Going Beyond the Here and Now during Interactive Book Reading

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As we know, interactive book reading can have a huge impact on children’s language and literacy skills. For children who have moved beyond the early stages of communicative development, interactive book reading provides excellent opportunities to be exposed to and to use language that goes beyond the here and now (i.e., decontextualized language). This type of abstract language supports children’s development of many thinking, language and literacy skills. However, research shows that most parents don’t use decontextualized talk while reading books with their children (Demir, Applebaum, Levine, Petty, & Goldin-Meadow, 2011). So, the question then becomes: how can we support parents in using decontextualized language while reading with their children?

I’m Ready!™: The Hanen Program® for Building Emergent Literacy in the Home

I’m Ready, our new parent program, picks up where the It Takes Two to Talk® Program leaves off. I’m Ready builds on the interactive book reading strategies from It Takes Two to Talk, in order to meet the evolving needs of children with increasing language capacity.

I’m Ready, which is for children aged 3-5, who are typically developing, at risk of language delay or have mild delays in their language skills, aims to lay the foundation for successful reading and writing. Helping parents learn to make book reading interactive and use decontextualized language are important components of the program.

Interactive book reading

When parents pause during book reading, observe their child’s interests and have conversations about them (by Observing, Waiting and Listening and following their child’s lead), they make book reading interactive. Reading with children in this way is more beneficial than simply reading the text to children. Interactive book reading engages children and gives them opportunities to use their language. The National Early Literacy Panel (2008) synthesized approximately 500 studies and found that when children participate actively in conversations during shared reading, growth was seen in:

- Vocabulary
- Higher level language skills
- Narratives
• Reading comprehension

Interactive reading also provides opportunities for children to be exposed to and potentially use decontextualized talk.

Decontextualized language

In *I’m Ready!* we support parents in using decontextualized language using the “Double E, Double P” strategy. It stands for: **Experiences**, **Explain**, **Problem Solve** and **Predict**.

Conversations that encourage children to reflect on their experiences, explain, problem-solve and predict, help them develop:

- Reasoning skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Inferencing skills

In *I’m Ready*, parents are coached on modeling decontextualized language and making comments and questions that support the child in using abstract language. Scaffolding higher level language and thinking skills helps children develop a deep understanding of the story. Research shows that using this type of decontextualized language can predict reading comprehension skills at the end of first grade (Demir et al., 2011).

Clips that show interactive book reading and decontextualized language

Here are video clips that are based on content from the *I’m Ready!* Program. They show the importance of interactive book reading and how a parent models language that goes beyond the here and now. The mom in these clips is named Jill and her son is Liam. In the first clip, Jill is reading to Liam.

When Jill reads to Liam he isn’t engaged. Without interaction, Liam doesn’t have the opportunity to participate or use language.
In the videos below, Jill turns book reading into a time for interaction by making comments and asking questions about Liam’s interests. This creates opportunities for Jill to use the “Double E, Double P” strategy to extend the topic. Select the E or P that was used during each part of the clip:

- Jill: “What do you think the witch is going to do to get out of this problem?”
- Liam: “uh get her magic wand and zoomoom disappear her!”

Video 1: Which E or P was used during this clip?

- Experiences
- Explain
- Problem-Solve
- Predict

Check My Answer

- Jill: “Look at the witch’s face”
- (pause)
- Jill: “Does she look quite happy?”
- Liam: “yeah… what’s she doing?”
Jill: “What do we make in a cauldron at home? Well, we don’t call it a cauldron we call it a pot but what can you make in a really big pot like that?”
Liam: “uhhm”
Jill: “Soup”
Liam: “Mommy?”
Jill: “mmhm”
Liam: “I think we could make rainbow popcorn. That’s yummy.”
Jill: “You want to make rainbow popcorn in the cauldron?”
Liam: “With some peanut butter”
Jill: “With some peanut butter, oooo”
• Jill: “Where do you think he’s going?”
• Liam: “back to his home”
• Jill: “To his home. Where do dragons live?”
  
  (pause)
• Jill: “I think, they might live in a cave.”
• Liam: “I think, I think they live in a volcano.”

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The bottom line…

As we saw with Jill and Liam, interactive book reading creates opportunities to have conversations that go beyond the here and now. Once a child has developed the ability to use short phrases, parents need to learn how to enrich their language to help the child progress to using decontextualized language. The I’m Ready Program and guidebook are helpful tools that you can use to support parents in learning strategies that promote interactive book reading and decontextualized language use. Helping parents have conversations that go beyond what’s happening on the pages of a book, promotes children’s thinking, language and literacy skills and gets them ready for school success!

References:


The ideas in this article are from *I’m Ready! How to Prepare Your Child for Reading Success*. Based on the latest research in early literacy development, this guidebook gives parents easy-to-use interaction strategies for building the critical skills that prepare young children for school.

Learn more

Note: This article is written for a professional audience. There is a parent-friendly, sister article that uses similar video clips to discuss interactive book reading here.

About The Hanen Centre

Founded in 1975, The Hanen Centre is a Canadian not-for-profit charitable organization with a global reach. Its mission is to provide parents, caregivers, early childhood educators and speech-language pathologists with the knowledge and training they need to help young children develop the best possible language, social and literacy skills. This includes children who have or are at risk for language delays, those with developmental challenges such as autism, and those who are developing typically.

For more information, please visit www.hanen.org.

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