

Dramatic Play and Language



Why is dramatic play so important?

Play is a natural context for children’s language development and the play that has the most profound effect on language and literacy is **dramatic play**. In dramatic play, children try out new ways of combining thought and language. Since dramatic play is symbolic in nature it can provide a “bridge” to printed language. Talking with children about their play has been associated with later reading and writing development, and enhances children’s comprehension of stories through “re-enactment”. Furthermore, **children’s language is enhanced when adults and older children scaffold their play.**

Play is a set of behaviors that are:

- Freely chosen
- Personally directed
- Spontaneous
- Intrinsically motivated
- Open-ended
- Creative

Dramatic play and role playing promote ongoing language development by teaching both younger and older children to:

- Communicate ideas
- Tell stories
- Reciprocate by listening
- Respond to ideas and activities
- Solve problems
- Describe current activities
- Practice a sequence or longer narrative

“As we learn more about how children play, it is becoming clear that we do not need to sacrifice play in order to meet academic requirements. On the contrary, only by supporting mature, high-quality play can we really help children fully develop their language and literacy skills.”

– Deborah J. Leong, Ph.D., Elena Bodrova, Ph.D,



How can play be encouraged and supported in the classroom?

Props can give dramatic play great influence on language development. **Phone props** encourage children to use specific words and intonations to get their point across. Studies have shown that the use of phone props by children resulted in an overall increase in oral participation, longer sentences and a more mature use of language. **Writing tools** and paper encourage children to incorporate writing into their play. **Books** and magazines can promote reading during dramatic play.

Other ways to raise the student's level of dramatic play include:



- Expand the repertoire of play themes and roles by exposing children to new and varied experiences. This can be done through the use of field trips, guest speakers, and sharing storybooks.
- Help children use appropriate strategies in planning their play with their playmates. This can include making sure children know the roles they are playing, the scenario and the props they will use.
- Help children see different uses for familiar props and create new props. Encourage children to use unstructured materials, make their own props or even pretend they have a prop when they do not.
- Older students can continue to use dramatic role playing to deepen their understanding of stories, books and units they are studying.

Happy Play and Playful Learning!

Adapted from the following Sources:

- **Kathryn White**, eHow Contributor, Dramatic Play & Language Development, www.ehow.com
- **Janette Pelletier**, Supporting Early Language and Literacy, What Works? Research into Practice, Research Monograph #37, OISE, University of Toronto
- **Deborah J. Leong & Elena Bodrova**, Building Language and Literacy Through Play, Scholastic.com
- **Jeannette Eadie, Speech-Language Pathologist**, Co-Planning Dramatic Play Centres In the Kindergarten-Early Learning Program Classroom, Presentation, DPCDSB, 2011