

Chapter 3: Vocabulary development

Conversations with the Two-Year Old

Conversation assumes enormous experience with spoken language anchored in sensory experience: word-meaning association. For example, the very young child experiences an apple: the taste (gustatory), color, shape, and size (visual), smell (olfactory), and feel (tactile), prior to learning the name “apple”. The spoken word “apple” is anchored in rich sensory experiences. Word-meaning association is established.

The principle of word-meaning association through experience prior or during introducing language is emblematic of Montessori instruction. The silent presentation of a Montessori teacher allows the child to sensorially experience a material before language is introduced.

Individualized Conversation:

In the two-year old environment this means that the young child’s spontaneous activity is observed prior to speaking. At the appropriate moment in the child’s activity the teacher/guide enters into conversation:

What were you doing?

Can you tell me how you did this?

How did you get this puzzle piece to fit?

Especially the two-year old wants to show how much they know rather than being told!

The teacher can introduce informational language after determining the limits of the child’s language and knowledge. Conversation is integral in the ongoing activity that the child is involved. Supporting the young child in describing their experience develops vocabulary:

What is this puzzle about?

What animals do you see? Or toys? Or vegetables?

Can you point to all of the red colors. All of the blue colors?

All of the yellow colors?

Group Activities with Words-Movement Focus:

Conversation in a group is far more teacher-directed than individual conversation. The group conversation is anchored in an object, in a picture, or in actions, as with the individual conversation discussed above. The conversation may be based upon a “finger song”. For example, the song, *Open, Shut Them*:

Open, shut them,

Open, shut them.

Give a little clap, clap, clap! ...

With each word the children are making the motion connected with the words. Vocabulary is developed and accompanied with movements. Finger songs at group time are exceptionally effective in developing meaningful vocabulary for this reason.

As with all finger songs, the children are making the motions as they say the words.

Change a verb for vocabulary enrichment:

Tapping, snapping,

tap finger-to-finger, snap fingers

Tapping, snapping.

Give a little clap, clap, clap! ...

Or *Rubbing, hugging,*

rub hands together, hugging self

Rubbing, hugging

Give a little clap, clap, clap! ...

The young child is developing vocabulary linked to motor-movement involvement with finger songs that change words but maintain the same rhythm and melody.

More complex verbally for the two-year old is Nursery Rhymes for vocabulary development. The young child may not even know the typical words in a nursery rhyme:

Jack and Jill went up the hill

*To fetch (**get**) a pail (**bucket**) of water.*

*Jack fell down, and broke his crown (**head**),*

*And Jill came tumbling (**rolling**) after.*

This simple nursery rhyme has four unknown words for the young child to learn. The nursery rhyme would be appropriate for an older two-year old, at best.

Group Activities with Word-Concept Focus:

The introduction of the names of various fruits may be enhanced by identifying one fruit for the week to explore at group (and snack) time:

apple –	Monday	real apple
	Tuesday	apple sauce
	Wednesday	apple juice
	Thursday	dried apples
	Friday	baked apple (pie, turnover, etc.)
apricot –	Monday -	real apricot
	Tuesday -	apricot jam
	Wednesday -	apricot juice
	Thursday -	dried apricot
	Friday -	baked apricot (pie, turnover, etc.)

Each week a different fruit can be introduced using this same format. The fruit-of-the-week, in its various forms, becomes a part of snack. From a single fruit the children's vocabulary and experience base is expanded: apple, apple sauce, apple juice, dried apple, baked apple/ apple pie/ apple turnover. Additionally, display the container/packaging that the fruit as it is sold in a grocery store. The fruit exploration can extend over months!

Objects can be explored in the same manner with a base word/concept and an additional word that specifies further its function:

brush: **hair** brush, **tooth** brush, **nail** brush,

paint brush, **watercolor** brush,

scrub brush, **toilet** brush

towel: **face** towel, **hand** towel, **bath** towel

kitchen towel, **dish** towel,

beach towel, **tea** towel, **baby** towel

Group Activities with Objects from Nature:

Share a set of natural materials such as leaves, rocks, or shells at group time with one item given to each child. The child handles the item (pine cone, for example). The child experiences and names the feel (texture and weight), smell, color, size, and shape. Items in nature are readily available and has no cost. Nature experiences at group time supports language development by providing tangible experiences that children can connect to meaningful word. Through these group experiences children observe and describe their world more closely and make the experience-word connection with accuracy.

Group Activities with Pictures:

Incorporating pictures allows the child to focus on specific elements which facilitates experience and vocabulary. Presenting a picture of a farm, for example, can prompt the children to discuss the different animals they see, their sounds, and their roles on the farm. The child makes connections between real-world experiences and words.

Experience-language approach assures the critical word-meaning connection in the child's mind which began our discussion. Word-meaning must be our focus when considering the language development of our young children's experiences with us in the two-year environment.