

"What is Literacy?" for Parent Workshops

***** For EDUCATORS ONLY ***NOT for DISTRIBUTION *****

- 1. Begin by introducing this section of the workshop*
(You might say something like, "Literacy is a term that is used all the time in our society. Literacy is something parents, teachers, and policy-makers value...but before we can talk about how to support children's literacy development we need to define 'literacy'. What do people mean when they talk about 'literacy?'").
- 2. Ask: "What is literacy? What do you think of when you hear the word 'literacy'?"* Invite parents to offer their thoughts. Encourage all responses (there are really no 'wrong' answers). (You can write these responses if you wish. Recording is optional.)
- 3. After a fair number of parents have shared their thoughts (about 8 contributions), explain that they're all right, AND,*

**"Literacy is currently defined as four main areas:
reading, writing, listening and speaking.**

So, think about your child as an infant.

Which one began to develop first? [Record: '1) listening']

Which one happened next? [Record: '2) speaking']

And then which one? [Record: '3) writing'] - there is typically debate about reading or writing - you can explain that drawing and 'scribbling' are writing, AND that writing and reading often happen simultaneously)

And lastly? [Record: '4) reading'] - if "reading" includes pretend reading, then reading may come before writing]

"I do this to demonstrate that LANGUAGE, listening and speaking, are the FOUNDATIONS for reading and writing. You cannot write a word you don't know in your oral language - you don't have it to call from your memory. AND it is much harder to read a word you don't know. If you don't know it, you're dependent on sounding it out, and trying to use context clues from the sentence to figure out what it means. Imagine coming across so many words

that you don't know. It's frustrating. In the end, vocabulary sometimes forces children/adults to give up."

5. *Share a few stories (mine or your own) about children using big words, and coming across words in print.*

- 4th grader - "The baby was born in the ____" (hospital).

- Full-time Mom who used large vocabulary on purpose, to entertain herself. 3-year old daughter came into bathroom as mother was bathing twin babies. "I don't know how you keep the house so clean with the three of us." Mom, "Wow, thank you, that's so sweet of you to say."

"Mom, don't you know I'm being **facetious**?"

- My coming across word 'facetious' in a book. I didn't know what it was. It took a really long time to figure it out - looks like it would be face-tious.

- Mothers and preschool children at Laundromat.

Little boy flirts with little girl, then hides.

One Mom says to the other, "Don't mind him he's just intimidated."

Boy says, "No I'm not!"

Mom says, "You don't know what that means."

Boy says, "Yes I do, it means 'shy'!"

6. *Invite parents to share stories of their own children using words they were surprised they knew what they meant.*

7. **Ask: How can you help your child's language skills develop?** (Invite parents to share ideas.) Elaborate: There are two main ways. 1) Use new vocabulary words, bigger than you think your child will know/understand. Young children can acquire up to 20 words a day. 2) Ask questions, and engage your child in conversations every chance you have (morning, to/from school, bathtime, meals).

8. (This discussion goes well before or after role playing picture reading with a "child" and extending the child's language. You can explain that books often have more 'rare' words - more 'sophisticated' language than we use in everyday interactions.