

Communication Begins with You and Me!



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Ho Mui Fong is a Senior Learning Support Educator from NTUC First Campus under the Development Support (DS) and Learning Support (LS) programmes. She has many years of experience working with young children, their families and early childhood educators in the sector. She believes that all children have the potential to learn. She strives to work with the various stakeholders to help children by scaffolding their learning and helping them achieve their fullest potential.

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The Development Support (DS) and Learning Support (LS) is an early detection and intervention programme using an integrated community-based approach. The programme also aims to build capability and capacity within the early childhood landscape to support children with mild developmental needs.

The Learning Support Educators (LSEds) in the programme are likened to resource teachers. They work very closely with preschool educators, as well as caregivers, through collaborative problem-solving to better support children with developmental needs in the classrooms. This booklet documents easy-to-use, tested strategies and ideas implemented in the early years and preschool classrooms. The content was shared and facilitated at the ECDA's Early Childhood Conference workshop in 2018.

Bringing the workshop content to print - a collaborative effort of the NTUC First Campus, Child Support Services and KKH Department of Child Development (DCD) Consultancy Team for DS LS, appointed by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) - aims to celebrate and continue to spread the good work of the preschool educators, the LSEds and many other professionals who work hand in hand to create a more conducive and inclusive learning environment for children with developmental needs in the early years and preschools.

December 2019

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Introduction

This booklet is inspired by early childhood educators for early childhood educators. Fresh from the Early Childhood Conference in 2018 where we have had the privilege to hear and learn from participants, we recognise that early childhood educators are already doing a splendid job supporting children's language development in the classrooms but as some have shared, we often forget to remind ourselves about the marvellous job we have done.

Pulling together anecdotes from participants and the workshop content from the conference, we hope that this booklet will provide useful and practical tips for early childhood educators in the following areas –



Identification of red flags for communication of children from birth to five years for earlier detection and support,



Use of the strategy, “Stop.Think.Do”, to build positive interactions with children, and



Extension of children's spoken language to model more advanced vocabulary and promote language development.

May this booklet serve as a timely reminder for all of us in affirming the work we have done but not forgetting to consolidate our skills further for the future! 😊

Red Flags for Communication

Communication begins from infancy. Before children even learn to use words to communicate, they develop preverbal skills which form the foundation for later language development. Preverbal communication refers to nonverbal means of sending messages to communication partners. This can involve looking at the person, following the person's focus of attention, waiting quietly for a turn in the communicative situation and many others.

While children may develop at different rates, there are red flags to suggest that a child may be at risk of a delay if certain key milestones are not achieved. It is vital that parents and early childhood educators are attuned to the red flags for facilitation of early detection and support. Early and timely support for children has been shown to result in better outcomes.

The following are red flags for communication of children from birth to five years:

Age	Red Flags
0 to 12 Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> No smiling or interaction with others<input type="checkbox"/> No babbling or makes few sounds (“quiet baby”)<input type="checkbox"/> No gestures for communicating<input type="checkbox"/> No attention to speech
1 to 2 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does not try to interact or communicate with others<input type="checkbox"/> Does not consistently respond to name or pay attention to others talking<input type="checkbox"/> Does not understand what others say, even routine instructions<input type="checkbox"/> Does not play with toys appropriately at 18 months<input type="checkbox"/> No words at 18 months<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 words or no word combinations at 2 years old<input type="checkbox"/> Limited speech sounds

Red Flags for Communication

Age	Red Flags
2 to 3 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does not try to interact or communicate with others<input type="checkbox"/> Has trouble playing with and talking to other children<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties responding appropriately to simple WH-questions (e.g. "What are you eating?" "Who is your teacher?" "Where is daddy/mummy?")<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties following 2-step related and/or routine instructions (e.g. "Wear your shoes and line up.")<input type="checkbox"/> Uses less than 3-word phrases to communicate
3 to 4 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Has trouble playing with and talking to other children<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties responding appropriately to most questions<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties talking about the past and/or future events (e.g. significant events at school/home, a school excursion)<input type="checkbox"/> Uses sentences of less than 4 words to communicate<input type="checkbox"/> Speech cannot be understood almost all of the time
4 to 5 Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Has trouble playing with and talking to other children<input type="checkbox"/> Slow to learn new words taught<input type="checkbox"/> Uses sentences of less than 5 words to communicate<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties telling a story in a series of sentences independently<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties initiating, maintaining and ending a conversation appropriately (e.g. interrupts others when they are talking, insists on talking about his or her topic of interest only)<input type="checkbox"/> Speech cannot be easily understood in conversation



Based on the child's age, if there are at least two red flags noted, this may warrant further evaluation by a professional.

Stop . Think . Do



Every child has the ability and intention to communicate – whether verbally or nonverbally. Sometimes, all children need is for their communication partners to take a step back, wait expectantly but patiently, and let them initiate the interaction. Let the child show you his or her interests and take the lead! You will be surprised how following the child’s lead can result in a more positive interaction and create more learning opportunities for him or her. 😊

This can be achieved by applying the strategy of “Stop.Think.Do”.



STOP

THINK

DO

In the next few pages, each component of the strategy will be elaborated in more details. Case studies will also be included to illustrate the strategy.

Stop . Think . Do



STOP

Stopping reminds us to take a step back, wait and allow the child to take the lead by:



Positioning ourselves and ensuring that we are face-to-face with the child, and



Pausing and waiting for the child to allow processing time i.e. letting the child initiate the communication or interaction.

THINK

Thinking reminds us to think about the child and understand him or her better by:



Noticing what the child is doing, his or her interests and what he or she may be thinking of,



Listening to what the child is saying and what he or she may be attempting to convey, and



Avoiding asking questions while doing the above, particularly questions that test the child's knowledge.

DO

Doing reminds us to include ourselves in the communication or interaction with the child by:



Following the child's interest and idea (as long as it is acceptable to us), and



Joining in the communication or interaction and commenting accordingly based on what we have noticed and heard from child.

Stop . Think . Do



Let's pause and reflect. 😊

For the case studies provided below, explore how each teacher could apply the strategy “Stop.Think.Do” in his or her interaction with the children.

Case Study A

Teacher A is reading a story to a class of children. She does not pause for some children to comment or ask questions about the story. After the story, Teacher A asks the children some questions pertaining to the story but she rushes the children to answer the questions.

Case Study B

Teacher B is at the learning corner with some children who are playing blocks. As the children are building some towers, Teacher B constantly talks to the children about their creation and gives them suggestions on what to do next.

Case Study C

Teacher C is helping some children with their Art & Craft. Child D eagerly shares with Teacher C what she is doing. Teacher C replies without looking at Child D, “Nice, continue,” while helping another child.

Suggested ideas are provided in the next few pages. 😊

Stop . Think . Do



RECAP: Case Study A

Teacher A is reading a story to a class of children. She does not pause for some children to comment or ask questions about the story. After the story, Teacher A asks the children some questions pertaining to the story but she rushes the children to answer the questions.



Here are some ideas on how Teacher A could have applied “Stop.Think.Do”.

Stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While reading the story, Teacher A could have paused for the children to comment or ask questions pertaining to the story.• If she did not want any interruption while reading the story, she could have let the children know before reading the book.• During the question and answer session after the story, Teacher A could have looked at the child who was answering the question (<i>face to face</i>) and waited for the child to think of an answer.• The children could be given ample time to process their thoughts before answering the questions.
Think	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When a child was answering a question, Teacher A could have listened to the child (<i>What is he/she saying?</i>) and think of what the child is trying to convey.• She could have avoided asking questions while listening to the child.
Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After the child answered the question, Teacher A could have commented accordingly based on what the child shared.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. Teacher asked, “Where do you think we can find lions?”• Child replied, “At the zoo!”• Teacher could have commented, “That’s right! We see many animals at the zoo.”

Stop . Think . Do



RECAP: Case Study B

Teacher B is at the learning corner with some children who are playing blocks. As the children are building some towers, Teacher B constantly talks to the children about their creation and gives them suggestions on what to do next.



Here are some ideas on how Teacher B could have applied “Stop.Think.Do”.

Stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While at the learning corner with the children, Teacher B could have positioned himself such that he would be facing the children.• He could have paused and waited for the children to initiate interaction.
Think	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher B could have observed the children (<i>What are they doing?</i>) and reflected on what they could be thinking of (<i>Why are they building the towers?</i>).• He could have listened to the children’s conversation and thought of the messages they were trying to convey.• While observing and listening to the children, Teacher B could have avoided asking questions.• He could have refrained from constantly talking to the children about their creation and giving them suggestions on what to do next.
Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher B could have joined in the conversation and played with the children before commenting accordingly based on his observations.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. “That looks like a train tunnel! It must be dark inside!”

Stop . Think . Do



RECAP: Case Study C

Teacher C is helping some children with their Art & Craft. Child D eagerly shares with Teacher C what she is doing. Teacher C replies without looking at Child D, “Nice, continue,” while helping another child.



Here are some ideas on how Teacher C could have applied “Stop.Think.Do”.

Stop	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher C could have positioned herself so that she would be face-to-face with Child D.• She could have given attention to Child D, paused and waited for the child to initiate conversation about the craftwork.
Think	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• While listening to Child D, Teacher C should avoid asking too many questions.• She could have noticed what Child D had done and thought about the child’s interests.
Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teacher C could have joined in the conversation with Child D and commented accordingly.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• E.g. Child D said, “Look, a flower!”• Teacher C could have commented, “That’s a colourful flower! It smells really nice too!”

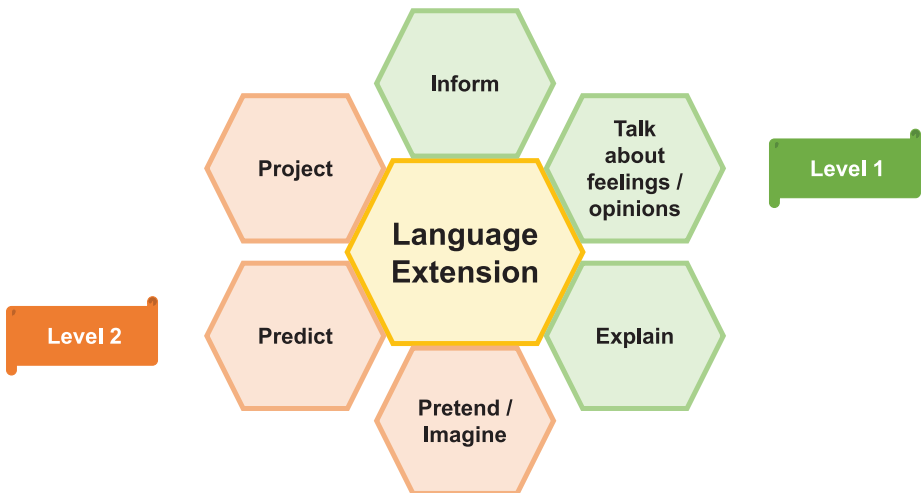
Language Extension



Following on from the earlier strategy of “Stop.Think.Do”, as early childhood educators, we may comment on what children do frequently. However, do we ensure that there is a wide variety of vocabulary and ideas in our comments?

Extending what a child says helps us to model more advanced vocabulary, spark new ideas in the child and enhance his or her language development.

There are six ways to extend a child’s language:



They will be elaborated in more details in the next few pages. Case studies will also be included to illustrate the strategies.

Language Extension



Level 1

What is **INFORM**?



- Give information about past or present
- Relate present experience to past experience
- Provide details
- Compare or contrast two things (e.g. “We are making animals just like the ones we have seen at the zoo last week.”)

What is **TALK ABOUT FEELINGS/OPINIONS**?



- Talk about how feelings which express sadness, anger, happiness etc.
- Talk about opinions and impressions (e.g. “I think the live show is going to be exciting!”)

What is **EXPLAIN**?



- Give reasons for what is happening
- Explain outcomes
- Justify opinions or preferences (e.g. “We can’t play outside because it is raining.”)

Language Extension



Level 2

What is **PRETEND/IMAGINE**?



- Talk about imaginary things; play a pretend role; create an imaginary story (e.g. I have a crocodile under my bed.)

What is **PREDICT**?



- Talk about future and predict what will happen
- Speculate about what might or could happen
- Anticipate possible problems and solutions
- Consider alternative ways of handling a situation (e.g. “If you don’t keep the blocks, then someone may trip and get hurt. Let’s all help to keep so that no one gets hurt.”)

What is **PROJECT**?



- Project into other people’s/living objects’ lives, experiences and feelings to help children take others’ perspectives
- Project into situations never experienced (e.g. “Think about this boy who lives in the tree. He probably loves watching all the birds right beside his house. The boy must be so frightened because he is lost.”)

Language Extension



Let's pause and reflect. 😊

For the case studies provided below, explore how each teacher could extend the child's language to model more advanced vocabulary and thinking.

Case Study 1 (using Level 1 strategies)

Activity	Brief description of activity	What child says
Story time	The class teacher is reading "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" to a group of nursery children.	"Caterpillar eat"
	A child comments about the caterpillar eating the food.	

Case Study 2 (using Level 2 strategies)

Activity	Brief description of activity	What child says
Role Play – At the Clinic	A group of Kindergarten 1 children are playing at the Dramatic Corner. The class teacher joins the children.	"The baby is very sick"
	A girl pretends to be the mummy and brings her sick baby to see the doctor.	

Suggested ideas are provided in the next few pages. 😊

Language Extension



RECAP: Case Study 1 (using Level 1 strategies)

Activity	Brief description of activity	What child says
Story time	The class teacher is reading “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” to a group of nursery children. A child comments about the caterpillar eating the food.	“Caterpillar eat”



Here are some ideas on how the class teacher could extend the child’s language using Level 1 strategies.

Level 1 strategies	What the teacher could say
Inform	“Yes, the caterpillar is eating <u>an apple</u> .”
Talk about Feeling	“Yes, the caterpillar is eating. The caterpillar must be <u>feeling</u> very <u>hungry</u> .”
Explain	“Yes, the caterpillar is eating <u>because</u> it needs to grow bigger and stronger, just like you.”

Language Extension



RECAP: Case Study 2 (using Level 2 strategies)

Activity	Brief description of activity	What child says
Role Play – At the Clinic	A group of Kindergarten 1 children are playing at the Dramatic Corner. The class teacher joins the children. A girl pretends to be the mummy and brings her sick baby to see the doctor.	“The baby is very sick”



Here are some ideas on how the class teacher could extend the child’s language using Level 2 strategies.

Level 2 strategies	What the teacher could say
Pretend/Imagine	“Yes, the baby is very sick. I am sick too. [<u>pretends to cough</u>] I am going to see the doctor.”
Predict/Talk about the future	“Yes, the baby is very sick. I think the baby <u>will</u> feel much better after taking some medication.”
Project	“Yes, the baby is very sick. <u>If I were</u> the baby, I would like lots of hugs from daddy and mummy.”

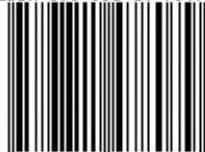
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