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• *Working together for children with disabilities* • INFORMATION FOR FAMILIES AND PROFESSIONALS

WINTER 2012, VOL.12, NO. 2

## Talk is Cheap – So Spend Heaps of it on Your Children

By Roberta Michnick Golinkoff and  
Kathy Hirsh-Pasek



*This article is translated into Spanish on page 2. Ver la versión en español de este artículo en la página 2.*

Produced by the State Department of Education Early Childhood Special Education Program and the Connecticut Birth to Three System in collaboration with the



University of  
Connecticut

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SYSTEM  
College of Agriculture & Natural Resources

Many young children, especially those with special needs, are headed for academic failure. The seeds of academic failure are sown when children do not hear enough language and then go on to struggle in school. One way to prevent this is to afford children opportunities to engage in developmentally appropriate activities.

So what are developmentally appropriate activities? What does that mean and what does that look like? Essentially, developmentally appropriate activities help define quality practices that relate to what children are expected to know and do at certain ages. Being developmentally appropriate also includes making sure that how we teach is individually tailored to a child's special needs, culture, abilities and family context. Many educators and parents use developmentally appropriate practices – but do we know when we do it?

For example, Jessica, a 2-year-old princess, is sitting in a shopping cart at the supermarket. She points inquiringly at an eggplant and looks at her mom as she says, “What dat?” Mom says, “Eggplant” and just keeps shopping.

Now, see Derek, a 2-year-old cowboy, sitting in the cart like he owns the place. He looks quizzically at the eggplants and makes the same query. Mom doesn't just say “eggplant.” She picks one up and hands it to him to feel and look at while she talks about how it's a vegetable, and look -- it's purple and all smooth! The child is obviously delighted and all eyes and ears.

Of course, this is but a single interaction. Jessica's mom may ordinarily be very responsive to her child's questions. But a steady diet of Jessica's mom versus Derek's mom will have a long-term implication for the princess and the cowboy. The princess is likely to have a smaller vocabulary by the time she starts school and be below average. The cowboy, on the other hand, will be primed for school and a smarter child. But why is this so?

Scientists have long known that the more you talk to children -- even before they are talking themselves -- the smarter children become. And smarter children with bigger vocabularies are likely to do better in school. Having conversations like Derek's mom started cost nothing. Yet, too few parents with children with special needs realize how important it is to talk with their babies and young children.

Think about it: We, as parents, are experts in the way the world works. Our children are novices. When we talk to our children about what interests them, we are not only offering them new words, we are sharing what we know. How else can kids learn about eggplants and Easter Bunnies? We hold the secrets. But there's more our children get from our talk with them. They learn the language, which is the foundation for reading. Children may learn to sound out the letters in the lower grades and they learn that paying attention to parents and teachers pays off in learning new things.

Children learn how we are their best source for answering their questions about the world. David Dickinson, of Vanderbilt University, suggests we all remember “Strive for Five.” When we talk with our children we should try for five back and forth turns -- the child asks a question, we answer and ask one too, the child answers ... well, you get the idea.

Keeping children engaged and talking with us is what makes for higher Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and better school achievement. Too many children today don't get enough conversation from their parents and caregivers. Television and videos do not help kids learn language, but

hearing lots of language and talking about the pictures and words in storybooks is what builds good readers, not memorizing the names of the letters of the alphabet.

Doing well in school is essential for children's success in today's knowledge-based economy. Learning language begins in the womb -- before children say a single word. Once children can talk, research tells us that the more we follow up on children's queries, the more they practice using their language to get information -- just like in school. Practice and understanding what people are saying -- even as a baby -- means that children will understand

their teachers and not get lost as the class moves on.

The number of vocabulary items children know when they are three years of age predicts how well they will understand what they read when they are in high school. Conversations really matter!

Talk is cheap -- except if you are a young child trying to learn how to talk yourself. Then it's priceless!

*We want to thank Roberta Michnick Golinkoff and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek for allowing us to edit and reprint this article highlighting the importance of talking and interacting with children.*

## Hablar es barato – Así Que Por Qué No Gastar Bastante en Nuestros Hijos

Por Roberta Michnick Golinkoff y  
Kathy Hirsh-Pasek

Muchos niños, especialmente aquellos con necesidades especiales, van en camino al fracaso escolar. Las semillas del fracaso escolar son plantadas cuando los niños no escuchan suficiente lenguaje y luego tienen dificultades en la escuela. Una forma de prevenir esto es proporcionarles a los niños oportunidades de involucrarse en actividades de desarrollo apropiadas a su edad.

Así que, ¿Qué son las actividades de desarrollo apropiadas? ¿Qué significan y cómo se miran? Esencialmente, las actividades de desarrollo apropiadas ayudan a definir la calidad de las prácticas respecto a lo que se espera que los niños sepan y hagan en ciertas edades. Ser de desarrollo apropiado también incluye asegurarse que, de la manera que enseñamos sea apropiado a las necesidades de los niños con necesidades especiales, su cultura, sus habilidades y su contexto familiar. Muchos educadores y padres usan prácticas de desarrollo apropiadas -- pero, ¿Sabemos cuándo lo hacemos?

Por ejemplo, Jessica, una princesa de 2 años, está sentada en una carretilla de compras en el supermercado. Ella señala una berenjena y mira a su mamá y dice, ¿Qué es esto? La mamá dice, “Berenjena” y continúa comprando.

Ahora veamos a Derek, un vaquero de dos años, sentado en una carretilla como si fuera el dueño del lugar. Mira curiosamente una berenjena y hace la misma pregunta. La mamá no solo dice “berenjena.” Ella toma la berenjena y se la da a Derek para que la mire y la toque y le habla de cómo la berenjena es un vegetal y emocionada dice, -- ¡Es morada y se siente suave! El niño está fascinado y pone completa atención con sus ojos y oídos.

Naturalmente, ésta es una simple interacción. La mamá de Jessica puede regularmente atender las preguntas de su hija. Pero una dieta rutinaria de la mamá de Jessica en comparación a la mamá de Derek, pueden tener implicaciones a largo plazo para la princesa y el vaquero. La princesa probablemente tendrá menos vocabulario para cuando empiece la escuela y estará por debajo del promedio. El vaquero, por otro lado, estará listo para la escuela y será un niño inteligente. Pero, ¿Por qué sucederá esto?

Los científicos han sabido desde hace mucho tiempo que entre más le hable a sus hijos -- inclusive antes de que ellos mismo hablen -- más inteligentes serán. Y los niños inteligentes con gran vocabulario probablemente rendirán mejor en la escuela. Tener conversaciones como la mamá de Derek no cuesta nada. Sin embargo, muy pocos padres con niños con necesidades especiales comprenden lo importante que es hablar con sus bebés y sus infantes.

Piense en esto: Nosotros, como padres, somos expertos en cómo funciona el mundo. Nuestros niños son novatos. Cuando les hablamos sobre lo que les interesa, no solo estamos ofreciéndoles nuevas palabras, estamos compartiendo lo que nosotros sabemos. ¿De qué otra forma pueden nuestros hijos aprender sobre berenjenas y el conejo de Pascua? Nosotros tenemos los secretos. Pero hay mucho más que nuestros hijos obtienen cuando hablamos con ellos. Ellos aprenden el lenguaje, el cual es la base para leer. Los niños pueden aprender a pronunciar el sonido de las letras en los primeros grados de escuela y también aprenden que poniendo atención a los padres y maestros tiene recompensa al aprender nuevas cosas.

Los niños aprenden cómo nosotros somos su mejor fuente para responder sus preguntas sobre el mundo. David Dickinson, de la Universidad Vanderbilt, sugiere que todos recordemos “Esforzarnos por los Cinco.” Cuando hablamos con nuestros hijos debemos intentar cinco turnos de ida y vuelta – el niño pregunta algo, nosotros respondemos y preguntamos algo también, el niño responde... bueno, ya se formó la idea.

Mantener ocupados a los niños y hablando con nosotros es lo que contribuye a un alto Cociente Intelectual (IQ) y mejor rendimiento en la escuela. Ahora, muchos niños no tienen mucho tiempo para conversar con los padres o cuidadores de niños. La televisión y videos no ayudan a los niños a aprender el lenguaje, pero escuchar mucho lenguaje y hablar de las fotografías y palabras en un libro de historias es lo que edifica buenos lectores; no memorizando los nombres de las letras del alfabeto.

Rendir bien en la escuela es esencial para el éxito de los niños en nuestra actual economía que se basa en conocimiento. El aprendizaje del lenguaje empieza en el vientre – antes que los niños digan una sola palabra. Una vez los niños puedan hablar, las investigaciones nos dicen que entre más respondamos las preguntas de nuestros niños, más practican el uso de lenguaje para obtener información – igual que en la escuela. Practicar y entender lo que gente está diciendo – inclusive aún siendo un bebé – significa que los niños entenderán a sus maestros y no se perderán en la medida que las clases progresen.

El número de palabras de vocabulario que los niños sepan cuando lleguen a los tres años de edad predice qué tan bien entenderán lo que lean cuando estén en la escuela secundaria. ¡Las conversaciones realmente importan!



Hablar es barato – excepto si usted es un niño tratando de aprender cómo hablar con usted mismo. ¡Entonces no tiene precio!

*Queremos agradecer a Roberta Michnick Golinkoff and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek por permitirnos editar e imprimir este artículo enfatizando la importancia de hablar e interactuar con los niños.*

## Parent Perspective

### Choosing the Right Toys for Children with Special Needs

By Amy McCoy, Parent Representative

How do we find the right toys for our children? Do we just look at what the box says (for example, ages 18 months – 3 years) and trust that the toy manufacturer is correct? While this might work for some children, it is usually not the best way to choose toys for our children with special needs.

Start with the knowledge you have about your child's special needs. Most likely, the toys you have at home are already good ones for your child. However, working together

with your child's teacher or 0-3 therapists, you'll be able to find the right toys and teach your child to play with them. These knowledgeable individuals know your child well and they know about playing and toys.

Teaching your child with special needs to play with toys:

- Model and demonstrate many times how to use the toy. Use an exaggerated voice such as, “you found it!” when your child discovers how to turn the toy on and off.
- Make sure your child has a secure place to sit or sit behind your child and you can model how the toy works from behind with your hands over your child's hands.

- Use hand over hand repeatedly. Some children will require many practice experiences before being able to play with the toy independently and some will always require assistance and will not play independently.
- Reduce distractions during playtime. Just give one or two toys at a time.
- Put the toy you are playing with on a blanket or towel with a solid background so that it is easy to see.
- Verbalize the cause and effect to point it out. “When I push the red circle, the cow says moo”.
- Make sure you are smiling and having fun so that your child can try to mirror your emotions during playtime.



## Providers' Perspective

### What Developmentally Appropriate Practices by Age Look Like *Tips from Providers*

By Jane Bisantz, Bisantz & Associates.  
East Hampton, CT

Bethanne Vergean – Disability and  
Mental Health Manager, Hartford, CT

Charlotte Martino – Director of Mount  
Olive Child Development Centers, Inc.  
Hartford, CT

Roxann Bartone, Director of Kids of  
Chatham Organization, Inc. (KOCO).  
East Hampton, CT

#### General Practices

- Policies regarding parent involvement clearly articulated
- Daily activity schedules posted
- Open door policy for parents
- Opportunity for consistent face to face contact between parents and care•givers
- Appropriate space and opportunity for outside play

#### Building Interpersonal Relationships

- Teachers greet children upon arrival and call them by name
- Classrooms are created to be a place that children and families like to be (feeling comfortable, welcome and safe)

#### Infants

- Quiet area for sleeping
- Stimulating pictures or mirrors underneath chair•rail height
- Padded area for new sitters and crawlers
- Adequate seating for adults to hold/feed children; rocking chair
- Place for tummy time
- Swings
- Paper and cloth books
- Open space to encourage movement; spaces to go into, over and under
- Toys that encourage both small and large motor movements

- A place where toys and books can be disinfected
- Appropriate music
- Soft play materials; specific information regarding early toileting policies

#### Toddlers: 15•36 months

- Written lesson plans
- Low tables for sitting, communicating, and eating
- Materials to touch and manipulate (art materials, toys, legos, blocks etc.) at child's level
- Art supplies always available – chalk, paint, crayons
- Changing table with stairs; area for potty training
- Quiet space for sleeping, quiet space with books, and appropriate music
- Child•directed art work displayed
- Space to gather for large motor activities; to go into, over and under; tubes to crawl through

## Birth to Three Update

### Birth to Three Update

By Linda Goodman, Director,  
Birth to Three System

A couple things happened this past fall. First, new federal regulations for the Infant/Toddler sections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were released in September. The state will begin to implement those new regulations on July 1, 2012 when we receive next year's federal grant. There aren't major changes for Connecticut, but there are a few modifications to our policies and procedures that we'll have to make.

The revised procedures that need to be submitted with our next grant application will be posted on

[www.birth23.org](http://www.birth23.org) under "What's New" in February 2012. The site will also include information about how to give feedback and whether there are public hearings scheduled. Public comments can be given for 60 days before we finalize the grant application.

Second, we had a visit from the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Dept. of Education in November. We spent two days looking at various components of Connecticut's system to check our compliance with the federal law and regulations. We also spent a day and a half looking at one "result" that we would like to work on for the next 3-5 years.

After much debate and help of many stakeholders and consultants, we selected the topic of increasing the percentage of children that we serve under the age of 12 months. We are doing well on the overall number and percentage of children under three that we're serving (we're about 10th in the nation), but we are not doing as well at identifying children under the age of 12 months (we're about 20th in the nation.) So, we'll be looking at what other states are doing, especially our Northeast neighbors, to figure out what we can do better. We'll be reporting on our progress with our annual performance report each year. We'll create a special section on our website that will keep you informed.

## Information for Families and Professionals

Is published periodically by the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System in collaboration with the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the Connecticut Birth to Three System, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and the Newsletter Advisory Board. We welcome readers' comments and contributions related to the special needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Please mail correspondence to the editor at 67 Stony Hill Road, Bethel, CT 06801.

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Produced in Office of Communications, College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Connecticut. Graphic Design by Dean Batteson

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## Update: Early Childhood Special Education

*Maria Synodi, Coordinator  
Early Childhood Special Education*

These are exciting times! The State of Connecticut submitted a federal grant application to the Departments of Education and Health & Human Services for the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (RTT-ELC). Thirty-five states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico also submitted applications for a \$500 million competition to improve early learning and development systems within their state.

The RTT-ELC required states to create comprehensive plans for improving early learning and development programs around five key areas of reform including: (a) establishing successful state governance systems; (b) defining and ensuring quality in early learning and development programs through the development and implementation of a statewide quality rating system; (c) ensuring accountability by promoting early learning and development standards and positive outcomes for children; (d) ensuring a competent workforce; and (e) measuring outcomes and progress through a coordinated data system.

Connecticut's application will undergo peer review by early childhood experts from across the country. By mid-December, the highest ranked applicants will receive an award ranging from around \$50

million up to \$100 million, depending on a state's population of children from low-income families and the proposed plan submitted by the state.

The state's RTT-ELC application was submitted at the same time that Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed Executive Order No. 11, establishing an Early Childhood Office within the Office of Policy and Management. The Executive Order cites Public Act 11-181, which required the creation of a coordinated system of early care and education & child development by July 1, 2013. The Order articulates the state's commitment to improving the health, development and educational outcomes of Connecticut's children, to reducing the achievement gap, and to building a highly skilled workforce.

The focus on a state's early learning and development programs includes all programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers. That includes the Birth to Three System and Early Childhood Special Education along with infant-toddler programs, child care, school readiness, head start and others. The hope is to weave a system of high quality program options and opportunities for all children with equal access, equal participation and an equal benefit from a high-quality early learning and development program for all. These are exciting times ...

### Birth to Three State Interagency Coordinating Council Update

By Dr. Mark Greenstein, ICC Chair/  
Developmental Pediatrician

One of the interesting things about the world of early intervention is the diversity of ways that people manage things. I was strongly reminded of this at the Early Childhood Mega Conference this past summer. People from all over the world converged at my table (for the Interagency Coordinating Council –ICC- what we call Birth-to-Three Council), where I met people from Guam, Alaska and Missouri!

We talked about how each of us was dealing with the challenges of fiscal stresses and learned about

each other's "worlds". In fact, we heard a very informative talk about the realities of the budget issues and how much at risk we all are if there are cuts coming. Despite that, the general mood remained a "can do" one.

The awards ceremony for those who shine at providing early intervention services to children with special needs was inspirational. There were parents and professionals, all working in leadership roles; all commiserating with funding stresses and all working for the benefit of children in need of early intervention. What was clear was that none of us can do this alone. There is more need of collaboration and creativity in terms of meeting children's, families' and even state's needs.

Families are an integral part of ANYTHING we do. We sponsored one of the parents from ICC to attend this conference. She brought experience and talent to the sessions she attended. She also shared with us what she learned at the conference. As we move forward, parent involvement will be even more crucial. I hope you will consider helping us support other children and families, especially those whose children have special needs.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at [MGreens@ccmckids.org](mailto:MGreens@ccmckids.org) or Mrs. Anna Hollister, ICC support ([Anna.Hollister@ct.gov](mailto:Anna.Hollister@ct.gov), or 860-418-8716) for more information.

## Resources

### Websites:

#### DAP Frequently Asked Questions

<http://www.naeyc.org/dap/faq>

This article focuses on Developmentally Appropriate Practice - Frequently Asked Questions. It is from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a web site for children and families with young children.

#### My Child's Academic Success

<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/part7.html>

This web site from US Department of Education includes resources for parents. The article, "If You Think There's a Problem -- Helping Your Child Become a Reader" addresses helping your children become readers.

#### Early Childhood Inclusion

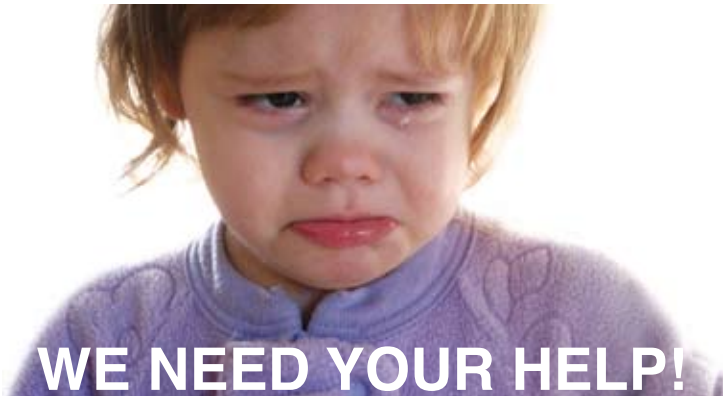
[http://www.dec-sped.org/uploads/docs/about\\_dec/position\\_concept\\_papers/PositionStatement\\_Inclusion\\_Joint\\_updated\\_May2009.pdf](http://www.dec-sped.org/uploads/docs/about_dec/position_concept_papers/PositionStatement_Inclusion_Joint_updated_May2009.pdf)

This publication on "Early Childhood Inclusion" is a joint position statement of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Parents as well as care and service providers may find the content of this publication very beneficial.

#### Book:

*The Language of Toys. Teaching Communication Skills to Special-Needs Children* by Sue Schwartz, Ph.D. Woodbine House, 1988.





Please send your ideas or suggestions for future newsletter topics to:

**German.cutz@uconn.edu**

Or call **203-207-3267**

Thank you so much for your input.

## WE NEED YOUR HELP!

### Training and Professional Development Opportunities

#### An Overview of Bilingual Language Development for Early Childhood Providers

**Presenter:** Nancy Cloud, Ed.D., Professor, Department of Educational Studies, Rhode Island College  
**Date & Time:** Friday, February 17, 2012  
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
**Location:** Rensselaer (RAH), Hartford  
**Fee:** \$30 Activity Code: 12-46-169

#### Finding the Balance Between Standards and Practice in Young Children's Education

**Presenters:** Andrea Brinnel & Michelle Levy, Education Consultants, CT State Dept. of Education  
**Date & Time:** Tuesday, February 28, 2012  
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
**Location:** SERC Library Community Room, Middletown  
**Fee:** \$40 (per team) Activity Code: 12-46-238

#### Only the Best: A Study Group to Learn How to Use Practices That Work for All Children - 3 Day Series

**Presenters:** SERC Consultants  
**Dates & Times:** Friday, March 2, 2012  
1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, April 18, 2012  
1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, May 16, 2012  
1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
**Location:** SERC Classroom, Middletown  
**Fee:** \$200 (per team) Activity Code: 12-46-245

#### Creating the Technologies to Enhance the Participation of Young Children with Significant Disabilities in Play, Communication, and Literacy Activities

**Presenters:** SERC Consultants  
**Date & Time:** Thursday, March 15, 2012  
9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
**Location:** SERC Classroom, Middletown  
**Fee:** \$40 Activity Code: 12-46-168

#### Including Children with Hearing Impairments in Early Childhood Education Programs

**Presenter:** Mindy Robbins - O'Connell, Consultant, Pittsburgh, PA  
**Date & Time:** Saturday, March 24, 2012  
8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
**Location:** CT Charts-A-Course, Hamden  
**Fee:** \$20 Activity Code: 12-46-196



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Este boletín está disponible en inglés y en español. Visite el sitio del Sistema para Infantes a Tres Años en [www.birth23.org](http://www.birth23.org) y pulse a Publicaciones o el del Departamento de Educación en [www.sde.ct.gov](http://www.sde.ct.gov). Pulse entonces el enlace 'Early Childhood' (educación Temprana en español).

## CHILDREN'S ARTWORK WANTED!

You are invited to send pictures or other artwork that your child has done. We would like to start an "art collection" for possible inclusion in future Birth through 5 News newsletters. Please mark the artwork with the artist's first name and age and mail to:

**Dr. German Cutz,**  
Editor, UCONN CES  
67 Stony Hill Rd.  
Bethel, CT 06801

Or send by e-mail to:  
[german.cutz@uconn.edu](mailto:german.cutz@uconn.edu)

*No artwork will be returned.* We look forward to receiving your child's works of art!

