

Language Development Activities: Dramatic Play Vignettes & Asking Questions

Vignette 1

T: What are you making?

C: Eggs.

T: They look delicious. May I have some?

C: Okay!

Vignette 2

T: What are you cooking?

C: Eggs.

T: Oh, I love eggs! What ingredients are you going to use?

C: I don't know.

T: Let's see. I made eggs on Sunday. Let's see if we can find some of the ingredients I used. (*Taking out spices and milk*). Here, I used pepper, parsley, and milk. What are some other ingredients that we can add to the eggs?

C: My mommy puts in cheese, and then she mixes it up like this (*stirs arm around*).

T: Your Mom adds cheese? Do you know what kind of cheese? There's cheddar cheese that's yellow. Swiss cheese is white with holes in it. Mozzarella cheese is the kind they put on pizza.

C: Yellow cheese.

T: So, maybe cheddar cheese. And does your Mom grate the cheese? That means does she run the cheese over a cheese grater to shred it into little tiny pieces so it will melt more easily?

C: (Shrugs shoulders)

T: That's ok. I'll see if the kitchen has a cheese grater that I can borrow to show you how it works. Now, what did you say your Mommy does to the eggs before she cooks them?

C: She goes like this (*stirs arm around*). Then puts them in a pan.

T: It sounds like you're describing scrambled eggs, where you beat them in a bowl, and then stir them in the pan.

C: Yeah, mix the eggs like this (*stirs arm around*).

T: When you stir them while they're cooking, that's called scrambling. I bet that's why they are called scrambled eggs because they are mixed and stirred and scrambled all up!

C: Yeah. I made scrambled eggs!

T: Scrambled eggs with cheddar cheese. You know other children might want your recipe? Why don't I get a big piece of paper and we can write down the ingredients we used to make our scrambled eggs. Now, what's the first thing the children will need to do?...

How are these two vignettes different? What does the teacher do in vignette 2? How do the children respond?

1. What is the difference between open-ended questions and closed-ended questions?

2. Identify the following questions or statements as either open-ended or closed-ended.

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| Tell me about your building. _____ | How was your weekend? _____ |
| What are you making? _____ | What did you do over the weekend? _____ |
| Is it rough or smooth? _____ | How do you know what kind of clothes to wear in the morning? _____ |
| What does this feel like? _____ | What are you planning to do in Dramatic Play today? _____ |
| How would you describe this? _____ | What are some things that make you grouchy? _____ |
| Have you ever felt grouchy? _____ | What are you building? _____ |
| What do you think made the ladybug in the story feel this way? _____ | |

10 STRATEGIES that WORK to Support Young Children's Language Development

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Instructions: Read this vignette and score this classroom on ECERS-3 Items 12 & 13. Please prepare to discuss your rating with examples from the vignette (e.g., rationale for strengths, recommendations).

Vignette - Opportunities for Language Items of ECERS-3

The children are eating breakfast at three small tables in the classroom. The assistant teacher, Ms. Moore, is sitting with one table engaging in conversation about a recent trip to the zoo ("What was your favorite animal?" "If you could be any animal, which animal would you be? Why?"). She's also sharing her observations/likes (e.g., "I love watching the tiger prowl back and forth across the front of his cage. I think his stripes are so beautiful, like zebra's stripes. I love both their stripes. Oh look, Joshua is wearing stripes today. Is anyone else wearing stripes?"). The classroom teacher, Ms. Williams, turns off the lights and says, "Time to clean up. Wash your hands, and take your seat on the rug for Circle time."

10 minutes later, after dozens of repeated commands at children, Ms. Williams reviews the calendar ("What day is today? What month? What year? What was yesterday? What will tomorrow be?"), and the weather. She reads a book about Signs in the environment. She explains some of the signs (e.g., "This large X means railroad crossing, that means there are train tracks, and drivers and pedestrians need to be very careful to look out for trains crossing"), but does not invite children to share their experiences seeing different signs, or to ask them what they think signs mean. She then tells the children they will each be making a stop-light with pre-cut red, green, and yellow circles during small group time.

During center time, Ms. Williams supervises children in centers, offering brief comments ("I see you're building a tall building. Don't make it too tall or it might fall and the blocks could hurt someone" "What are you making to eat? Can I have some?"). Ms. Moore reads an alphabet book about dinosaurs to two second-language learners in the Library area, inviting labeling of the letters. Then Ms. Williams calls small groups of children to a table to do the traffic-light activity. Conversation is very limited, consisting mostly of questions ("What color is this? What shape is this? Which one goes on the top? What does the "red" mean?), management talk ("Don't forget to share the glue." "Don't grab, ask your friend to pass the green circle to you") and praise ("Good job, Nadine. That's right!"). Children seem disinterested, and repeatedly ask if they can go play.

Brainstorming Open-Ended Questions, Statements, & Conversation Starters (& Tier 2 Vocabulary)

EEERS 3

Inadequate 1 Minimal 3 Good 5 Excellent 7

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

12. Helping children expand vocabulary*

- 1.1 Staff use very limited vocabulary with the children (Ex: specific names for objects and actions rarely used; few descriptive words used; “this,” “that,” “it,” used in place of more exact words).*
- 3.1 Staff sometimes use the names for people, places, things, and actions as children experience them in routines or play; throughout the observation (Ex: name foods for lunch, name the objects children use and actions they take).*
- 5.1 Staff frequently use specific words for people, places, things, actions, and descriptive words as children experience routines and play.*
- 7.1 Staff generally use a wide range of words to specify more exactly what they are talking about, appropriate to ages and abilities of the children.*
- 1.2 Staff teaching of words is not related to children’s actual experience (Ex: calendar used to teach days of the week, but days of the week not used in conversations about when things happen; weather words used when doing weather chart, but not when children actually experience weather).
- 3.2 Words that describe people, places, things, and actions are sometimes used within a meaningful context for the children (Ex: “You’re wearing a *soft blue* shirt.” “Today we are having *square* crackers.” “You are walking so *quietly*.”).*
- 5.2 Staff sometimes correctly explain the meaning of unfamiliar words in a way children can understand (Ex: “Fog is really tiny bits of water and that is why it feels wet.”; “When I say that I am concerned, it means that I care what happens to you.”).*
- 7.2 Staff introduce new themes or topics of interest to provide a wide and interesting range of new words.*
- 1.3 Staff do not use the opportunities provided by classroom materials, display, or other concrete experiences to introduce words.*
- 3.3 Staff sometimes use the opportunities provided by classroom materials, display, or other concrete experiences to introduce words.*
- 5.3 Staff frequently use the opportunities provided by materials, display, activities, or other meaningful experiences to introduce words.*
- 7.3 Staff add information and ideas in order to expand children’s understanding of the meaning of words children use.*
- 5.4 Special accommodations are observed for children to suit their diagnosed disabilities or family language needs (Ex: demonstrates with hands the meaning of words; says words in two languages; uses a language board or computer technology; uses signing with speech).*

NA permitted

13. Encouraging children to use language*

	Inadequate 1	2	Minimal 3	4	Good 5	6	Excellent 7
1.1	The majority of questions staff ask children require rote or yes/no answers that children have difficulty answering correctly (Ex: "What color is this?" "What shape is this?")		3.1 Staff ask occasional "non-rote" questions that children can answer successfully (Ex: "Where did you get your new shoes?" "Do you like to eat this cheese?" "What do you see in the picture?")		5.1 Staff frequently ask questions that children are interested in answering.*		7.1 Staff ask many questions that require longer answers (Ex: questions that begin with "how", "what if", "why", "tell me about").* <i>Observe twice</i>
1.2	Staff ignore much of what children say, respond to their talk negatively, or do not respond appropriately.*		3.2 Staff pay moderate amount of attention to what children say, responding either neutrally or positively, but not negatively.*		5.2 Many staff-child conversations during indoor free play.*		7.2 Many staff-child conversations during gross motor free play and routines.*
1.3	Few staff-child conversations where each child takes turns according to ability.*		3.3 Some staff-child conversations observed intermittently.*		5.3 Staff respond positively to children's communication and encourage them to talk more (Ex: listens with interest to child who is able to speak at length; provides words to help child explain what she wants; responds positively to children's questions and follows through with children's requests).*		7.3 Staff-child conversations go beyond classroom activities and materials (Ex: include social talk about home and family life; activities in the community; feelings; other non-school topics).* <i>Observe once</i>
1.4	Staff make no attempt to encourage children to communicate (Ex: no singing, nursery rhymes, saying alphabet, naming colors).*		3.4 Some attempts to maximize children's individual abilities to communicate (Ex: attempt to understand what less verbal child is trying to say; waits for response from child; understands a few words in child's family language or in sign language).*		5.4 Staff help children communicate verbally with one another (Ex: ask them to "use their words" if fighting over a toy, and follow through appropriately; remind child to say "excuse me" when trying to move past another child; begin topic of conversation and help all children contribute).* <i>Observe twice</i>		
1.5	Social environment does not encourage much talking among children or with staff (Ex: strict atmosphere where child talk not encouraged; little time to interact socially).		3.5 Relaxed environment allows children to talk with staff and one another most of the day.				