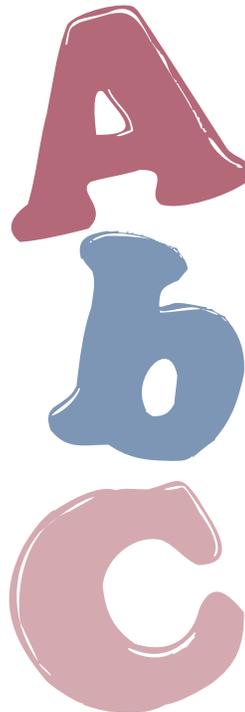


Encouraging Language Acquisition in Young Children

Early childhood educators need to plan and implement a play-based program that provides children with opportunities to test and communicate their ideas and feelings, and to talk about experiences that are meaningful and relevant to them. Teachers must provide a playroom that is rich in print. By using books, posters, signs, labels and by writing down what children say, we can help children understand that “what can be said can be written, and what can be written can be read.” Here are some ideas for enhancing the language skills of the children in your program:

- Photos are a meaningful way to enhance children’s language. For example, children can use a Polaroid camera to create a book called *Round Things* by taking pictures of round objects found both inside and outside the child care setting. Photos can also be used to show what happens in the playroom on a typical day.
- If you cannot afford to take pictures on a regular basis, ask the children to bring in old photographs from home. Present these photos in a book format and record the children’s comments. Leave it in the book centre for the children to share.
- Children can also create books using photographs from old magazines and catalogues. Print the appropriate text in large letters underneath each picture.
- Pick a familiar big book that is a group favourite. Write the text on large pieces of construction paper and have the children create their own illustrations. Assemble the pages with a large ring and have each child read his/her own page. Keep the book in the book area for easy reference or for reading to parents. Tape the children’s oral reading of the book and make this available to everyone.
- Celebrate **Canadian Children’s Book Week** (usually the second week in November). As a group, write to favourite authors and illustrators and ask them to visit your centre. Invite a reporter or publisher to talk to the children, or organize a trip to a book binding factory or an animator’s studio.



- Leave “happy letters” in the children’s cubbies for them to discover when they arrive at the child care centre or send notes home with each child that celebrate his/her accomplishments.
- Four- and five-year-olds are just beginning to “get” jokes. Make up silly riddles, tongue twisters and rhymes, and record them in print. Create silly dinosaur names such as *Sarhsaurus* and *Mariosaurus Rex*.
- Travelling suitcases are a wonderful way to encourage reading and language development. Children can sign up to take home suitcases developed by teachers to encourage parent/child interaction. For example, one suitcase might contain the book *Little Red Riding Hood*, a red hooded cape, a wicker basket, some plastic food, a wolf puppet and a tape of the story.
- Help children create their own props for dramatic play such as tickets for the bus, menus for the restaurant and prescriptions for sick babies. Also let children make their own birthday and get well cards.
- Provide prop bags so that children can create their own adventures. Have the children create prop bags using items found on nature walks or within the classroom. Let an interested child take his/her prop bag to the toddler room and tell a story. The children might even like to perform their “bag stories” for parents at the end of the day.
- Tell a “clothes-line” story, pinning up characters and key pieces of the story as you go along. After the story is finished, leave the props so that the children can experiment with them.
- Remember the power of storytelling. Invite parents and grandparents to share stories from their childhoods. Perhaps a local elder can tell stories about your community. Set the scene by creating a special storytelling area.