

Every Child a Talker Every Adult Involved

Developing language and involvement through small world play and sharing storybooks

Young children, and especially those aged 2 to 3 years, are beginning to use language to express ideas, as well as meet their needs. They are also beginning to learn a lot from each other. They show more involvement if there is a balance between child- initiated and adult-led /supported/supervised activities. One of the ways that adults can support expression of ideas is through sharing books, and particularly simple stories. But how to sustain children's interest, and especially when working with a small group, in a 'free-flow' environment, without making the activity too structured and adult-led?

One way is to introduce toys that feature in a story, before sharing the story. For example, you have planned to share a story about farm animals. You will need a bag full of soft farm animal toys or puppets, a bag of small plastic farm animals, a large cloth, and your story book. NB. This activity works best if two adults are involved. If you do it on your own, you will find that most of your language will be 'managing language' rather than interaction. If you know that children learning English as a second language will be involved, it will be helpful to find out how to say some of the key words in the story in their home language. (You can find this out from parents or other practitioners).

Encourage the children to take the soft toys out of the bag one at a time, and talk about what they have found, what noises they make, etc. This is the adult-led part. Let the children play with the toys, and talk to each other. This is the adult-supervised part.

Then take over again, by asking the children to sit in a circle and close their eyes. Hide the toys under a large cloth. When the children open their eyes they can take turns to feel under the cloth, and take out an animal of their choice. Talk about what they have found. Let the children play with the toys again. Now put the soft toys to one side and introduce the bag of small plastic farm animals. Let the children take them out one by one, play with them, hide them under the cloth and play with them again.

By this time some children may want to move away, but some may want to look at the pictures in the storybook, and others will want to share the whole story. If you are telling the story, it helps to let children know that you expect them to stay and join in with the whole story. It helps to keep the story very brief, perhaps just commenting on the pictures. Individual children may want to stay and share the whole story. Try following up a session like this with an activity in the creative area; e.g. making a farm using plasticene, play dough, colouring with large felt pens etc.

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