. Let's put more in the feeder, OK?"

Parent talk recapitulates experience:

"Remember yesterday? We sat for a long time before the cardinal came? It was a beautiful red bird. Remember how it scared the other birds away? Let's see if it comes again today."

Parent talk organizes thinking and behavior:

"First let's get the feed, then we'll need to find a ladder, then we'll pour the seed into the feeder."

Parent talk presents alternatives:

"We can sit and wait to see if it comes back again, or we can walk in the woods to see if it's on its favorite tree. The downy has a tree back in the woods."

Parent talk stretches the imagination beyond the obvious:

> "Suppose you were a little bird. What would you do on a windy day like today? Where would you go?"

Parent talk sets limits:

> "Let's not be too noisy. We can't drop our buckets or we'll scare the birds."

Parent talk provides security and support:

> "Don't worry, we'll pick it up. Sometimes we get so excited we can't see what's in front of us. Let's get a little broom and a pan and we'll sweep up the seeds."

Parent talk exerts a powerful influence on a child's behavior. It not only influences thinking in the immediate situation, but encourages the anticipation of future events as well. Parent talk eventually comes to influence independent thinking and behaving as the child "talks" himself through subsequent difficulties and challenges in the adult's absence.

Parent talk becomes part of a child's self-talk:

> (Child to himself) "Oh, oh ... got to be careful, spill it ... shhhhh. Don't scare the birds."

More than a decade of advertising hype, media technology and poly-vinyl gadgetry has left many parents confused and frustrated concerning their value to children. The once familiar advice offered by Dr. Spock concerning the importance of parents no longer seems sufficient in today's world of video games, talking teddy bears and programmable race cars. As expressed by one frustrated mother:

> It seems that if it doesn't buzz, beep or blink, and if it's not presented on a screen, my three-year old isn't interested. I can't seem to get him to sit still long enough ... Star Wars and Radio Shack have replaced me.

This parent workshop is designed to help parents develop a fresh perspective concerning the crucial impact they can make on a child's thinking and literacy

development before school. The capacity to think -- to focus, to analyze, to reconstruct, to resolve, to invent -- has both biological and social beginnings. Beyond concern for health and diet, there's not much parents can do about the child's biology. Through talk, however, parents can make a significant impact on the social processes affecting intellectual development and ultimately on the child's development of literacy competencies. To this end the PCRP urges that:

1. Parents be provided with a description of the Plan and an explanation of why it came about;

2. Parents be provided with information on the PCRP and its activities as implemented in the school;

3. Parents be encouraged to become involved in school activities as volunteers;

4. Parents be given information pertaining to ways they can provide a literate environment in the home. More specifically, that they be provided with suggestions for reading to children, composing and developing specific literacy skills in the home.

Numerous resources have been developed to assist parents in implementing the PCRP objectives. Pamphlets, games and texts have been developed to help parents more clearly see their potential contributions to literacy development. The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has produced four exceptionally attractive booklets to help parents understand the value of speaking and listening, reading and modeling with children.

The pamphlet, Children Learn by Watching and Helping, suggest that parents can teach children "simple tasks and show them how to do things;" that parents "can explain things to children so that they will understand more about their neighborhood and community." The pamphlet encourages parents to "listen to their questions; help them when they are having trouble; encourage them when they try."

Practice What You Teach encourages parents to see themselves as models which children will imitate as they learn "tasks, develop curiosity and interest in learning, develop respect for others, develop emotional control, and learn problem solving skills." The pamphlet suggests that parents deliberately attempt to:

- ask rather than tell
- say please and thank you
- show how before expecting a child to do a task
- praise or compliment, even for small successes
- answer questions without complaining
- participate in family discussions
- read newspapers and magazines
- talk about current events in front of the children
- say "I was wrong" when you were
- talk to children as courteously as you talk to adults
- accept people who look and act differently
- talk to others in positive ways
- react to frustration situations in positive ways
- accept problems as challenges

Read to Your Child provides information pertaining to the selection and presentation of story materials. Finally, Talking With Children leaves the parent with the following do's and don'ts with respect to parent-child conversation:

- Do encourage children to talk. Sometimes it will be up to you to keep the conversation going.
- Don't use baby talk or talk down to children. Say "Do you want a drink?" not "Baby Dwink?"

- Do explain things your children don't understand. "This is a jack. It'll lift up the car so I can change the tire. I can't lift the car by myself, so I use the jack."

- Don't scold or correct children when they say the wrong word or say a sound wrong. Young children are still learning to talk, and they will outgrow saying things like "thoup" for soup or "doggie" to mean cats, dogs, and everything with four legs.

- Do be polite. Listen without interrupting. Say "please" and "thank you" when talking to children. Use the same courtesy that you do with other adults.

The Southwest Educational Lab materials provide parents with a developmentally sound set of principles to follow in promoting literacy as well as in living more fully with their children.

A less ambitious, yet insightful set of "literacy development activities" has been compiled by Dwayne R. Litz. His approach evolves around the activities in which families already engage, activities that typically involve sharing with others in pleasant circumstances, which we subsequently relate to reading and writing. His approach is intuitively appealing. All that's required is a little extra time and a willingness to focus the activities on literacy skills and principles. Litz, like the Southwest Lab, provides general principles for use in refocusing "family rituals." However, neither set of resources provides the crucial guidelines to assist parents in transforming an ordinary ritual into a literacy support experience.

For parents to make a difference something "special" must occur in the way they talk through experiences with their children. Simply presenting a child with a map or a trip itinerary is not sufficient to transform the outing into a literacy development experience. Parent talk must go beyond "OK, everybody pile in, we're off to the nature center."

That something special, of course is a particular kind of parent talk which effectively fulfills its immediate purposes in the situation as well as reinforcing long range literacy goals and principles. Observe the differences

that might make a difference in the following two scenarios. The first is taken from a transcribed conversation as it actually occurred between four children and adult during a routine trip to nursery school. The situation was comfortable and personal. The conversation had purpose. At best, literacy potentials were minimal.

Adult: OK, we're all here. Now we can go.

(Three minutes of silence followed as two three year olds and two fours watched pedestrians and automobiles pass outside)

Claudia: (singing softly to herself) I have a kitty, it is white, I have a kitty it is white.

Barbara: We have a kitty too ... He's Sam.

Adult: We have a Kitty too, He's called Scratch.

Claudia: My kitty is real, but I have a toy one ... Sacha.

Barbara: What's your kitty Carl?

Carl: We don't ... we don't have a kitty. Mrs. Clausner has one, a kitty ... Where are we? Stop! S-T-O-P It says stop. David (to the adult) you stop the car when it says stop. OK?

Adult: OK Carl, we can't break the law can we...

Claudia: No, we better not... the... the police... my mommy once got one

Elizabeth: I broke my nose once and the police came.

(Barbara looks at her sympathetically)

Elizabeth: Ha, I was kidding...fooling...

Barbara: That isn't nice to do...

Carl: OK, We can go now David. S-T-O-P, stop, means stop.

Barbara: David?

Adult: What?

Barbara: We know our ABC's. Right?

(Claudia begins to sing ABC's others soon join in)

Adult: OK, Here we are: As soon as I S-T-O-P You guys can unbuckle and pile out for school.

The patterns noted in this conversation are not dissimilar from the naturally occurring tendencies observed in most conversations: talk occurs about topics and events that arise spontaneously; individuals interact; new topics emerge; individuals are distracted; others join in; the adult responds to questions and directives, and makes comments and asks questions.

In an indirect way, of course, the trip to nursery school, in the same manner as any of life's experiences, can contribute to the development of literacy competencies: Language is used. Sequences of comments, questions and answers are offered in coherent patterns. Listening occurs. Thinking occurs. Bits and pieces of events and talk are remembered to serve as a content in subsequent encounters.

One would expect, however, that Litz, the Southwest Lab and the originators of the PCRP had more in mind with respect to the adult's role than is evident in the previous transcript. One might expect that the adult, where appropriate, would try to expand and reinforce the children's awareness of literacy elements present in the carpool situation.

Observe in the following reconstructed (and fabricated) conversation the potential for introducing and reinforcing concepts which might bridge the gap between experience and literacy:

Adult: OK, we're here. Now we can go.

(Brief silence)

Adult: Anybody know where we're going? Who knows?

(Silence)

Adult: C-A-R-L knows. I bet C-A-R-L knows.

Carl: C-A-R-L that's me. I'm Carl, David.

Adult: Where are we going Carl?

Carl: To Sunday School.

Barbara: No. Nursery School.

Carl: No. Sunday School.

Adult: Perhaps Carl means nursery school at the church where he goes to Sunday School

Carl: Yep, Nursery school at Sunday school.

Adult: Nursery school on Monday, Sunday school on Sunday. Do you guys know your days of the week?

Children respond together: Sunday, Monday ...

Adult: Anybody know how many streets we have to go on? Anybody know their names? Let's name them as we go. Look over there on the sign. It says Waring Avenue. W-A-R-I-N-G. Waring Avenue. Can you spell it with me? W (wait for children to join in) A...R...I...N...G.

Admittedly, the adult's refocused participation will alter the conversational interplay. However, if kept within reason, and if the children seem eager to participate, why not! (Reality in service of literacy.) Let's return to the conversation with Carl's S-T-O-P:

Carl: Where are we? Stop! S-T-O-P. It says stop. David you stop the car when it says stop. OK?

Adult: OK Carl, we can't break the law can we. S-T-O-P, stop. Words tell us a lot of things don't they? How would we know when to go?

Elizabeth (who knows how to spell. She was trained on Montessori Ladybugs): When it says G-O.

Adult: That's near. Let's all say it kids. S-T-O-P means stop. G-O means go. Let's try it, S-T-O-P means stop. G-O means go.

The reconstructed conversation illustrates an aware adult who is capable of taking talk beyond its apparent purposes, and, where appropriate, reinforces literacy concepts. Evidence seems to suggest that most untrained parents are not sufficiently prepared to make the transition. Numerous studies published during the past two decades suggest that parents typically fall into reocurring

patterns of conversation with children that do not necessarily develop literacy competencies.

When asked to reflect on how they talk with children, many parents respond with something similar to the following:

> I really never think too much about it. I talk when I need to. I suppose I think about what I can say that he can understand. He's two you know. I don't know. We jabber a lot. I know I point out lots of things. Sometimes I scold him when he's bad.

Some parents simply blush and shrug apologetically at not being able to explain themselves. This is not to suggest that they should However, if the goal is both conversation and the development of literacy skills, parents need to understand the differences that make a difference. These parent workshop materials were developed to assist in this endeavor.

WORKSHOP PLAN

This parent workshop will provide means for helping parents bridge the gap between everyday routine and literacy skill development. The workshop activities focus on three basic conversational activities:

A. Talking with children

B. Reading with children

C. Making stories with children

The workshop may be offered in five to seven, one or two-hour sessions depending upon the size of the parent group and the time individuals are willing to commit to the project.

As implied in the following Teaching Notes for each session, the workshop pedagogy is very much a hands-on, discovery approach. Parents are provided with activity assignments and general guidelines to assist in observing and reflecting upon their behavior in the three situations. Once recorded (Parent Notebooks and audio tape recordings are considered basic workshop tools) observations are analyzed and discussed. Suggestions are made with respect to alternative approaches and parents are encouraged to try again to see what differences an alternative approach can make.

The workshop atmosphere must evolve around a "let's see what happens" attitude. Considerations of "right" and "wrong" are not at issue. Parents must be let to see that clear goals and options are critical, not only for sharing deeper levels of experience with their children, but for realizing literacy potentials as well.

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TEACHING NOTES---SESSION I

"Talking with Children"

1. This session is very important. In fact, it's crucial! It will set the tone for the entire workshop. Participants should be eased into activity. Informal introductions should accompany coffee or iced-tea. Small talk will probably emerge concerning children, parent expectations, etc. Tune in.
2. Introduce staff and explain the goals of the parent workshop. Organize your parents in groups of four or five, being careful to separate husbands and wives, and instruct each group to discuss your orientation. Suggest that participants share impressions, concerns, questions, etc., and instruct each group to prepare a set of five responses to be directed to the staff. The responses may include questions, comments, curiosities, etc. Respond to the responses as appropriate. This "buzz-group" ice-breaker is important. Be sure to include it.
3. Introduce the NOTEBOOK ASSIGNMENT. Have parents complete a first reflection during the session. Reflections might pertain to the following:
   A. My reason for participating in the parent workshop:
   B. My goals with respect to the workshop:

C. My impressions concerning the way I participate in conversation with my children. What we talk about; how frequently we talk; who initiates; who carries the conversation; how well I listen.

D. My feelings about the role parents play in preparing children to read; to think; Specific contributions I feel I make to my child's literacy development.

4. Depending upon the size of the group and the length of the sessions, parent impressions might be shared and discussed.

5. The first assignment should be distributed and briefly discussed.

PARENT NOTEBOOK-SESSION I

Participants are urged to maintain a notebook during the workshop. The notebook is included to provide an extra dimension of personalization and continuity for each participant. Point out that the notebook will serve as a diary, a log, as a record of conversational activity with children.

Encourage participants to reflect on their conversations with children at least once each day in addition to whatever is required by the session assignments. Indicate that notes can be made in relation to the number of conversations, the topics talked about, the unexpected happenings that occurred during the conversation.

Indicate that participants will have an opportunity to reflect upon their notes and offer comments and questions at the beginning of each parent workshop session. One effective means for initiating notebook discussion is to have parents share one or two surprises observed during the week. Another is to suggest that notebooks become the source of one or two questions parents would like to have answered during a subsequent session.

Parents should be encouraged to extend observation and curiosity concerning parent-child conversation by watching other parents involved with children in public places--restaurants, parks, shopping centers, waiting rooms, etc. A simple procedure for observing might be to have parents note <u>who</u> interacted, the topics talked about (<u>what</u>), the roles taken by children and parents (<u>how</u>), the consequences of the conversation (<u>what effect</u>) as determined either by the obvious outcome or by inferences on the part of the observer.

Each observation might be concluded with a set of impressions and/or questions motivated by the observation.

An example of an observation follows:

Time: Saturday morning

Location: Supermarket

Special circumstances, if any: Market is really busy. Lots of adults probably trying to finish quickly and return home. It's a great day for gardening. How I hate shopping on a day like this.

Who: Young mother and her toddler son (approximate age, 18 months)

What: Mother talking to son. "Oh, look at this. It's your baby food. Look at the little baby on the box."

Son smiles and says "bibi".

Mother replies, "yes, baby."

Mother and son continue on down the aisle.

How: Mother took responsibility for initiating the conversation.

Son responded. Mother followed with agreement and correct pronunciation.

What effect: Both seemed happy. (My thought, what a nice person!)

ASSIGNMENT I, SESSION I

1. The assignment provides parents with an opportunity to begin observing how they interact with children. Many probably have never given the idea a second thought. Some may be very curious. Survey the group to find out. Make the point that this first assignment provides an opportunity for participants to begin to understand one of civilization's most basic building blocks, namely, parents interacting with and preparing children to participate in experience. Additional conceptual grounding may be found in Joseph Church's Language and the Discovery of Reality as well as his Three Babies.
2. Suggest that each parent select three conversation situations for observation during the week. The length of the conversation need not exceed three to five minutes. Ask parents to observe themselves:
   A. Teaching and/or explaning something to the child (cooking, cleaning, managing any number of household chores).
   B. Talking spontansously about whatever occurs naturally as parents and children sit together (mealtime, watching TV, following a special event).
   C. Sharing thought about feelings (likes, dislikes, whatever. Naptime and bedtime are situations that lend themselves to this type of talk).
3. In each situation parents should be instruced simply to turn on the tape recorder and forgel about it. They should be encouraged to act naturally. Remind them that there is no one best way to conduct a conversation!
4. Once the three situations have been recorded, instruct parents to sit alone and listen to the lape. (Strongly urge that they not review the lapes until the three conversations have been recorded.)

5. Suggest that notes be made in the Parent Notebook with respect to "surprises," curiosities, etc.

6. If appropriate, suggest that parents transcribe any or all of the three conversations. Provide the following format:

Conversation # _____

Time _____

Date _____

Topics _____

Parent:

Child:

Parent:

Child:

ETC.

Notes:

7. Indicate that parents should bring all materials to the second workshop session.

TEACHING NOTES--SESSION II

1. Encourage parents to share their reactions to the assignment. Be prepared for a variety of responses. Some may be wondering if their conversations were "good". Others may be confused and embarrassed by their observations. Expect a diverse set of parent reactions!
2. Remind parents that good and bad are not at issue. Indicate that it's more important to think of behavior and consequences, of speaking and listening and understanding. Help your parents begin to understand their contribution to the conversations by calling attention to:
   a. the variety of topics talked about
   b. the length of time spent talking about each topic
   c. the length of the various contributions made by themselves and their children
   d. the outcomes of the conversations in terms of enjoyment, learning, discovery, etc.
3. Help parents see how their contributions shaped the conversations. Assist them in understanding how, and in what ways, the following behaviors either encouraged or discouraged the child from participating in the exchange:
   a. the tendency of the parent to initiate new ideas and topics
   b. the tendency of the parent to evaluate the child's contributions
   c. the tendency of the parent to contribute information and opinion
   d. the tendency of the parent to interrupt while the child was speaking
   e. the tendency of the parent to probe and question the child's contributions

f. the tendency of the parent to organize and reformulate the child's ideas

4. Have parents determine who did most of the talking. An important consideration at this point pertains to listening. Have parents determine whether they actually understood their child's contributions. Have them point to contributions in the transcript which indicate that the parent actually checked the child's meanings. Many will discover that much of their responding was from their adult perspective rather than the child's.

5. Help the parents see that a variety of responses are available for use in developing, clarifying and sustaining conversation:

- They can suggest:

  Child: That's a neat car.

  Parent: You really like it. I wonder how it works.

- They can convey understanding:

  Child: Gramp and me had a fight.

  Parent: Well, it sounds like grandpa and you had some exciting moments trying to land that trout.

- They can probe:

  Child: It's scary.

  Parent: What do you suppose makes the thunder so scary?

- They can support:

  Child: I can't do it.

  Parent: It's really tough trying to tie your sneaks.

- They can evaluate:

  Child: I'll take the scissors.

Parent: That's not such a good idea. Let me get you a smaller pair.

Analysis of the conversations will help parents begin to discover their typical responses when conversing with children and hopefully will encourage curiosity about trying alternatives.

6. Parents need to see conversation as a way of creating meanings and shaping the way a child views his experience. It's mind in the making and the essential tools are the parents' conversational responses. Participants need to understand that adults typically do not take the child's view seriously and consequently do little to actually discover what's on the child's mind. The following transcriptions illustrate what can happen when an adult consciously uses conversational responses to extend, to clarify and to share in the child's point of view:

Situation I - (Adult shuts off conversation)

Jennifer: I have the (she hiccups) hiccups.

Parent: You do. I get them sometimes too.

Silence

Situation I - replay (Adult encourages conversation and promotes a sharing of meanings)

Jennifer: I have the (she hiccups) hiccups.

Parent: You do. I bet they make you feel uncomfortable.

Jennifer: Yep. (hiccup)

Parent: Hmm, where do you think they come from?

Jennifer: from my (hiccup) mouth.

Parent? From your mouth?

Jennifer: Yep, I try to spit them out.

Parent: Spit them, that's interesting, are they always there in your mouth?

Jennifer: Yes, on sundays, I mean somedays.

Parent: I get them somedays too.

Situation II - (Adult shuts off conversation)

Jacob and his father sitting in a McDonald's. Jacob, aged 4, watching a rather heavy-set woman eating a hamburger.

Jacob: Yeah, she's really big, I mean fat. I'm not really fat am I? Right?

Father: No, you're not really fat, just chubby, besides little kids are supposed to be chubby.

Jacob: Yeah.

Silence

Situation II - replay (Adult promotes a sharing of meanings)

Jacob: Yea, she's really big, I mean fat. I'm not really fat am I? Right?

Father: No, you're not really fat, just chubby. (pause) Does being chubby bother you?

Jacob: The kids call me fatty, but someday I'll lose it, my fat, I'll lose it and get skinny (pause) and it will go down to here (points to his foot) and my foot will get fat.

Father: (laughing) Right, and then I'll call you old fat-foot.

Jacob: No! Then my foot would be really hard and I could kick anything...and I'd really need a big shoe, bigger than any in the whole world, bigger than big foot.

Father: Your little shoe won't work huh?

Jacob: Nope, too small (pause) besides...

Father: Besides what?

Jacob: Besides I have to be really careful cause...

Father: Cause why?

Jacob: Cause I might step on you silly.

Father: Well, you be careful, OK?

Jacob: OK. (pause) I want to eat.

7. Once parents become interested in sharing the child's point of view, they need to be prepared for the shifts in meaning and for the highly individual nature of the child's logic, something many parents dismiss as "silly," and infantile. Note what happened when a mother asked her three-year-old son Bobby about water while taking his evening bath:

Mother: Boy oh boy you sure can splash. You like water don't you?

Bobby: Yep. I like water falls too. Fishes go in water. We go in water. I go at Whipples Dam. Milk comes from cows.

Mother: Milk?

Bobby: And then I pour it in my cup.

Note what occured when her father decided to encourage four-year-old Kristy to develop her point of view in the following:

Father: What would you do if this big monster came up to you?

Kristy: I would say "Hey, you get away from me" or I'll kick him.

Father: But he might be ten times bigger than you.

Kristy: I can kick him if I want, like in the movie.

Father: Movie?

Kristy: It was scary, on tv. It had a big black count and the count was killin' people.

Father: Really? Why was he killing people?

Kristy: Well, well he doesn't like people.

Father: Doesn't like people, I wonder why?

Kristy: Cause it would kick people and people would still be dead. They have to go to the hospital. You took me to the hosptial when my scab was that big.

Father: I remember. Where was the scab?

Kristy: Right here (points to her ankle) it was big and bleeding and it had a bandage on it.

Father: Do you remember what happened at the hospital?

Kristy: The hospital gave me medicine. And you know what they...a girl doctor came in, and know what she gave me?

Father: No, I forgot. What?

Kristy: A sticker.

Father: A sticker? You mean a bandage.

Kristy: Yeah. She was very nice. I was nice at her but I was, I had tears right down.

Father: People were nice at the hospital?

Kristy: Yeah, but the boy doctor came in. He was this tall! He put his finger where my big scab was and I said "Ahouch!"

Father: He hurt you? But the girl doctor didn't?

Kristy: She put medicine on a white cloth and she put it on my ankle and then she put a white bandage on it and then a brown bandage on it and two pads.

Father: That was quite a day wasn't it?

Kristy: Yeah.

8. Encourage your parents to recognize that careful and conscious managing of listening and responding is a key to the development of literacy skills with children!

9. The preceeding approach reflects in modified form a classic study conducted by Robert D. Hess and Virginia Shipman where 160 mothers and their 4 year-old children were observed interacting in a variety of task and conversational situations. The objective was "to discover how teaching

styles of mothers induce and shape learning styles and information-processing strategies in the children." Analysis of their transcript data suggests that parents differ in the way they prepare and lead children through learning tasks. Hess and Shipman identified three basic maternal teaching styles, each exemplified in the following, taken from the study:

Style I - This mother outlines the task for the child, gives sufficient help and explanation to permit the child to proceed on her own. She says:

"All right, Susan, this board is the place where we put little toys; first of all you're supposed to learn how to place them according to color. Can you do that? The things that are all the same color you put in one section; in the second section you put another group of colors, and in the third section you put the last group of colors. Can you do that? Or would you like to see me do it first?"

Style II - This mother "offers less clarity and precision." In introducing the same task, she says:

"Now, I'll take them all off the board; now you put them all back on the board. What are these?"

Child: "A truck."

"All right, just put them right here; put the other one right here, all right put the other one there."

Style III - This mother is less explicit, she says: "I've got some chairs and cars. Do you want to play the game?"

No response from the child. Mother continues:

"OK, What's this?"

Child: "A wagon?"

Mother: "Hm?"

Child: "A wagon?"

Mother: "This is not a wagon. What's this?"

Encourage your parents to reflect on the potential in each style for preparing the child to think his/her way through the next task in the absence of the mother. Have parents reflect on the teaching and conversing styles they employ. Stress the need for awareness and flexibility in parent-child conversation.

10. Introduce and Clarify Assignment II.

ASSIGNMENT II--SESSION II

1. Assignment II provides parents with an opportunity to replay Assignment 1.
2. Suggest that parents follow a procedure similar to the one followed in Assignment I, and that they bring observations and tapes to Session III.
3. Encourage your parents to view this replay as an opportunity to more fully explore their child's point of view. Stress the need for careful listening and controlled responding. Suggest that parents explore the effects of probes, suggestions and supportive statements.
4. Additional conceptual and practical suggestions may be found in Ginot's, Between Parent and Child.

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TEACHING NOTES--SESSION III

"Reading with Children"

1. Encourage parents to share their reactions and observations to the replay of Assignment I. Review Parent Notebooks. Have participants compare and contrast the conversational approaches taken in Assignments I and II. Prepare "bits and pieces" of conversation transcripts and "gently" assist participants in analyzing for the effects of their responses on their children's comments. Positively support the discoveries and concerns parents may voice concerning the assignments.
2. Have parents think critically about personal strengths and difficulties (likes and problems) they have concerning listening and conversing with children. Reflections may be written in the Parent Notebook. Individual responses may be shared with the group depending upon time and readiness.
3. Survey and comment upon additional "field observations" made by participants concerning the conversations of other parents and children as observed in public situations.
4. Depending upon the size of the group and the time available, it may be useful to conduct one or a series of focused conversation practice sessions. Organize participants in groups of three, one to serve as observer, the others to participate as conversants. The following agenda should be followed so that conversants have at least 2 opportunities to share observer feedback, and so that all participants have an opportunity to serve as observers:

1. Pairs converse about topics pertaining to the workshop, observers take notes concerning conversational responses, particularly with respect to the way responses serve to extend, clarify and personalize meanings; (three to five minutes).
2. Observers share observations and discuss impressions with conversants; (two to three minutes).
3. Pairs continue conversation, observers note changes in responses that seem to enhance the exchange; (three to five minutes).
4. Observers feed-back impressions of the second phase of the conversation; (two to three minutes).
5. Participants change roles and repeat the process untill all have served as observers.

As appropriate, additional excitement may be added to the conversation practice by having participants tape record and review their exchanges.

5. As an additional conversation tuning activity, parents can be assigned responsibility for teaching others in the group how to perform a specific skill. Presentations should be tape recorded and parents provided with an opportunity to review their presentations with you. Specific attention should be focused on how well participants explained concepts and responded to questions.
6. Introduce and briefly reflect upon Assignment III.

7. If time permits, assist parents in selecting a "special story" for their children. Review standard criteria pertaining to story line, content, illustrations, print and binding quality, etc. Help parents understand that "cheap is not always best."

8. Have parents practice story reading with each other. Suggest that they (1) read the story silently; (2) practice aloud; (3) experiment with variations in inflection, characterization, etc.; (4) attempt to "tell" the story whenever possible.

9. Demonstrate various approaches to story reading.

10. Ask that each parent adhere to the following standard procedure with respect to presenting Assignment III:

    A. Invite the child to come and share a new story. This might be easiest just before bed or nap time.

    B. Take time to examine the book. Look at and comment about the illustrations. Permit the child to turn the pages. Talk about the story before actually reading it.

    C. Read the story verbatim. Be flexible. Provide additional comment as requested by the child.

    D. Read the story a second time at this first session if requested by your child.

    E. Provide additional readings at the child's request during the week.

ASSIGNMENT III, SESSION III

1. This assignment provides parents with an opportunity to observe how they approach story reading with children.
2. Have parent select and present a story sometime during the week. Suggest that they follow the standard procedure introduced during Session III.
3. Request that story reading be tape recorded at least twice, during the initial presentation and as the story is represented three or four days later.
4. Suggest that parents keep notes on the various readings. Notes should pertain to when the story was presented, at whose request, the length of each reading, the extent to which the child became involved in the reading process, comments made by the child during the reading, etc.
5. Participants should review recordings and notes prior to Session IV.

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TEACHING NOTES--SESSION IV

"Reading with Children"

1. This session is designed to assist parents in developing their options for story presentation.
2. Have parents share their reactions concerning Assignment III. Ask about unexpected challenges, problems, and surprises.
3. Help parents understand their story presentation approaches by comparing and contrasting their observations with those reported by Darlene Hoffman with respect to her presentation of Maurice Sendak's In the Night Kitchen.
4. Hoffman presented the Night Kitchen to her three year old daughter Inga in a manner similar to the presentation procedure outlined in Session III. Hoffman's observations were compiled over a ten day period during which the Night Kitchen was read and talked about eleven times.
5. Hoffman's transcript clearly revealed that for Inga (like many children), "reading was an interactive process." Inga was read to; she was asked questions; she provided exclamatory and explanatory comment; and she "read" the story for her mother and father.
6. Hoffman's analysis revealed the following about the parent-child conversations that accompanied the story reading process:

A. Inga's contributions increased significantly as the process continued through the ten days. The more familiar she became with the characters and events, the more she naturally wanted to participate in the "reading" of the story.

B. Parent contributions fell naturally into four conversational categories:

I. Textual Content-which included all words and phrases which were read directly from the book;

II. Explanation and Expansion-which included comments used to explain and elaborate the story line;

III. Questions-which sought to clarify and verify Inga's understanding of the story;

IV. Responses to Inga's questions and comments.

C. Hoffman found that parent contributions shifted as Inga mastered the story. As the readings progressed parent contributions shifted from high proportions of text content and explanation to high percentages of questions and responses to Inga's comments.

D. Hoffman noted that as Inga mastered the story she also imitated the intonation patterns used by her parents in presenting the story.

E. Hoffman noted Inga's use of her parent's explanations in Inga's own spontaneous readings of the story.

F. Hoffman also noted Inga referring to events in the story as she reacted to experiences in her everyday life.

G. Hoffman's observations of Inga should help your parents understand their own preferences for story presenting as well as to appreciate the potential contributions story reading can make to the child's development of thinking and social skills and to reading readiness. Depending upon interest and time constraints, the Story Presentation Assignment may be "recycled" for an additional week with a second selection.

H. Present and briefly discuss Assignment IV.

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ASSIGNMENT IV--SESSION IV

"Story-Making"

A. This assignment provides parents with an opportunity to systematically observe and participate in the story making process.

B. Survey parents to discover those already making stories with their children. Parents of story makers should reflect on their child's story making history. Written notes should be made pertaining to when stories first appeared; favorite topics and/or story characters; typical and/or preferred listeners ("story takers") according to Sutton-Smith, see (Teaching Notes), whether stories involved the use of props; circumstances in which stories were typically produced (riding in car; before bed; while playing with trucks, etc.). Reflections may be shared with others in the workshop.

C. If story making is not a familiar family event, the assignment may seem strange and perhaps threatening for both parents and children. Encourage your participants to move slowly and gently into the process! Admonish parents to suggest rather than demand that stories be made, to explore a variety of approaches in helping the child find his own way to make a story, and to settle for "little" stories not too well formed (see Teaching Notes for Session V) as the child progresses toward competence in story making.

D. Prepare parents to take an active role in assisting with the story making process. Indicate that children may need suggestions with respect to:

1. the type of story, i.e., "a silly story," "a dangerous story," etc.
2. the story focus, i.e., "about monsters," "about grandpap," etc.
3. the action sequence, i.e., "and then he went up the stairs, what happended next, what happended after he went up?"
4. the opening and closing, i.e., "Once there was a kitty...and, after a long day, they all went to sleep. Anything else? OK, the end."

E. Suggest that a special time and location be set aside for story making. As with previous assignments, notes should be made in the Parent Notebook, and conversational exchanges tape recorded.

F. Parents should be encouraged to repeat the complete story for the child once a story is completed. Parents need to remember that for most young children remembering the story is not nearly as much fun as making the story!

G. As indicated in the following, some parents may need to take an active role in shaping both the story content and its form:

Parent: Let's make a story.

Child: Nope, not by me lone (by myself).

Parent: OK, let's make one together. Let's see, Once upon a time, a long long time ago there was...(parent slows, and waits for child to fill the gap)

Child: There was this Darth Vader and Sky Walker.

Parent: There was this Darth Vader and the Sky Walker, and...

Child: They was fighting, fighting with a lazer beam.

Parent: They were fighting with a lazer beam?

Child: Yep, they tried to destroy the enemy.

Parent: They were trying to see who was more powerful, right?

Child: Right, and Darth Vader won, that's all!

Parent: And Vader won, that's all, right?

Child: No, Darth Vader!!

H. Parents should be prepared to make <u>their</u> <u>own</u> stories as some children may insist that "mommy, you make one first."

I. Parents should be reminded to keep records in the Notebook and to review tapes prior to Session V.

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TEACHING NOTES-SESSION V

1. Briefly survey parent reactions to the story making assignment. List problems, concerns and curiosities for comment and discussion later in the session. Technical background for workshop staff can be found in the following sources:
   a. Arthur Applebee, The Child's Concept of Story: Ages 2 to 17. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
   b. Sylvia Ashton-Warner, Teacher. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.
   c. Howard Gardner, The Arts and Human Development. New York.
   d. Darlene Hoffman, "Ten Days with Inga and In the Night Kitchen," Communication Education, 25, #1, Jan. 1976.
   e. "The Child's Mind," Special Section Edition, Harper's Magazine, April 1978.
2. Invite parents to share stories with the group. If possible, prepare transcripts of selected stories. Use these as the basis for story analysis. Have parents analyze their stories with respect to the following elements. (A workable analytic approach for your parents might involve (1) reading a story; (2) identifying the story elements; (3) reflecting on the parent's sense of the child's mastery; (4) suggesting strategies the parent might employ to encourage further development.)

I. The child's use of standard openings and closings: Help parents understand that early stories may not contain these elements:

The man came. He took the toy. The boy was sad.

With time and continued exposure to more standard story forms, help parents understand that the child may progress to the following level of mastery:

Once there was this man. He was mean to kids. He would take candy and toys and throw them in the street. One day he took the little boy's big wheel. And the boy didn't know what to do. He was sad. The end.

II. The child's development of characterization and setting: Help parents understand that character development may not occur until the child has had extensive experience listening to and making his own stories. Initially the child may simply describe and/or list aspects and attributes of character, and situations:

There was once a little gerbil. He played all day. He went round and round and round in his little wheel. He got thirsty and drank from his water bottle. That's all for now.

A later more developed rendering of the same story character and setting might show the following:

Once there was this little gerbil named Mickey. Mickey was a very happy gerbil. He was the favorite pet of all the children who came to the pet store after school. Everyday the children came and stood around Mickey's cage. Sometimes Mickey would

run round and round and round in his wheel. Sometimes he would do tricks in his tubes. One time Mickey played a big trick on the children. He got his wheel going real fast and then he jumped off. The children came and looked at the wheel. They said, "Look there's nobody in it." "Where is Mickey" they said. Mickey looked out from under his paper and straw and said, "here I am!" They all laughed. The children said "he is really a tricky Mickey." and that's the end.

III. The child's development of plot and action sequences:

Help parents understand that plot develops in a manner similar to character and setting. Early stories may simply present loosely related sequences of actions:

Once there was a little train. He lived up at a really big station. He liked to run on tracks. He lost the tracks one day. He was sad. He cried. the end.

A later rendering of the same story might produce the following:

Once upon a time there lived a little train. He was sad because he didn't have no tracks to run on. He wanted to stop at a station because he was a passenger train. He was a toy train. He couldn't get to the station because he had no tracks, not even toy tracks. One day he went in a tent that was by the station. Then he came out and he had tracks. And he was happy. That's all.

IV. The child's use of familiar stories to develop his own: As indicated in the case of Inga and the Night Kitchen, a young child's first stories may be attempts to retell familiar stories. In many instances the familiar story may subsequently provide the form in which the child will create his own story:

> Once upon a time there were three little crocodiles, named Flopsy, Mopsy and Tooth. They woke up real early in the morning and asked their parents if they could trike and big wheel in front of the house before breakfast. Their parents said yes, and so they did...(Adapted from Dan Sheridan, "Flopsy, Mopsy and Tooth: The Storytelling of Preschoolers": Language Arts, 56, #1 Jan. 1979)
>
> Once upon a time, Jack was, Jack was nimble. He could jump over high things. He was quick. He jumped over the candlestick. He jump over a house. One day it was raining but Jack had his umbrella. It looked like wings. Jack jumped with his umbrella wings and he got lost. He found a house and knocked on a door. Santa came and said "you look like a plane. I need a plane." Jack said, "I am not. I am Jack be nimble." And Jack jumped over the house and over the moon. That's the end.

V. The child's use and resolution of conflict: According to Sutton-Smith, early stories may not present conflict (or problem situations):

> My dolly is Cindy. I put her in a house. She comes out. My mommy plays too.

Later stories may present an unresolved conflict (or challenge):

The man came. He took the toy. The boy was sad.

More developed stories may resolve the conflict through a variety of strategies:

The man came. He took the toy. The boy was sad.

Strategy I (resolved through help from another):

The boy cried.

His mommy came and gave him another toy.

Strategy II

The boy cried.

It started to rain.

Lightening came and struck the man dead.

Strategy III (resolved by character himself)

The boy cried.

Then he stopped and thought.

"I'll go get it when the man isn't locking."

The man was asleep and the boy took his toy back.

3. Emphasize the following throughout the session:

A. THAT STORY MAKING BEGETS STORYMAKING: This deceptively simple proposition was initially argued by Brian Sutton-Smith. His observations of hundreds of story makers suggest that:

"If you keep asking children to make up stories for you and show delight at the stories they tell: and if you keep coming back and asking for more stories, then the stories get better and better. There appears to be clear signs of an increase in

their narrative competence just because you have been a good and rewarding listener. Children also progress from telling you stories to wanting to write their own stories. The most important practical conclusion from this study is that almost everyone, including parents...can play this role...The only precaution is that they should enjoy children's stories and enjoy them no matter what the children put into them."

(Brian Sutton-Smith, "The Importance of the Storytaker," The Urban Review, 8, #2 Summer 1975. See also, Ashton-Warner's Teacher for a detailed description of the "processes of good and rewarding listening" as used in developing literacy skills with primary children.)

B. THAT PARENT AWARENESS PERTAINING TO HOW CHILDREN MAKE STORIES CAN ENHANCE PARENT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT OF STORY MAKING SKILLS:

Parent awareness need not extend to the level of technical sophistication conveyed in the resources listed under #1. In addition to an awareness of the story elements presented earlier, parents need to understand and accept that what children say may be important to them for a variety of reasons.

1. The child's story may serve as a means for walking through and or resolving an aspect of experience which is troublesome for the child:

A new baby was there. He cried too much. Mommy spanked the baby. Daddy spanked the baby. I didn't spank him. But not really. We shouldn't spank the baby they to little.

2. The story may serve to test the adult's reaction of an action intended by the child:

   Child: ...and then he ran outside into the rain.

   Adult: I hope he doesn't run too far.

   Child: Nope, just outside.

   Adult: With his boots on.

   Child: Yep, he ran outside with his boots.

3. The child's story may assist in developing a sense of mastery over events beyond the child's comprehension and/or control:

   This big box. A boy was in it. The box had a big cover. It started to rain and lightening and storm like that. It was scary. The boy was afraid. But he didn't cry. He said stop. And the storm stopped and the rain went away. The boy found a rainbox and saved it in the box.

4. The story may simply be an expression of language play and practice with language form:

Once upon a time the dog was looking back. The bear said, "Hey you doggie, you look at me," but the doggie wasn't lookin. The bear said, "If I stand up on my head he will...and if someone tickles me, I'll stay up on my head. If someone pulls my tail I'll still keep standin on my head. If some one tickles me on the toes, I'll keep still standin on my head. If someone looks at me, I'll stand still on my head. If someone smacks me, I'll still stand on my head. If someone ties my bow, I'll still keep standin on my head." And this bear is getting angry, he was getten very mad. He said, "You monkey, give me back my caps." But the monkey only said "sssssss, sssssss". That's the end.

5. The story may be an attempt to catch and maintain control over the adult's attention:

Michael: Hey Butt, you know what?

Adult (named Mr. Butt): What Mike?

Michael: I got another story for you. You want to hear it?

Adult: Sure.

Michael: Once I was ridin' my bike and I fell in a road, and you know what?

Adult: What?

Michael: I had grease on my head and my hand and I had to fix my tire. I dropped the bike down and you know what?

Adult: What?

Michael: I saw this greasy line on the road and it, You know what?

Adult: What?

Michael: It moved.

Adult: What?

Michael: It moved. Ha, ha. It was a greasy black snake. But it wasn't really. It was my shadow. Ha, ha!

Adult: That was a really silly story Michael.

Michael: Yeah, but it really wasn't real, really!

4. Help parents more fully enjoy their children through the collected stories as well as to appreciate the crucial contributions they <u>will</u> continue to make as "good and rewarding listeners."

5. ENJOY!!!