



FRONT PORCH SERIES BROADCAST CALLS

Promoting Language and
Literacy: Building Bridges
from Classroom to Home

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QUESTIONS FROM SEPTEMBER 24TH FRONT PORCH SERIES BROADCAST CALL

Q:

Thank you so much for that wonderful presentation of simple but powerful research-based strategies that we can use to increase children's language by using storybooks. Such a simple thing for us to start using. In some of the materials you've developed, there's a great little acronym that we could use, which is CAR. Can you talk about that a little bit?

A:

The CAR acronym is easy to remember, it's a short word. And C stands for comment; A, ask questions and wait; and R, respond by adding a little more. So make a comment and wait, ask questions and wait, and respond to what the child says with adding just a little bit more. That makes it easy for parents to remember just the three things that they need to do. If somebody gives you 15 things you have to do at home while you're reading to your child, it's pretty tough. But three things are not so bad. And if you have something to hook it to—CAR: comment, ask questions, respond—then it's more apt to actually get used.

Q:

That's right. I've seen in some Head Start classrooms that they post CAR in, say, the literacy corner as a reminder for staff and volunteers. And those sixth graders, as you talked about—that might come in and volunteer in a classroom—it's a way to remind everyone of three simple strategies that we can use around books.

Let's talk a little bit about translating these into the classroom. You talked about strategies that parents can be ready, in an hour, to be able to use at home with their children. Can this be done with groups of children, with small groups of children, or is it really only a one-on-one strategy?

A:

I think a good teacher, a good Head Start teacher, can do it with smaller groups. They need to be aware of who's talking and who's sitting, of course. But sure, I think you can use it in small groups. Make sure every child gets a chance. And, of course, kids learn from each other. So if one child makes a comment, then the other kids learn from it. One-to-one is probably the best, especially for those kids who are struggling or who are shy. But, sure, you can use these techniques.

The other thing you can do is use these techniques around play. Because once you've used them around books where you have a book open, and you have a context, and you become really comfortable at making comments and waiting; when kids are playing you can do the same thing. "Oh, you put that big red block on top of the yellow block," and then you wait. You can say, "Oh, do you have any more green blocks?" So as the kids are playing, you can use these exact same techniques. It's away from the context of the book, but it gives you a whole other area to facilitate language in.

Q:

So we could see the CAR acronym posted in the block corner as well, or in the dramatic play area. It doesn't have to be just located with books. We can use any kind of medium and use these strategies.

A:

Sure, you could have them on the playground. Play is great—we like play. Play is good for kids. You probably have never heard that before. Using these strategies, start with books, because it's a little easier when you have the book right there. The context is more limited. But once your other folks in the classroom and parents become comfortable with books, you can say, "Oh, have you ever tried to use this when your child's in the bathtub and you're just playing with toys?" Try these same techniques.

Q:

This is so great, because it reminds me of some of the work that I've done with children with some more challenging behaviors. If our type of play that we engage in with children is, "What color is the cow, what sound does the cow make, what's a baby cow called?" Those types of things tended to turn children off and disengage, as well as it created just the right recipe for some challenged behaviors to come out.

A:

I think if you bombard kids with questions, first, if a child's having trouble talking, then it's going to be tough for them to respond to all those questions. It's overwhelming. If you just make a comment and give the child time to talk, a comment doesn't require an answer socially. If I say, "Boy, I really like your new shoes," you don't have to say anything. We had one parent who was Hispanic, and she called it—she was laughing—"We call that the Anglo thing." She said she would see moms in the grocery store, and they'd be pointing to things the kid wasn't interested in, saying, "Oh, look at that box of Tide with those yellow and orange concentric circles." We hope people don't do that. Making comments and just waiting, it's hard, but you can do it with some practice. Asking questions about what the child's interested in. If you see the child looking at the box of Tide, you can say, "That's some soap. Look at the circles on it." That's okay, but you're following their lead. Bombarding them with questions is not my favorite thing.

Q:

You've also developed video materials to help provide parents with some understanding of how to use these strategies as well as for Head Start staff. Where those are available and how we can access them?

A:

Every [ECE Specialist] has a cool set of materials that you can get and make copies of at no charge. They're on DVDs. They're not copyright protected. There's one disc that shows these techniques that you can share with parents. There's another disc that you can show after you show techniques around books that shows how you can use the same techniques around play. If you go to your ECE Specialist, they can make you your own copy.

Q:

Once a bilingual child learns English, do we encourage parents to learn more English so they'll be able to assist their child in English? Or, you talked a lot about making sure you're using your best language and your home language for lots of good reasons. Do you have any recommendations?

A:

I think it's always good for parents to be bilingual. It's good for everybody to be bilingual. Having a parent learning English is great. I would still say have the parent use whatever is their best language with their child, because they're sharing their culture with the child, which is incredibly important. You don't want any child coming in saying, I'm from this culture where my language isn't so important; it's a lesser language. There's no such thing as a lesser language. Ask any linguist. That's just a fact. All languages are equally complex and equally rich. I'm not making that up. That's a foundation of linguistics.

The other part is a parent should use the language that they're really most comfortable with so they can give the richness of language to their child. It's good for parents to learn English. What they'll do is they'll be switching back and forth. People talk about Spanglish. As both the parent and the child become more and more proficient with both, they'll probably use both back and forth. But I would recommend not using English if English isn't your best language. Let other people who are more comfortable English speakers teach English, because I sure couldn't, for example, teach Spanish to a kid.

Q:

We do have some listeners who are not connected with Head Start, and they would like to know how they can get the materials. Are they still available from Washington Research Institute [<http://www.wri-edu.org>]?

A:

Yes, and they're for sale. What I would do if I were you is buy them from us or go to your Head Start program, and they can help you. We want people to use this. Make a copy. There's a booklet that comes with it you should know about, and you can make a copy of that too. It has handouts for parents in a variety of different languages. There are videotapes too in about six different languages. I'll bet that your ECE Specialist can track those down somewhere you don't have to pay for them. But if you want to pay for them, that's okay.

Q:

What kind of key research references that you make could you give us—the journals we would find this research in?

A:

Two things I'd look up, one is dialogic reading. A lot of the research on storybook reading is listed under dialogic reading. You'll find Russ Whitehurst; Grover Whitehurst is his actual name. Very smart guy. Chris Lonigan, another. If you look for those two, you'll branch out and you'll find most of the other people. Philip Dale has at least one good research article with kids with disabilities that I know about, because I'm on it.

And Catherine Crain-Thoreson, and Dale is another one. And I can't remember if her study was with kids with disabilities or not. Those are some of the primary authors. Whitehurst has worked with Valdez-Menchaca and some folks who have replicated this in Mexico. So dialogic reading would be your starting point. Grover Whitehurst would be the other. We have a chapter in a book by Rebecca McCauley that's about language and early literacy facilitation. In our chapter, we have a lot of references.

Q:

This is a research-based strategy that has been demonstrated to be effective, but not only demonstrated to be effective once, but multiple times and across different kinds of populations of children. Works well in Scarborough, works well in Seattle with children with disabilities, works well with children from different linguistic and language and cultural backgrounds. That's just what we're hoping to promote. So Ph.D. candidates can do this and parents can do this and Head Start teachers can do this. Everyone can use these simple strategies.

A:

The What Works Clearinghouse™ [<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>], if you look up dialogic reading there, there's a lot of good information.

Q:

Where does storytelling, versus using a book, fit into promoting language and literacy? If we had someone that was using more of an oral tradition and storytelling, is there a place that you see this fitting in some of the CAR techniques?

A:

Storytelling is great. There are two ways you can do it. For kids who are above 3 ½ to 4, storytelling is probably a more appropriate technique, because then you get into things like narratives, where kids learn how to tell a whole story and what the beginning, middle, and end is for a story. So storytelling is wonderful. You can gear it down to younger kids if you do storytelling by stopping and asking questions, and say, "Okay, what do you think is going to happen when Coyote steals the sun?" You can pinpoint for the kids. Storytelling also in general tends to promote cultures. So storytelling's good. That's why play is a good technique. Play, books, and then storytelling. That's kind of a third leg of this.

Q:

That's fantastic. We've come to the end of our time here together. And we just want to thank you so much, Dr. Cole, for not only volunteering to be one of our presenters but joining us at our NCQTL studios.

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