

Especially for practitioners working with young children! 

Tales for Talking

Reading and Print Awareness

When a child asks to be read to, it provides the perfect opportunity for interactive reading. This practice guide includes ideas you can use with preschool children that will make reading together enjoyable and beneficial for your children.

What is the practice?

While reading together, encourage the child to ask questions, talk about the illustrations, speculate about what's going to happen next, or relate a time that she experienced something similar to what is happening to the story characters. Reinforce the vocabulary in the book by using and explaining unfamiliar words. You may even use concrete objects to represent the words in the story. Interactive reading helps a child build vocabulary, develop an understanding of story structure, and become more familiar with language patterns and the reading process.



What does the practice look like?

A child sits with an adult while the adult reads a book. The child interjects a comment about the story and the adult responds to the child's comment in an encouraging way. The adult continues with the story, occasionally pausing to ask a question about the plot (e.g., "what do you think he should do now?") or to point out something in the illustration (e.g., "the girl looks really excited!"). When the child responds to the adult's question or comment, the adult answers with another comment or question. The back-and-forth dialogue between the child and adult keeps the child actively engaged in the story.

How do you do the practice?

Interactive reading can occur throughout your daily routine with children one-on-one, or in small groups where every child has a chance to participate.

- Start by choosing stories with topics and characters that are interesting to the child. Often, letting the child pick the book is the first step in getting her involved.
- Read during a time when you are not hurried or needing to transition to another activity, so that there is plenty of time for the children to think about and respond to your questions and comments, and to make comments or ask questions of their own.
- Pause periodically and ask open-ended questions to make sure the children are following the story and understand its meaning. For example, ask "What do you think that word means?" or "Why do you think the character did that?"
- Expand on a child's answers, making it part of a conversation.
- Suggest alternative possibilities starting with "What if ..." or "Suppose" to see where the children will take the conversation.
- Pose increasingly more challenging questions.
- If a child uses picture symbols or an augmentative communication device, have messages available that let her communicate about the story. For example, program a communication device with words such as "turn page," "more," "read," "stop," "yes," "no," and common phrases that can be used to discuss the story.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is the child staying engrossed in the story until the end?
- Does the child ask questions, make comments relevant to the story?
- Does the child answer questions posed to her?
- Does the child demonstrate a larger vocabulary or better conversation skills?

Take a look at more reading and talking

Read and Chat

Three-year-old Paulo chooses a picture book from his preschool's classroom library and brings it to a teacher assistant at naptime. "You want me to read to you before your nap?" she asks. Paulo nods. "What book did you pick?" she asks him, showing him the front of the book. "Cars," says Paulo happily. "Yes, it's the book about cars," says the assistant. She waits while he gets settled on her lap and then opens the book to the first page of the story and points at the picture. "What color is this car?" she asks. "Red" says Paulo. "That's right. It's bright red, like a fire truck." She reads a couple of pages, then before turning to the next page she pauses and asks Paulo, "What will happen next?" Paulo says, "Cars go fast!" "Let's see" she replies, "Turn the page for me." Paulo turns the page and the assistant says, "You're right! What are they doing now?" "Go real fast," answers Paulo. "You might be right," replies the assistant as she continues reading the book.



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Group Story Time

Mrs. Jones lets the four-year-olds in her class choose one of the big books for story time. They raise their hands for the one they want her to read as she holds up their choices. The one that gets the most hands is the book about a rainbow fish. Mrs. Jones reads a couple of pages and then asks, "How do you think those fish feel when he won't share with them?" She waits patiently as each of the children call out their thoughts. "Mad!" "They're sad!" "He isn't nice." When all of the kids have commented, Mrs. Jones asks, "Was there a time when someone didn't share with you?" Again she listens to the children's comments, then continues reading a couple of pages. "Oh, now he's sad. Why is that?" she asks. "No one will play with him," answers one child. "He lost his friends," says another. "What do you think he should do?" Mrs. Jones asks. Several of the children simultaneously shout out, "Share!" "That's a good idea, let's see what he does." She continues reading the book.

Reading and Experiences

Five-year-old Mia has a visual impairment. She sits in the library center as her teacher reads her and a friend her favorite story about animals, using a book with textured pages. As her teacher reads, she lets the children feel each textured animal on a page. Her teacher reads the first part of a sentence, then pauses to let Mia say the rest. Mia smiles as she helps "read" the book by saying the words that she knows come next. When they get to a part about rabbits, Mia's teacher reminds her about petting the class's rabbit that morning. "How did Rosie feel?" asks her teacher. "She was soft and fuzzy," says Mia. "What other animals do you think would feel that way?" "Dogs and cats," says Mia. "What animals do you think would feel different?" Mia thinks for a minute, then answers, "bears and snakes." "I think you're right," says her teacher, and she continues to the next page in the book.

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