



## Word Play

### Fun With Language and Learning

Brenda S. Metzler



One of the primary ways that children communicate is through playful interaction. Word play is a simple, relaxed and fun opportunity to engage with your child and help him or her to learn some rules of language at the same time!

Young children are learning language. From birth they begin to distinguish between words, sounds and noises, and communicate through crying, smiling and eye movements. You facilitate his or her learning every time you echo a coo or expand on your baby's sounds and wait for his or her response, **play** *Pat-A-Cake*, **sing** "*This Little Piggy Went to Market*" or **say** "*Where's your nose? There it is!*". You foster the development of your child's language skills when you **tell** him or her what is happen-

ing in their world and in the life of your family. Mealtime, diapering and bedtime are wonderful times for conversation. "*Now it's time for a bite—open wide!*" "*Ooh, let's get you into a fresh diaper!*" Name what you are doing. Make eye contact, smile and connect, and talk to your child. Well before children have the capacity to express themselves with recognizable words, they are able to receive and understand what we are saying.

Simply **talking** to your child greatly increases his or her vocabulary and language facility. While we continue to add new words and expressions to our repertoire throughout life, young children are at the height of language acquisition. Their vocabularies have the potential to expand exponentially from week to week, seemingly exploding with new words they encounter. A language-rich environment promotes greater language facility which directly impacts later success in school and in social interactions.

**Reading** to your child is another way to introduce your child to more language. Research has shown that the younger children are when their parents begin to read to them, the greater their language skills throughout life. Reading to a child offers the opportunity for the two of you to be close and cozy and together. Even very young children can help to turn the pages and learn to match words with objects. You may invite your child to point to objects in a picture, or notice colors or shapes. As they learn to read, they may want to follow along or read to you.

As children grow and develop, their language facility becomes more sophisticated. Fun with language doesn't end with "*Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes!*" By the time they're toddlers, children can recognize and get a lot of mileage out of rhyming words, even the silliest non-sensical rhymes. Imagine the excitement when they discover those special categories!

*Onomatopoeia*. Just saying that word can make someone smile. *Buzz...smack...hiss...crack*—words that imitate the sound being described. *Alliteration*—phrases that repeat the first sound in every word. *Tall tales take time to tell*. Tongue twisters thrill with alliteration. *Rhythm and rhyme, keeping the time*—it's not only poetry that enjoys the cadence of language. If you've ever read a book to a child, you know how much pleasure a child can take in repetition and the flow of words. It can be the same in everyday conversation.

Another benefit of sharing language with your child is the positive connection you'll have. Every child needs a warm, secure relationship with a parent or other primary caregiver in order to foster the healthy development of his or her brain. Children don't care if you sing off-key or get a little goofy, and you are helping their brains to grow well.

Listen for opportunity and have **fun** with words! Say them, hear them, and say them again. Feel the sounds in your mouth even as you revel in the sounds with your ears. Notice aloud when words rhyme and say them again. Say them and play them and sway them, sing them and swing them. "*I'm a poet and I know it!*" You'll find yourself smiling, your young child playing along, and your older child rolling his or her eyes.

Talk to your child. Read to your child. Spend meaningful time playing with them daily—doing something they enjoy. Join them in their world. Listen for the opportunities and make word play a part of your everyday lives together.



# Getting Started

— a few books that will get your fun juices flowing!

## *Children's Books*

Flamingos on the Roof Calef Brown

Jamberry Bruce Degen

The Lady With the Alligator Purse Nadine Bernard Westcott

The Random House Book of Poetry for Children Jack Prelutsky, Arnold Lobel

Tikki Tikki Tembo Arlene Mosel, Blair Lent

Where the Sidewalk Ends Shel Silverstein

Anything by Dr. Seuss

Your child's favorite book—you know, the one you read over and over!

## *Other Reading*

The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow,

Learn, and Flourish T. Berry Brazelton, Stanley I. Greenspan

Parenting From the Inside Out Daniel J. Siegel, Mary Hartzell

Playful Parenting Lawrence J. Cohen

## *Stewards of Children: Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Training*

**Saturday Sept 19, 2009 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM**  
**At Dartmouth Hitchcock Lebanon, NH**  
**Auditoriums E & F**

This training is FREE.

To register contact The Child Care Project at Dartmouth:  
**(603) 646-3233 • (800) 323-5446**

### **Staff:**

Elaine Guenet, Exec. Director  
Hoyt Bingham  
Ariel Cahn-Flores  
Sarah Canterbury  
Kimberly Colson  
Debbie Cushman  
Anne-Marie Darsney  
Julia Dickenson  
Prudence Fisher  
Kelly French  
Joanna Hamlin  
Marla Ianello  
Jeanne McMahan  
Tonya McMurray  
Helene Meloche  
Brenda Metzler  
Dianne Norton  
Katie Ouelette  
Samantha Piro  
Sarah Schneider  
Lori Stever  
Kelly Wallace  
Lisa Wills

### **Board of Directors:**

Kathleen O. Snyder, *Chair*  
Laurel Spielberg, *Vice-Chair*  
Elizabeth Chabot, *Secretary*  
Michael Horvath, *Treasurer*  
Elizabeth Adams  
Mary Brown  
Marie Colacchio  
Beth Kolehmainen  
Ashley Milliken  
Arlene S. Rotman  
Peter Rutledge  
Jack Wilson