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Tutoring Strategies for Preschool and Kindergarten

Overview

Three- to Five-Year-Olds Assimilate Language Rapidly

Children learn at an amazing rate during the preschool and kindergarten years. Nowhere is this more apparent for most children than in their acquisition of language. Vocabulary expands, and with it the child's capacity to gain both oral and written language skills. Children enhance their literacy abilities by listening and speaking, reading (or being read to), and by writing to practice making marks on paper and to put their thoughts on paper (themselves or by dictating to an adult).

Talking

Talking with children helps them to increase their vocabulary, express their ideas and creativity, and to develop a relationship with the tutor. Talking, particularly when linked with a related literacy activity such as reading aloud, enables children to grasp the interplay between oral and print forms of language. Conversation sends a clear message to the child, "I'm interested in you and think you are important." Talking can be a part of many activities and projects, including walking to and from the tutoring session.

Reading

Reading aloud should be part of every tutoring session with a preschool or kindergarten child. Read-aloud times can allow a tutor to dramatize the story, pictures, and characters in ways that will make them come alive to the child. By this means, the tutor conveys to the youngster the magic and excitement that inspires the tutor to love reading. Dramatic reading enhances the child's ability to derive meaning from the story as well as increasing the shared sense of fun.

In this chapter

Training Sessions 4, 5, and 6:

- Training Session 4. Talking with Children
- Training Session 5. Reading Aloud
- Training Session 6. Writing with Children

Writing

Children go through predictable stages as they develop the motor and mental skills that lead them to conventional writing. **Early scribbling** occurs when the child first grasps a crayon and makes random marks on paper. **Controlled scribbling** occurs as the child discovers he or she can control the marks to explore different techniques. A child in the **basic forms stage** might do scribble writing, making horizontal, linear scribbles across the page as if they were actual words. The **pictorial stage** is when a child can combine marks and basic forms to make pictures and letters that look “real.” By this point, the child has come to understand the symbolic meaning of pictures and words. While many preschool and kindergarten children are at the pictorial stage, some are at an earlier stage. The tutor’s role is to help them progress from wherever they are.

What Tutors Need to Know

Tutors, to be successful, need to be attuned to the child’s learning rhythms so as to nurture, and not disrupt, the natural process of language acquisition. This calls for tutors to:

- Listen so children will talk (active listening) and talk so children will listen;
- Be sensitive to the child’s feelings and aware of body language and other forms of nonverbal communication;
- Practice positive reinforcement and foster the child’s motivation; and
- Use proven techniques to promote the child’s reading and writing skills.

The primary purpose of the three training sessions in this chapter is to convey basic concepts and techniques of how tutors can talk, read, and write with three- to five-year-olds. In addition, the sessions underscore the interrelationships among talking, reading, and writing. They point out the importance of the tutor creating the proper conditions of learning and nurturing the child’s motivation throughout the series of tutoring sessions.

Training Session 4. Talking with Children (3 hours)

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, tutors will:

- Understand the conditions of learning and practical steps to create them;
- Be aware of the critical role motivation plays in learning and how to influence the child's attitudes about literacy; and
- Be able to employ more effective ways of talking with children, taking into account language and cultural diversity and the abilities of children with special needs.

Basic Concepts

The concepts highlighted in this section are:

- Children first learn to listen and speak, then use these and other skills to explore reading and writing;
- Children who have many opportunities to use oral language tend to become skilled readers and writers; and
- Through play, social interactions, and other daily experiences, most children gradually learn the connections between spoken and written words.

Tutor Reading

The following information will be useful for tutors to review prior to or following the tutoring session:

- *On the Road to Reading*, Chapter 3, "How Tutors Can Support Young Readers." Pay special attention to the guidance on Incorporate Conditions of Learning (pages 26-27) and Motivating Children to Read (pages 29-30). Skim Tutoring Strategies for Preschool and Kindergarten (pages 31-36).

Trainer Preparation

Prior to the session, the trainer should:

- 1** *Review* *On the Road to Reading*, Chapter 3, “How Tutors Can Support Young Readers.” Also review *READY★SET★READ FOR CAREGIVERS*, paying special attention to the section, “Using Language to Learn: Activities for Preschoolers (3 to 5 Years Old).” For programs serving children whose home language is Spanish, Spanish versions of the *READY★SET★READ* booklets are available (see Appendix A). See description of the *READY★SET★READ Early Childhood Learning Kit* in *On the Road to Reading* (page 73).
- 2** Develop and copy handouts for each tutor, including:
 - Agenda for the training session;
 - Evaluation handout.
- 3** Coordinate planning with any other trainers. Recruit tutor volunteers to peer train in Activity #1 and #2.
- 4** Arrange for the training facility, room layout, and logistics, including audiovisual equipment.
- 5** Notify all participants of the date, time, place, and topic of the session.
- 6** Prepare overhead transparencies and handouts.
- 7** Arrange for displays of information on talking with children and on diverse languages and cultures.

Materials Needed

The overheads and handouts for Training Session 4 are:

- *Transparency #15, Conditions of Learning*
- *Transparency #16, Motivating Children*
- *Transparency #17, Listening and Talking*
- *Transparency #18, Language Differences*
- *Transparency #19, Special Needs*
- *Handout #1, Evaluation Form*
- *Handout #5, Activities for Children Aged 3–5*

Activity #1**Prerequisites to Learning****Activity #1**

- Give a mini-lecture on the conditions of learning and other factors that influence the child's motivation, highlighting the information in *Transparency #15, Conditions of Learning* and *Transparency #16, Motivating Children*.
- Ask for three volunteers to comment for 5–7 minutes each on motivation and related issues from the perspective of their ongoing work with children.
- Ask tutors to form small groups of three to five. Have each group brainstorm ways to improve conditions of learning and enhance children's motivation.
- Have small groups report to the full group by highlighting suggestions that might be widely applicable.

Activity #2**READY SET READ Listening and Talking****Activity #2**

- Give a mini-lecture on ways to use the activities and ideas for talking and listening with preschoolers three to five years old, in *READY★SET★READ FOR CAREGIVERS*, using *Transparency #17, Listening and Talking* and *Handout #5, Activities for Children Aged 3–5*.
- Ask a peer trainer to model talking and listening with preschool or kindergarten children, either in a live demonstration with children or through videotapes.
- Lead a group discussion on use of the techniques in the booklet and in the demonstration. Encourage all participants to discuss the pros and cons of various approaches and the applicability to the children whom they are tutoring. Emphasize proven techniques, such as:
 - Elaborate on the child's comments using correct language, rather than correcting the child.
 - Express your own ideas or ask open-ended questions that keep the discussion alive—avoid “conversation stoppers” such as questions that call for “yes/no” or similar one-word responses.

Activity #3
Language Differences
and Special Needs

Activity #3

- Give a mini-lecture on the importance of using appropriate approaches for talking and listening with children whose home language is other than English and with children with learning disabilities or other special needs. Use *Transparency #18, Language Differences* and *Transparency #19, Special Needs*.
- Have tutors form small groups of three to five. Ask the small groups to discuss their experiences tutoring children with diverse language backgrounds and special needs, and brainstorm successful strategies and tutoring approaches.
- Have small groups report to the full group by sharing techniques that appear to be generally applicable. Lead a full group discussion on “where do we go from here” in improving tutoring. Explore:
 - Are these topics that will require further in-depth treatment in future training sessions?
 - Does the tutoring program need to reach out to other community partners with expertise on these topics?

Debriefing

Discuss the following questions with the group:

- What tutoring approaches are appropriate for responding to language diversity and special needs?
- What are the keys to talking and listening with young children that will reinforce the child’s motivation and stimulate a love of learning?

Tutor Follow Up

Suggested follow-up activities for tutors:

- Review the tutoring plans for children with special needs and those whose home language is other than English to ensure that the tutoring complements other learning activities in which the children participate, including what goes on at home. Ensure that the tutor’s tool box contains adequate materials tailored to the child’s individual characteristics and learning needs. Discuss any revision in tutoring plans with your supervisor, reading specialist, or other designated contact.
- Read *Handout #5, Activities for Children Aged 3–5*.

Evaluation

Use the sample training evaluation handout in Appendix B (*Handout #1, Evaluation Form*) to have tutors evaluate the training session.

Training Session 5. Reading Aloud (3 hours)

Learning Objectives

At the end of this session, tutors will:

- Be able to apply proven techniques of reading aloud with children;
- Be able to select suitable reading materials for children of different ages and reading abilities; and
- Know how to utilize reading resources.

Basic Concepts

The concepts highlighted in this section are:

- The most important goal of reading instruction is to instill a love of reading;
- Children who are read to often learn to value books and reading; and
- Reading aloud is one of the most effective ways to encourage a child's emerging literacy and to support growing reading skills.

Tutor Reading

Have tutors review the following information prior to the tutoring session:

- *On the Road to Reading*, Chapter 3, “How Tutors Can Support Young Readers,” skim Tutoring Strategies for Preschool and Kindergarten (pages 31–36). Pay special attention to the guidance on Reading Aloud (pages 31–33).

Trainer Preparation

Prior to the session, the trainer should:

- 1 Ê Review *On the Road to Reading*, Chapter 3, “How Tutors Can Support Young Readers.” Also review *READ*WRITE*NOW: Activities for Reading and Writing Fun*, paying special attention to the section, “Moving into Reading: Preschool through Grade Two.” For those programs serving children whose home language is Spanish, Spanish versions of some of the *READ*WRITE*NOW* booklets are available (see Appendix A). See description of *READ*WRITE*NOW* in *On the Road to Reading* (page 72). Also preview resources for Activity #2 and #4.
- 2 Ê Develop and copy handouts for each tutor, including:
 - Agenda for the training session;
 - Evaluation handout.

- 3** Ê Coordinate planning with any other trainers. Recruit tutor volunteers to peer train in Activity #2 and #4.
- 4** Ê Arrange for the training facility, room layout, and logistics, including audiovisual equipment.
- 5** Ê Notify all participants of the date, time, place, and topic of the session.
- 6** Ê Prepare overhead transparencies and handouts.
- 7** Ê Arrange for a display of children's books and other reading materials suitable for preschool and kindergarten children (including advanced readers).

Materials Needed

The overheads and handouts for Training Session 5 are:

- *Transparency #20, Choosing Children's Books*
- *Transparency #21, Looking at Books to Read Aloud*
- *Transparency #22, Thinking About Books to Read Aloud*
- *Transparency #23, Conversation During Reading Aloud*
- *Handout #1, Evaluation Form*
- *Handout #6, Read to Me*

Activity #1
Choosing Books

Activity #1

- Give a mini-lecture and emphasize the need to select books and other reading materials that: (1) are suited to the individual child, and (2) will help the child progress to the next learning level. Use *Transparency #20, Choosing Children's Books*.
- Have the tutors count off by four's and form small groups, each with a volunteer recorder. Ask the small groups to select a sample of books from the resource display. The group's task is to pick one or two books for each of the children whom they are tutoring. The group should then develop a list on a flip chart matching characteristics of the child with features of the book that makes it a good choice for that particular child.

