

IN  
THIS  
ISSUE

## FEATURE ARTICLE:

Supporting  
Communication  
Language, and Literacy  
Learning With Infants  
and Toddlers

page 1

## CLASSROOM HINTS:

Benefits of Listening to  
Stories and Reading Aloud

page 11

## TRAINER TO TRAINER:

Reading and Storytelling  
With Infants and Toddlers

page 16

## NEWS BRIEFS

page 19

## ASK US

page 19

# Supporting Communication, Language, and Literacy Learning With Infants and Toddlers

BY SHANNON LOCKHART, HIGHSCOPE SENIOR EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIALIST

Communication, language, and literacy learning for infants and toddlers take place within the context of trusting relationships. The bonding and connections that spontaneously occur between children and between children and adults directly supports and encourages communication and language. For those children who do not yet have language, nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal language is for the children who can talk. For all infants and toddlers, it is all about relationships, and communication and language skills develop through these strong relationships. This article begins with an overview of why infants and toddlers are motivated to communicate and learn language. We then

take a closer look at the importance of relationships in developing these capacities and two other keys to language learning for infants and toddlers — learning through sensory-motor experiences and providing a vocabulary-rich environment. We will also review some basic



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ways these young children begin to learn language, and describe how to support infants' and toddlers' language growth.

### The Drive to Communicate and Learn Language

Children, like people of all ages, are driven to communicate. For infants, their primary motivation is to communicate their needs: “I’m hungry, tired, cold, wet, bored, in pain,” and so on. Infants communicate these needs using their inborn capacities to cry, gesture, make facial expressions, and turn toward or away from something. These communication skills are generally effective, but at times don’t convey the real need. As caregivers, we do our best to interpret needs based on our intimate knowledge of each child, but sometimes we can only guess. Moreover, these ways of communicating carry a limited number of messages. They cannot communicate the child’s growing need to share discoveries, ask questions, and convey love, as well as to be more precise about needs — not merely “I’m hungry” but “I want cereal” and even “I want to feed myself!” Fortunately, humans have developed the capacity to communicate a wider and deeper range of feelings and thoughts. We call this capacity *language*.

As infants and toddlers hear language from the trusted adults who communicate with them on a daily basis, they are motivated to learn and use this wonderful communication tool. They reflect back the sounds and intonations their young ears are able to decipher, refining these into words as they repeatedly hear and begin to differentiate and reproduce them. This process is exciting for the child, as he or she becomes a more adept communicator. It is also exciting for adults as we get to know the children better, discover more about their inner lives, and provide them with the social-emotional, physical, and cognitive experiences they can now tell us they need and enjoy.

### Communication in Trusting Relationships

Consider the following two scenarios, in which a great deal of experimentation with communication and language is going on the whole time — all within the context of the relationships the children and teachers are establishing with each other.

#### Feeding time with Sierra

*It's feeding time, and you are holding Sierra (an infant) and feeding her a bottle while rocking back and forth. She stops sucking, and you look down at her with a smile; she in turn looks up with wide eyes and a smile back. You continue smiling at her and whisper a few words. She then spits the nipple out of her mouth and begins to coo with a big grin on her face as she reaches for your face. Her coos are short at first, but as you talk with a gentle voice using inflections and facial expressions, her coos become lengthier, and her smile turns into giggles. As you both continue communicating back*

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*and forth with inflections in your voices and wide facial expressions, it turns into a language game. This continues for a few more minutes, and then Sierra turns back to her bottle and continues sucking as she looks at you as you rock her back and forth.*

### **Reading with Gabriel**

*As children arrive in the morning, some are playing in the different areas while others are sitting on the floor with their parents as they transition into the room from home. You have some books lying by you, and Gabriel crawls over and picks up a book and puts it in your lap. You ask him if he wants you to read the book to him and he shakes his head up and down with a big smile. He crawls into your lap and you begin reading the story. As you turn the page, Gabriel frantically points to the dog and says “gahgee, gahgee, gahgee” at the top of his voice. You say “Yes, Gabriel, that is a doggie, and he looks a lot like your dog that you have at home.” You continue reading the story as he points to different animals and either sounds out their names or says the sounds the animals make like “yow, yow” for the kitten and “moooooo” for the cow. Also, you point to other animals while saying their names and the sounds they make. When you are done reading the book, Gabriel holds it in his hand and crawls across the floor to the toy area and pulls the tub of animals off the shelf and begins to play with them.*

The first key ingredient needed for language development to thrive is *communication in a trusting relationship* between the child and caregiver. Interactions should be nondirective and enjoyable, with the caregiver tuned into and responsive to the child’s needs and learning. Conversations between adult and child should be personal. It is important to get to know the child on a personal level (and vice-versa) as well as to be respectful in every interaction, whether it be a playful interaction (for example, Gabriel and his caregiver reading a book) or a routine task (for example, the “conversation” between Sierra and her caregiver during bottle-feeding).



Caregiving routines such as feedings and mealtimes, changing diapers, dressing, and naptimes provide rich opportunities for communication and language.

**Opportunities throughout the routine.** Throughout the day, communication is part of the give-and-take between caregiver and child. It is part of a joint relationship in which the patient caregiver listens intently, allowing time for the child to process his or her thoughts; communicate through gestures, signs, or words; and respond to what the caregiver contributes to the conversation or interaction. This includes caregiving routines such as bottle feedings/mealtimes, changing diapers and potty training, dressing, and naptimes. Caregiving routines should not be rushed or carried out in a mechanical way but seen as opportunities to build trust and have face-to-face communication with children about the feeding or diaper changing, for example, or just to enjoy playful back-and-forth verbal and nonverbal interactions.

**Active listening.** Adult listening is vital to children's language and intellectual development. Active listening means the adult attends to what the child does or says, neither ignoring it nor waiting to see or hear an expected response. If we want to support a child's desire to communicate, we must convey to the child that his or her communications are important and make a difference. We do this through active listening.

Consider the implications of this finding: In an international study on the quality of life for four-year-olds called the IEA Preprimary Project<sup>1</sup>, across 15 countries adults were found to listen to children only one percent to seven percent of the time. Even in the country where there was seven percent, the listening tended to be the adult listening to the child answering the adult's question. In other words, most communication went in one direction — from the adult to the child — and little was being done to support communication from the child.

By contrast, when we talk about *mutual* conversations and interactions, it is about caregivers listening to children's thoughts and ideas *and* commenting and responding to what children say — not about adults controlling the conversations. It is important to slow down and allow time for children to respond through gestures, babbles, words, or signs. Conversations containing shared interaction are important throughout the day and should be ongoing — and daily — even when the routine gets tight or highly variable, because infants and toddlers are always listening and learning from us.

**Varieties of communication.** Inside these trusted relationships and the various communications with caregivers that are part of them, young children hear voices with ranging intonation, sounds, syllables, and words — all of which are connected to learning and understanding speech. “Within this interactive social milieu, infants and toddlers learn to talk and lay the foundation for learning to read.... They initiate social interaction with trusted caregivers and peers, and in the process, construct a set of useful ideas:

<sup>1</sup>Olmsted, P. P., & Montie, J., (Eds.). (2001). *Early childhood settings in 15 countries: What are their structural characteristics?* Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.

that communication is a give-and-take process; that you don't need words to convey and understand safety, acceptance, approval, and respect; that there are lots of ways to make your point; and that trusted people are interested in what you have to communicate and say" (Post, Hohmann, & Epstein 2011, pp. 43 & 45). A report from Zero to Three states, "Talking, reading and singing all stimulate children's understanding and use of language, and help them learn to become good communicators and eager readers" (Lerner & Ciervo, 2004, p. 2).

However, we need to remember that the kind of language young children hear significantly influences the extent to which they learn language. Nagy and Scott (2000) say that children need to hear new words many times throughout the day and in many different contexts in order to assimilate and accommodate the sounds and meanings into long-term memory. If the words are mainly "routine language" such as "time to change your diaper," "Are you ready for your bottle?,"

"Would you like more soup?" or rote questions such as "How many blocks do you have?" and "What color is this?" then we limit children's learning of vocabulary and language development. We want children to hear descriptive language, which we can offer to them by commenting on what they are doing (e.g., saying "You crawled all the way over here by yourself!" or "It feels squishy and cold"). As we do so, we can focus on using action words (e.g., "You are bouncing really fast" or "I see you hop, hop, hopping to the bathroom") and asking open-ended questions (e.g., "I wonder how that feels in your hands and between your toes?" or "Look how high that is — how did you get those blocks to stay so high?").

**Types of language.** Also, the type of language we use most often and at critical times of young children's language learning will determine *how* children learn language. As adults, we tend to "speak down" to infants and toddlers, and in some cases we use gibberish (e.g., saying "witty bitty baby boy" for "little bitty baby boy"), which is not helpful and can even impair how children learn to hear the sounds of letters and the pronunciation of words,



It is important for children to hear many different types of language in many different ways throughout the day.

even their own names. However, this does not mean that we should talk with infants and toddlers the way we would talk to adults — for if we do so, they will tend to tune out our relatively monotone voice and wordy speech.

Baby talk (e.g., “beddy-bye”; “di-dee” for diaper, etc.), is another type of speech that adults tend to use that is also referred to as child-directed speech (CDS) or motherese. Research reveals the value of this type of talk because it shows that baby talk fosters the emotional bonding process as well as the children’s mental development and indicates that it assists in learning the basic functions and structure of language (Gopnick, Meltzoff, & Kuhl, 1999).

This type of simplified speech pattern (e.g., “mama,” “dada,” “baba” for bottle, “nana” for grandmother, “jammies” for pajamas) helps children build their own schema by using forms that are recognizable as the actual words while getting children’s attention because of intonation and sounds that more closely match sounds the children are able to produce. This in turn aids in their language acquisition. CDS uses a fluctuation of the voice (glissando-like rises and falls of pitch), is slower than regular speech, has a special pronunciation of words, and includes affection and emotion as well as repetition (e.g., “bye-bye,” “pee-pee” or “poo-poo,” “aw oh,” “oopsie-daisy”).

Babies prefer CDS because it draws and holds their attention longer than does regular speech. Child-directed speech therefore plays an important role in the rate and quality of language acquisition for infants and toddlers. It also assists in vocabulary acquisition and better grammatical accuracy in babies (Apel, K., & Masterson, J. J., 2001). However, our speech needs to match and change with the developing speech patterns of the children we are working with so that we keep the language and vocabulary they are hearing at a slightly higher level than their own language capabilities. For example, if a child says “ba” for bottle, but repeatedly hears adults say “bottle,” the child gradually picks up the idea that the word has two syllables, each with a distinct sound, even before he or she is able to produce the word more accurately.

So, when we, as caring, responsive caregivers, talk with children respectfully, labeling and describing their experiences and the objects they engage with, and engaging them in everyday conversations that match and build on (scaffold) their increasing capabilities, infants and toddlers can acquire language skills and feel confident about their ability to communicate.

**Family culture and first experiences.** Think back to when you were a child. Think of the people you remember being close to and the experiences you remember having. What do you remember the most? What do friends and family members remember and describe about you as a child? What words do you remember learning and using? Perhaps you even remember the first word that you spoke. Our understandings and memories

of stories and experiences that we either remember or know of through our parents and relatives are intimately tied to how we learn language. For example, I remember being called “chubby cheeks” (cheeks I have never outgrown!), mainly by my dad. When I think of these words, a visual representation comes to mind of my dad taking his fingers and gently pinching my cheeks and shaking my head. I am sure many of you can relate and/or have a mental image and story of your own that connects to an experience, a ritual, or

just a fond memory. As I grew, I was able not only to retrieve the meaning of the words *chubby cheeks*, and spell them, but also to have a mental picture that represented the words. These kinds of interconnections are what make language learning richer.

For infants and toddlers, their first communications and the development of language is intimately tied to their connections with primary caregivers. “Whether children will eventually speak one, two languages, or more, their earliest lessons take place in the universal language of human interactions” (Lally, Mangione, and Greenwold as quoted in Figueroa, p. 11, 2006). Hart and Risley write that “children’s experiences with language cannot be separated from their experiences with interaction because parent-child talk is saturated with affect” (1995, p. 101).

Other factors, such as children’s family culture, economic status, and geographical location also contribute to children’s language learning and use.

### Active Learning Using All the Senses

The second key ingredient needed for infants’ and toddlers’ language development is *learning through doing*. When infants and toddlers come into contact with their world, it is through all of their senses! When we as caregivers provide a stimulating environment that engages children’s keen senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing, and touch, their learning levels increase — and this includes language learning. Play and language learning are inextricably linked — for, as young children actively explore their world and manipulate



Children’s family language and culture contribute in many ways to their language learning and use.

objects that engage all of their senses, they engage in new, meaningful, and memorable experiences. Further, as mentioned at the beginning of this article, when emotion is tied into experience, the experiences become embedded in memory. This brings us back to the point that infants and toddlers are sensory-motor learners. When infants and toddlers are actively involved through movement of their bodies and engagement of their senses, their brains are stimulated, resulting in a greater development of neural connections.

As we engage in play with children, we can extend this kind of learning through conversation or by giving children words (vocabulary) for what they are doing. During play, children are free to make choices, explore, and express themselves through language. Choice time, more than any other part of the daily routine, allows children time to practice conversation, experiment with language, and express themselves freely without any adult interference and/or expectations. So when infants and toddlers are engaged with their whole bodies and experience the world through their senses, their language learning becomes more meaningful and helps build lasting memories.

### Language in the Environment

The third key ingredient needed for language to thrive is a *vocabulary-rich environment* in which young children hear new words throughout the day, every day; where adults expose children to many words in many different contexts; and where conversations are a give-and-take process, with time for children to respond at their own pace. As caregivers, when we fluently use object, action, and idea words, we model language through labeling and give children words to attach to the experiences they are having. In a study of young children's language development, Hart and Risley state, "By the time the children were three years old, trends in amount of talking, vocabulary growth, and style of interaction were well established" (1995, pp. 176–177). So we are laying the foundation for children's language and literacy development well before they get into formal schooling. "Language provides the foundation for the development of literacy skills. Learning to communicate through gestures, sounds, and words increases a child's interest in — and later understanding of — books and reading (Lerner, C., and Ciervo, L. A., 2004). The more new words young children are exposed to within their daily experiences, the wider their vocabulary and understanding of how language works will be. But we do need to be careful and not "talk at" children with lots of vocabulary words that make no sense to them. The language we use to "narrate" their experiences should be descriptive and make sense to them, and our conversations should pertain to what they are doing and learning.

We encourage you to try out the various strategies discussed in this article, to aid infants and toddlers in their language acquisition. The most important points to keep in mind



with this age are that language is developed, not taught, and that it grows organically from meaningful interactions with attentive and responsive caregivers!

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## Stages of Language Development

### Stage 1: Crying and Cooing

- Changes in vocal apparatus to communicate needs
- Use of eye contact and gestures in newborns (by four months they follow the direction in which adult is looking)
- Cooing (begins around 6–8 weeks)
- Beginning of the conversational skill of turn taking in infants (as early as three months)
- Recognition of familiar voices and natural rhythms from womb

### Stage 2: Babbling (around 6–12 months)

- Use of short strings of various sounds accompanied by distinct intonation patterns (syllables)
- Use of large range of sounds
- Recognition of syllable combinations
- Experimentation with tongue, teeth, and lips to produce sounds
- End of babbling in some children when beginning to use words
- Mixtures of babbling and words

### Stage 3: First Words (around one year)

- Use of isolated, identifiable words
- Concentration on specific sound patterns or words
- Beginning use of speech phrases (but to child it is one word – e.g., “allgone”)
- Accidental and purposeful practice leading to repertoire of sounds and combination of sounds
- Use of “pretend words” – making up words to mean anything
- Use of first true words (between 9 and 12 months)

### Stage 4: First Sentences (around second part of first year)

- Combining isolated words to form telegraphic speech
- Use of two- to three-word strings (e.g., “I go you house”)
- Tendency to leave out articles, prepositions and conjunctions
- Use of adjectives plus nouns (e.g., “big ball”) or verbs plus nouns (e.g., “want milk”)

Additionally, children typically hear over 100,000 words each day. From 24 months to five years, children master most of the sound system, learning thousands of words and gaining control over most grammatical constructions. (Adapted from O’Grady, 2005.)

## CLASSROOM HINTS

## Benefits of Listening to Stories and Reading Aloud

BY SHANNON LOCKHART

Building strong adult-child relationships in order to nurture attachment is a primary goal for infant-toddler caregivers. One of the best ways we can foster attachment as well as language and literacy learning is by reading books aloud to young children and telling them stories. “Reading aloud to children improves their reading, writing, speaking, listening — and best of all, their attitudes about reading” (Trelease, 2001). As infants and toddlers interact and explore their world, they develop an understanding of how verbal communication works, which is fundamental to developing reading and writing skills. In fact, researchers David Dickinson and Patton Tabors urge us to keep in mind “that *oral language* is the foundation of early literacy” (2002, p. 10). HighScope’s position paper, “Good Beginnings in Reading for Infants and Toddlers in HighScope Programs” (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2001) states, “The ability to produce and comprehend oral language, handle and look at books, and hear and tell stories are skills essential to later reading and writing” (pp. 10–11).



Through reading aloud and storytelling, we are supporting key areas of children’s development in print and language exploration as well as in listening and responding. Through the exploration of books, materials, and language, infants and toddlers gain an active understanding of what words mean and what they represent. “They [infants and toddlers] learn that books contain pictures of familiar

things; that they can make their own picture-like marks; that stories, rhymes, and songs are fun to repeat again and again; that they can talk about their own experiences and make up their own stories; and that trusted people affirm what they do, communicate, and say” (HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 2001, p. 5). Plus, it is just plain fun and pleasurable for all!

### Benefits of Listening to Stories and Reading Aloud

- It is pleasurable for both children and adults!
- Very young children first begin to read by interpreting the pictures.
- Read-alouds enable children to have fun with words and learn more about language.
- Reading to children helps focus on oral language.
- Reading aloud to children eventually leads to children’s understanding of written language (connecting spoken and written words).
- Reading aloud is one of the most important ways adults can foster children’s emerging language and literacy skills.

### How to Build Relationships Through Reading

**Setting up the space.** So how can you support reading with infants and toddlers? The first step is to plan a book area that is cozy and inviting, away from distractions and busy traffic flow. Place soft items for children and caregivers to lean and sit on — pillows, blankets, or cushions — and a bean bag chair, love seat, small mattress, and/or rocking chair (both child and adult size). Make the area cozy and homey with family pictures, fabric, or weavings hung on the walls, an area rug, and soft lighting. (If environmental regulations require the use of fluorescent bulbs, mimic the soft lighting of incandescent bulbs by choosing “warm” rather than “cool” fluorescent bulbs, with color temperatures in the 2700–3000 K range.) Lofts and cozy nooks

can be used to add spaces for children to crawl up or into and look at a book alone. If possible, place books so children can see the covers. Use a front-facing book rack or stand some books up on the floor or shelf. Setting out many books for children to choose from can be overwhelming for children at this age, so limit the number of books, depending on the number of children in the room. And don't limit books to the book area — place books in baskets and other containers in other areas as well.

**Choosing books.** When it comes to choosing books for infants and toddlers, there are some basic guidelines to keep in mind. Include a variety of books (e.g., soft, board, big, fabric, plastic, pop-up and paperback books). Choose books that are about children's everyday lives or about objects that infants and toddlers can learn vocabulary from. Make sure the books are not lengthy in words but have few words on each page or no words at all. Infants and toddlers love books with faces — faces of other children and people of all races, abilities, and families. Have books with various types of illustrations (e.g., photographs, drawings, collages, abstracts, and realistic paintings, etc.) so children are exposed to a variety of representations and art. Keep familiar and favorite books on shelves no matter how many times the children ask you to read the same story over and over again. Add new books from time to time and remove books according to children's interests. (See recommended list of children's books at the end of this article.)



**Reading with infants.** Reading and book time with infants should be carried out with a caregiver holding the infant and reading picture books, simple word books, or soft and fabric books for the infant to hold. This fosters the relationship between adult and child and supports attachment and literacy learning. Since infants

mouth everything they come in contact with, it is good to have a material that the infant can safely put in his or her mouth (pacifier; soft toy; teether; other vinyl book) so that you can hold a book, talk about the pictures, and turn pages without the child mouthing the book itself. For older infants, reading would consist of caregivers reading throughout the day as well as allowing infants to access books on their own, for example, by crawling to the shelf, pulling a book off, and looking at it or bringing it to a caregiver to read. In either instance, provide a cozy, inviting space for reading, just as you would for toddlers. Of course, in a toddler room, caregivers can provide more materials and space for the children to move in and out of as well as a wider variety of books for the children to choose from.

## Storytelling

Storytelling is another great way to support language learning. Infants and toddlers love to hear stories told to them. They love to hear stories about themselves, for example, what is currently happening or has recently happened to them — such as what is happening at snack time, or what happened when a guest visited the classroom. When we tell stories that include children's names and personal things about them, we are engaging their imaginations while connecting personal relationships with actual events. This strengthens children's understanding of language because these details help children connect language with personally meaningful events.

## Supporting Reading and Storytelling Throughout the Day

- Read throughout the day in a variety of settings (arrival time, outside time, naptime, choice time).
- Place pictures of children and their families on the wall by the diapering table and tell stories about the children.
- Take pictures of children during the day and make little storybooks using small photo albums.
- Share rhymes and poems as stories.
- Share stories about events of the day (outside time, walks, choice time events).
- Ask toddlers to tell a story.
- Encourage parents to share home pictures for storytelling.

## Supportive Interactions

Finally, it is important to look at how we can support reading and storytelling with infants and toddlers through our interactions with them. The way we plan for reading and storytelling throughout the day and the way we read to children will make all the difference in how they acquire reading behaviors. First and foremost, story time should be optional for infants and toddlers. Whole-group reading does not work since most of the children will want to sit on your lap and your lap is just not big enough for 12 children! Nor can you meaningfully interact with that many children at once. Also, not all children will be interested. Further, trying to read with the whole group will create many child-management issues (e.g., children can't see the pictures).

It's also important to keep story groups small and intimate so children can participate at their own developmental levels and you can respond to individual children's needs. Story times may even develop during choice time when a child brings you a book to read. For example, as you read the book, another child may come and sit beside you while two other children peer over your shoulder from time to time as they move around and listen. Thus, you automatically have an intimate story time, where children are engaged and are listening according to their own interest. This does not mean



that you cannot have story time built into your routine — such as before children lie down for nap — you just need to have other materials available for those children who are not yet ready to settle down for naptime or who have other physical needs that need to be taken care of first (e.g., diaper changing, feeding). And when they are ready to get on their cots, give each child a storybook to look at while lying down to rest. (Refer to the sidebar “Supporting Reading and Storytelling Throughout the Day” for other ideas).

## Reading Strategies

When reading with children, draw from a wide variety of books, but consider children's abilities and preferences. The younger the child, the fewer words needed in stories; build in labeling of objects in the story for vocabulary. Of course, toddlers can sit longer and can understand longer stories with multiple characters or storylines. Before you read a book with children, familiarize yourself with it first so you can focus on sharing it with the child.

As you read stories with all children, use a natural voice and take pleasure in reading and engaging children in the stories you read and tell. Involve children before, during, and after the reading by commenting about pictures in the story or asking open-ended questions about the characters or pictures. Bring in comments or children's names in a way that connects the stories to the children's lives and experiences so they can relate to the pictures and the characters in the story. For example, while reading a book about animal pets, ask “Do you have a dog or cat at home too? Or while looking at an object book, point to the ball and say “We have balls like this outside that you played with yesterday.”

Encourage conversations about the stories, and allow time for children to make their own comments or to describe what they see in the pictures. Talk with children about feelings depicted in stories and ask older children what they think might be happening or will happen (prediction).

Another way to make the stories come alive is to read with expression or to use different voices for each character. This comes with practice, so spend some time practicing different voices or making different parts of the story come alive through gestures and vocal inflection before reading the story to the children. Also try singing a story or using props from time to time. Be sure to follow children's lead. And last but not least, repeat stories that children are interested in hearing over and over again. By reading these stories over again it

- Enables children to build more comprehension with each successive reading
- Strengthens and reinforces the neural connections in children's brains
- Improves children's vocabulary, sequencing, and memory skills

- Increases the possibility that toddlers will be able to repeat the book on their own afterward
- Encourages toddlers to reenact their favorite stories
- Immerses the child in the language of the story, making it easier to learn
- Helps build children's confidence

By incorporating a variety of story-reading strategies as you build in reading and storytelling throughout the daily schedule, and by providing an inviting, cozy space and interesting book-reading materials, you can open a new world for young children by stimulating their thinking and imagination, which will ensure their language and literacy learning and their later success as competent readers and writers.

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## Important Interaction Strategies for Infant-Toddler Caregivers

- Make storytime optional for infants and toddlers. If they are interested, they will join in.
- Consider children's abilities and preferences.
- Keep all story groups small and intimate.
- Familiarize yourself with a book before reading it with children.
- Enjoy reading and engaging children in the stories you read and tell.
- Read a wide variety of books.
- Involve children before, during, and after the reading.
- Use props from time to time.
- Follow children's lead.
- Repeat stories that children are interested in hearing over and over again that
  - Immerse children in language of the story, making it easier to learn
  - Help build children's confidence
  - Enable children to build more comprehension with each successive reading
  - Strengthen and reinforce the neural connections in children's brains
  - Improve children's vocabulary, sequencing, and memory skills
  - Increase the possibility that toddlers will be able to repeat the book on their own afterward
  - Encourage toddlers to reenact their favorite stories
- Use a natural voice.
- Use children's names in stories.
- Talk with children about feelings depicted in stories.
- Practice by reading with expression.
- Sing a story.
- Make simple comments about pictures in the story.
- Connect the stories to children's lives.
- Encourage conversations about the stories.

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## Recommended List of Young Children's Books

### Infants:

*B is for Bear*, by Roger Priddy  
*Baby Born*, by Anastasia Suen  
*Baby's First Book*, by Clare Beaton  
*Baby Faces Peek-A-Boo!*, by Roberta Grobel Intrater  
*Baby Faces Smile!*, by Roberta Grobel Intrater  
*Big Fat Hen*, by Keith Baker  
*Bouncing*, by Shirley Hughes  
*Brian Wildsmith's ABC*, by Brian Wildsmith  
*Busy Toes*, by C. W. Bowie  
*Busy Fingers*, by C. W. Bowie  
*Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*, by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault  
*Clap Hands*, by Helen Oxenbury  
*Cow Says Moo*, by Shulamit Serfaty  
*Ernie and Bert Can...Can you?*, Sesame Street  
*Eye Winker, Tom Tinker, Chin Chopper*, by Tom Glazer  
*Friends*, by Helme Heine  
*Goodnight Moon*, by Margaret Wise Brown  
*Here Are My Hands*, by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault  
*Hush, Little Ones*, by John Butler  
*I Love Animals*, by Flora McDonnell  
*I See*, by Helen Oxenbury  
*I Went Walking*, by Sue Williams  
*Love You Forever*, by Robert Munsch  
*Messy Baby*, by Felicity Brooks  
*My First Mother Goose*, by Tomie dePaola  
*My House*, by Lisa Desimini  
*Museum Colors*, by The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
*Play With Me*, by Marie Hall Ets  
*Read Aloud Rhymes for the Very Young*, by Jack Prelutsky  
*Sleep, Sleep, Sleep: A Lullaby for Little Ones Around the World*, by Nancy Van Laan  
*Sleepyhead*, by Karma Wilson  
*The Baby's Lap Book*, by Kay Chorao  
*The Noisy Book*, by Margaret Wise Brown  
*The Runaway Bunny*, by Margaret Wise Brown  
*Time for Bed*, by Mem Fox  
*Tomie DePaola's Mother Goose*, by Tomie dePaola  
*What Does Baby See?*, by Denise Lewis Patrick

### Toddlers:

*All About Me*, by DK Publishing  
*All by Myself*, by Mercer Mayer  
*Best Word Book Ever*, by Richard Scarry  
*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*, by Bill Martin Jr.  
*Clifford, The Big Red Dog*, by Norman Bridwell  
*Cookie's Week*, by Cindy Ward  
*Dancing Feet*, by Lindsey Craig  
*De Colores and Other Latin-American Folk Songs for Children*, by Jose-Luis Orozco  
*Dimity Dumpty: The Story of Humpty's Little Sister*, by Bob Graham  
*Eat Up, Gemma*, by Sarah Hayes  
*Finger Rhymes*, by Marc Brown  
*Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, by Eileen Christelow  
*Freight Train*, by Donald Crews  
*Goodnight Gorilla*, by Peggy Rathmann  
*Have You Seen My Duckling?*, by Nancy Tafuri  
*Hunky Dory Ate It*, by Katie Evans  
*If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*, by Laura Joffe Numeroff  
*Is Your Mama a Llama?*, by Deborah Guarino  
*Jamberry*, by Bruce Degen  
*Jesse Bear, What Will You Wear?*, by Nancy White Carlstrom  
*Jump, Frog, Jump!*, by Robert Kalan  
*Mama, Do You Love Me?* by Barbara M. Joosse  
*Max's Bath*, by Rosemary Wells  
*"More, More, More" Said the Baby*, by Vera B. Williams  
*Mouse Paint*, by Ellen Stoll Walsh  
*On the Day I Was Born*, by Deborah M. Newton Chocolate  
*Peepo!*, by Janet Ahlberg  
*Peter's Chair*, by Ezra Jack Keats  
*Seven Blind Mice*, by Ed Young  
*Sheep in a Jeep*, by Nancy Shaw  
*Stellaluna*, by Janell Cannon  
*Ten in a Bed*, by Allan Ahlberg  
*Ten, Nine, Eight*, by Molly Bang  
*Boyage to the Bunny Planet*, by Rosemary Wells  
*The Little Red Hen*, by Byron Barton  
*The Very Quiet Cricket*, by Eric Carle  
*The Wheels on the Bus*, by Annie Kubler  
*Toddlerobics*, by Zita Newcome  
*Wait Till the Moon Is Full*, by Margaret Wise Brown  
*Will I Have a Friend?* by Miriam Cohen

## TRAINER TO TRAINER

# Reading and Storytelling With Infants and Toddlers

BY SHANNON LOCKHART

This two-hour workshop is designed to inform participants about the importance of reading and building language literacy learning through reading and storytelling with infants and toddlers. The objectives of this workshop are that participants will be able to (1) discuss the importance of reading with infants and toddlers, (2) identify strategies for building relationships with infants and toddlers through reading and storytelling, and (3) turn everyday events into storytelling experiences.

*What you will need:*

- Copies of this issue's lead article
- Family magazines
- Copies of this issue's "Classroom Hints," article with list of strategies for supporting reading
- Examples of children's books
- Recommended list of young children's books



### Opening Activity

#### 1) Sharing Early Stories and Experiences (10 minutes)

- A. Have participants share stories about the following:
- People they remember being close to as a young child
  - Experiences they remember having as a young child
  - Words they remember learning as a young child

- B. After participants have had time to talk about their stories, discuss their responses with the whole group and summarize with "Our understandings and memories of stories and experiences are intimately tied into how we learn language."

### Central Ideas and Practice

#### 2) Three Keys to Language Learning (10 minutes)

- A. Discuss the three keys to language learning from the lead article. Children learn through
1. *Interpersonal experiences* — discuss the ways language development grows through communication (see this issue's feature article).
  2. *Sensory-motor experiences* — discuss the ways language development grows through experience.
  3. *Vocabulary-rich environments* — discuss the ways language development thrives in vocabulary-rich environments.
- B. Summarize by saying that book reading is one of the easiest ways to support language learning in very young children. Tell participants that, in this workshop, they will be learning strategies for supporting reading and storytelling with infants and toddlers. Talk about how storytelling is another fun way of engaging young children in early literacy learning.

#### 3) Beloved Books (15 minutes)

- A. Have each participant find a partner with whom to discuss the following questions about his or her experiences with books as a child:
- What books do you remember from your childhood?
  - Why do you think you remember these specific books?
  - What about these books made them memorable?
- B. Record participants' answers on chart paper and discuss how their preferences or favorite times were tied to some experience or ritual established with a special person (e.g., parent, grandparent, sibling, neighbor, etc). Stories often become memorable because of the story content; some quality of the illustration (pictures); repetition of phrases or words in the story; relationship with the person reading the story; or how the story is read. Discuss other connections that made the books memorable to them. Summarize by saying "These are experiences that we



want our young children to have. Repetition is perhaps the most important aspect of book reading. Children love to hear and read the same story over and over again, to learn and internalize its content.”

#### 4) Benefits of Listening to Stories and Reading Aloud

(10 minutes)

- A. Review the benefits of listening to stories and reading aloud from this issue’s “Classroom Hints” article. Say “Children love to hear stories about themselves and about what has happened to or is happening to them. When we tell stories that include their names and personal details about them, we engage their imaginations, connect personal relationships to actual events, and strengthen their understanding of language. Plus, it is just fun and pleasurable for all!”
- B. Say “Another way to support early literacy is through story telling.” Discuss with participants how storytelling is not hard — that making up stories can come straight from what teachers and children do every day or from everyday events. Remind participants that the important thing to remember is to make the stories personal by including children’s names, pictures of children, and details about children’s personal background.
- Share the following with participants:

*In one particular childcare home, there is a fish tank with a few colorful fish in it. Every day, children gather as the fish are fed. They watch the fish move to the top of the tank to take food and float back down again. Some children watch the bubbles from the filter. The children make comments about feeding the fish and how their mouths move. One of the children waves to the goldfish as it gulps the food particles. One day, Sharon, the provider, had an idea to capture what children were experiencing and the conversations that were triggered by simply feeding fish. She took a photograph of the fish feeding event and glued it to a piece of paper. Now, as children watch and converse each day, Sharon writes down children’s words and utterances that describe the feeding event. She shares it with the children when they read stories! The storytelling then begins! When we tell stories and children tune in, we are promoting listening skills!*

#### 5) Practice Making Up Stories (20 minutes)

- A. Discuss how to make up stories by using magazine pictures. Have participant groups do the following:
- Using the pictures from magazines, choose a picture or series of pictures that would interest young children.

- Discuss what information you can share with children about this picture(s).
  - Make up a story about the picture that includes a child you know.
- B. Have participant groups share their stories and discuss their reactions about this way of storytelling with infants and toddlers.

#### 6) Strategies for Supporting Reading With Infants and Toddlers (30 minutes)

- A. Present “Important Interaction Strategies for Infant-Toddler Caregivers” from the “Classroom Hints” article. (*Note:* Have participants use children’s books for part B, below). Emphasize the following two key points:
- Have a cozy place to read.
  - Build reading and storytelling into your routine. Be sure to point out that all other physical needs of children should be taken care of first in order for children to listen and enjoy the stories (e.g., change children’s diapers, feed infants).
- B. After reviewing the strategies, have participants pair up and choose children’s books to read to each other as if they were reading to a child. Have them use the caregiver interaction strategies reviewed in part A, above. Once everyone has had a turn, have them answer the following questions and discuss them as a whole group when everyone is done:
- What did you notice about your own skills when reading?
  - What strategies did you use?
  - What are your likes and dislikes about reading aloud to children? How will you work with/around these when reading to children?
  - Refer participants to the list of recommended books for young children from the “Classroom Hints” article.

### Application Activity

#### 7) Looking at Your Own Book Area and Books (15 minutes)

Have groups discuss the following questions about their book area and books in comparison to the strategies covered in this workshop. After 10 minutes, discuss with the entire group.

- What are the strengths of your book area?
- What adjustments would you make to your book area?
- What are the strengths of your children’s book collection?
- How can you use the books you do have as deeply as possible?

- What kinds of books would you like to add to your collection?
- Where can you find the books you want to add, and how can you get them?

## Implementation Plan

### 8) Reflecting on Key Questions (10 minutes)

Have participants individually answer the following questions using the information from the Application Activity. When they are done, ask for volunteers to share their plans.

- What changes do you want to make to your book area?
- What adult support strategies will you begin using when reading books with your children?
- How will you incorporate reading and storytelling into your daily routine?

## NEWS BRIEFS

### Schweinhart Receives MAISA Award

On June 21, HighScope President Dr. Larry Schweinhart received the Education Fellows Award from the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) at the MAISA summer conference held at the Lexington Hotel in Lansing, Michigan. According to MAISA director of Operations Mandy J. Diroff, the award is given each year to an individual or individuals who, among other qualities, places service above self interest; advocates for the programs and services of public education, and has shown leadership on behalf of public education or performs public service on behalf of MAISA, intermediate school districts, or K–12 education.

### HighScope Expanding in Lincoln Consolidated Schools

The current HighScope elementary program will be expanding in Southeast Michigan's Lincoln Consolidated School district in 2012–13. In addition to the multiage classes currently offered, "looping" classrooms will be added. Lincoln Elementary students from all buildings will be able to enroll in this program. In a looping classroom, students attend a single-grade classroom in which a teacher spends two years with the same group of students. By getting to know how each student learns, how they retain information, and what motivates them, teachers and students develop relationships that help students succeed.

Lincoln has had one elementary multiage school using the HighScope methodology for 18 years. This fall they will be able to add 250+ students, which will accommodate their waiting list and additional elementary students. This year, HighScope will be providing training for the Elementary Approach for one week in August and continue mentoring throughout the year.

### Barbara Rome and Margaret Fullerton Receive the David WEIKART Award

At a luncheon during the annual HighScope International Conference in May, the HighScope Educational Research Foundation presented the David Weikart Achievement Award to Barbara Rome, Toledo, Ohio, and Margaret Fullerton, Belfast, Ireland.

The award is given annually to a person outside of the HighScope staff who the Foundation feels has demonstrated exemplary dedication to HighScope's vision and mission. This dedication may be

continued next page

## ASK US

BY J. GARCIA

***We have a parent who is concerned about her son because he is not talking yet and he is two years old. He says a word here or there, but is mostly pointing to things he wants. She wants us to start getting him to speak by informing him that if he does not use his words, then he will not get what he wants. I am uncomfortable doing this, and I would like to know what strategies we could use to support his language development without forcing him to talk.***

— A Preschool Teacher

You have a valid concern. We never want to force children or punish them for their language skills. We always want to meet children at their current level of development, and support and scaffold their increasing abilities. First of all, in general, boys tend to speak later than girls do, but there may be other development happening too. When young children are ready to use language, there are typically two ways this occurs. Some young children experiment with language by "babbling" — using sounds and words whether they make sense or not. They just talk, talk, talk! This is their way of learning to understand letter sounds, syllables, words, and sentence structure. However, there are the other, more cautious children who take it all in by observing and listening and then just blurting out full phrases or sentences at some point. Both types of language learning are equally valid and valuable to children's learning. However, there are some strategies that we can use to help support those children who tend to be more nonverbal before they actually begin to use words and sentences to communicate.

One way is through the use of sign language. Some parents are concerned about using sign language with their children because they think their child will not talk. Research proves otherwise. In fact, the research shows that children learn more words at an earlier age than nonsigning children (Garcia, J. 2001). Signing with infants and toddlers allows them to communicate with us at a time in their lives when their language abilities are not yet developed. Signing also helps prevent children from becoming frustrated because of miscommunication.

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## NEWS BRIEFS (continued)

exhibited through excellence in their training activities, superior implementation of the HighScope Curriculum in their setting, or outstanding leadership in their community which has resulted in a high-quality experience for the children they serve. This year, two people were chosen for the award.

Ms. Rome has worked with Head Start for almost 45 years. In the beginning she went door-to-door recruiting children for the Head Start program. She and her team transported children to get their immunizations and other medical services. Before many people knew and understood the concept of active learning, Ms. Rome practiced it by taking the children she taught on field trips so she could teach them about their world in a concrete way. Ms. Rome became a HighScope Certified Trainer in 1986. She has trained teachers in several states and in Washington, D.C. She is currently the Curriculum Supervisor for the E.O.P.A. Toledo-Lucas County Head Start Program.

Margaret Fullerton is a qualified teacher in both primary and secondary education and serves as the HighScope Consultant Trainer at HighScope Ireland. As a HighScope trainer she has worked since 1994 delivering HighScope training in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. In addition, in her current role, Margaret provides strategic support for HighScope and all the quality initiatives of the Early Years Organization, where HighScope Ireland, a nonprofit organization, is based.

### OnlineCOR Mobile App Available for Download

The OnlineCOR Mobile App is now available to download from the iTunes or Android Market stores. Here's what you need to do to use the mobile app:

***Prior to using the OnlineCOR Mobile App, a PIN number will need to be established for users***

- From Administrator access, click on classroom name, then select "Manage."
- Click on "Manage Users."
- Check box next to staff member name, then select "edit."
- Staff info will appear; scroll down to bottom of page and enter desired PIN number (the PIN is numeric values only).
- Share PIN number with staff member—this PIN will be required when staff use a mobile application.

continued next page

## ASK US (continued)

Another way is to use language yourself throughout the day by labeling and saying the words for objects that this child is pointing to or wanting. Use the words in full sentences as well so he is hearing sentence structure along with sounds of letters and words. When he chooses to use a word, repeat and restate his words in sentence structure so he can hear the whole language. Engaging him in nursery rhymes, finger plays, and songs will also encourage use of language and show him that you can have fun with language too. A language enriched environment is only going to encourage infants and toddlers to communicate using any language skills they have.

Garcia, J. (2001). Sign with your baby. Sign2Me: Seattle, WA, and Stratton Kehl Publications, Inc.: Bellingham, WA.

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## NEWS BRIEFS (continued)

### **Next, Download the app**

OnlineCOR Mobile (search words for iTunes or Android Marketplace <https://play.google.com/store>: **OnlineCOR Mobile**)

While connected to a wireless hotspot, sync the app with OnlineCOR.net and select the site(s) and classroom(s) you wish to work with. (User access to site and classroom data is limited by the user's ID and password just as when using OnlineCOR.)

Teachers will be able to collect anecdotes when offline using an iPad\* or Android\*\* device.

Benefits include:

- Offers a time-saving, easy-to-use device to collect notes that can be used anywhere (outdoors, without Internet connection, etc.)
- With iPad 2 or higher or Android devices with an integrated camera, photos may be taken and added to the student profile
- Child Tally Sheet is available on mobile device to monitor anecdotes entered since the last sync session.
- Staff may determine when they wish to upload data to online program

\*Requirements for iOS devices: iPad device with iOS 4.0+, PIN, iTunes account, access to wireless hotspot to sync data.

\*\*Requirements for Android devices: Android device running version 3.0 or higher, PIN, access to wireless hotspot to sync data.

Questions? Call OnlineCOR Technical Support at 888.386.3822 Option 5 (Monday – Friday 8:00 – 5:30 pm)

### **HighScope Establishes Center for Early Education Evaluation**

HighScope has reorganized its research department and established the *Center for Early Education Evaluation at HighScope*. The mission of the Center is to facilitate conversations among researchers and evaluators in the early childhood field in order to help administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders understand how evaluation can inform decision making and advocacy. One of the primary goals of the Center is to further emphasize the importance of evaluation in education, in addition to activities traditionally thought of as research.

“Independence in evaluation is extremely important to the credibility of the research,” noted Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, Director of the Center. While the HighScope research group has worked independently

from the rest of the organization, both in function and in funding sources, this move will, in part, result in the further separation of the research function from other activities at HighScope, although the Center will still be housed and legally a part of the not-for-profit organization.

Research and evaluation have always been central to the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. HighScope's signature Perry Preschool Study set the standard for evaluative research on early childhood programs. The IEA Preprimary Project, the Training for Quality Study, the Curriculum Comparison Study, the Great Start Readiness Program Evaluation, and other HighScope studies have also shaped the early childhood field. HighScope's development and validation of the Child Observation Record (COR), and the Program Quality Assessment (PQA) has shaped early childhood assessment. The Early Literacy Skills Assessment and the Ready Schools Assessment round out the evaluation tools HighScope has developed and are currently in use in pre-K and elementary schools, respectively.

“One of the Center's goals will be to help early childhood programs move toward a more integrated system of early childhood evaluation which will foster collaboration not only at the program level, but amongst researchers and evaluators,” said HighScope President, Dr. Lawrence Schweinhart.

The Center will name a five member advisory panel made up of scholars and researchers in the field of early childhood education. The advisory panel will connect throughout the year, but will meet annually. The panel will provide guidance helping the Center develop and meet its goals.

“One of the initiatives of the new Center will be to present an annual conference to bring together local, regional, and national-level evaluators, researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders who use evaluations for decision making and advocacy,” noted Dr. Wakabayashi. The first annual conference, co-sponsored this year by the Michigan Department of Education, will be held in Dearborn, Michigan, on October 5, 2012. Participants will include evaluators from pre-K initiatives, such as the Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP), in Michigan, Head Start and Early Head Start, Home Visiting, and other early childhood interventions and initiatives.

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