

Small Groups for Language, Cognitive and Personal Development

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A small group consists of one adult and 3 to 6 children who routinely meet together with the same membership. The goal of each activity is for all children to spontaneously initiate statements on the topic of the group. Each activity should have a warm-up time before you start when you just listen to the children, then an engagement device to attract their attention to the activity, and, at the end, a closing statement that conveys the fun you had doing this. The leader groups children by their "level of blabber" — the quietest together and the most talkative together.

Wordless and Pattern Picture Story Books

When you select books with a story line clearly depicted through the illustrations, understanding the story is not dependent upon the text. The goal is for the children tell the story themselves and participate in the repetitive pattern. The second time is usually better than the first. Adults use the **Eliciting Method** convention: (a) model the statement you desire from the children, (b) wait at least 5 seconds for children to initiate similar kinds of statements, and (c) respond warmly to comments that are on the topic.

Transformation Experiences

Present a science activity where an easily observable change occurs. The convention here is to name all the equipment you present because the children need to have the vocabulary to talk about what they are about to experience. Then ask two types of questions which call upon the children to describe what they see and predict what will happen. What do you see? What is happening? What will happen? What will it look like? If the transformation occurs over time, such as placing celery in colored water, you can record their predictions to review later.

add water to dry ice

add salt to ice

insulate bottles of warm water

combine oil and water and color

combine carbonated water and raisins

filter muddy water

try flashlights and colors of cellophane

plant seeds in zip-locks with wet towels

combine colors on flat spinning tops

mix gelatin

blow things with an electric fan

lower a small open bottle of warm colored water into a large bottle of cold water

sprinkle pepper on the surface of plate of water, wet finger, rub on soap and touch the water surface;

draw lines on a spinning turntable

draw with fluorescent crayons or paint and illuminate with black light

combine room temperature cream, food color, and drops of detergent

fill bottles with different levels of water and tap them with a spoon

blow bubbles outside on a freezing day

put white flowers in colored water

slide ice, wood, rubber down a ramp

Natural Progression Experiences

Present a real item that the children are familiar with that has a sequence of use that the children already know. An example is wrapping paper; the children know exactly what to do with it and what else one needs in order to wrap a present. The adult brings those associated items, such as transparent tape, scissors, ribbons, etc., and wrong items, too, such as a hammer. These are kept in a bag or a box out of sight. The adult keeps control of all materials. The adult does the progression as told by the children. The game is to elicit from the children what is natural to do with the item all the way to the end, including cleanup, if necessary.

For example, for adhesive bandages natural progression activity, present a box of adhesive bandages and have a sack containing masking tape, scissors and a table knife ready to use as needed. Simply present the box and provide all the vocabulary you can "This is the lid, hinge, face, and top." Let the children initiate how to get the box open. If they don't, try to get it open with a table knife and they will soon tell you how to do it right. Follow their lead, doing what naturally occurs with adhesive bandages, opening the covering, pulling off the adhesive protection papers, putting it on one's arm or hand, but at each stage, the children must describe what to do before you do it. You are the only one with the bandage through all the steps until it is fully complete. Then the children could have their own ones to open. But if you give them something to do with their hands, they are less likely to talk.

opening any package, box or container

applying a bandage

washing or cleaning anything

making tea

opening a can

mailing a letter

putting in batteries

squeezing juice

preparing fruit or vegetables

polishing shoes

making a sandwich

sewing a button

dressing a doll

pumping up a ball

blowing bubbles

planting bulbs or seeds

making toast

operating a known device

Routine Walkabout

Every week take the group on an exploration trip of the inside or outside environment, looking for something planned for only 5 to 10 minutes. (a) plan -set a goal for the walkabout; (b) do -collect ideas, observations, or objects or actually gather things, write down the ideas of children or the children can write or draw their ideas-somehow bring their observations back to the classroom; (c) represent -recall the experience orally, artistically, mathematically, or in writing.

Examples: Find things that are ____, or are not ____ noisy, move, grow, big, wet, the wind blows, you can pick up, scary, new, beautiful, made for our safety, out of place, need fixing. Collect objects: leaves, trash, flowers, rocks, weeds, classify, label or graph.