

Fostering Second Language Acquisition

Developmentally appropriate practices are at the heart of our philosophy at CPE Narnia. Knowing that children learn best when they are self-motivated and all their senses are engaged, at Narnia, we promote learning through play. Our priority is to maintain a safe environment while supporting all areas of child development, including fostering a second language acquisition. Narnia strongly values bilingualism. We strive to offer children an ideal environment in which to learn a second, or in some cases, a third language. As per our document on “Developmental Milestones & Widely Held Expectations”, our goal is for children to first acquire receptive language (understanding), which may progress into expressive language (verbal).

At Narnia, the designated English/French educators incorporate their language throughout the course of the daily routine. The educators will give instructions, lead activities, hold discussions, and facilitate transitions in the language that they were designated to speak. Teachers will enhance understanding by being descriptive and using body gestures, translating only as needed. Children are encouraged to respond in the target language, but never forced, as optimal learning happens in a stress free environment.

In order to develop a second language, children must be able to sustain attention & concentration, be engaged in self motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure & enjoyment, and must desire to communicate with others. Keeping the above in mind, our teaching method is to have the children learn by:

- Making comments and/or leading discussion during side-by-side play with the children while they engage in free play activities such as building blocks, dramatic play, art activities, playdough, sandbox, waterplay, etc.
- Linking words to pictures or objects through books, songs with props or flannel-board pictures, and use of color or shape games, seek & find games, “What’s That Sound?”, sensory box games, etc.
- Incorporating action songs, finger-plays and yoga where the spoken words are acted out
- Number learning through counting of children & items
- Use of repetition and reflection on previous experiences

As a parent, you can support your child in learning a new language by supplementing what we are doing at Narnia. At home, the receptive language can be promoted by listening to children’s songs or through the limited use of educational TV shows/e-books/video games. For expressive language, if you, yourself, are not proficient in the target language, then arrange for play dates with a fluent speaker friend, or enroll the child in activities where the language utilized will be the one being learned.

In an effort to immerse ones child in the new language, care should be taken, however, not to negatively impact the first language typically used in the home. Research has demonstrated that children who possess a large & rich vocabulary in their primary language have an easier time learning a new language. The explanation is that the best method to increase memory & learning of all kinds-- including for a 2nd or 3rd language—is through reciprocal back-and-forth interaction with an engaged child & adult while reading a book together, playing together, or conversation about a shared activity such as baking, shopping or other outing.

References

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