

Self -Talk and Parallel Talk

Self-Talk is a strategy in which the adult describes what he or she is doing. The adult provides the words to describe her actions, without expecting the child to respond.

When to use Self-Talk:

- Use with children who are non-verbal or have low verbal skills
- Can also be used for teacher directed activities such as cooking or gardening with children

Examples of Self-Talk:

“I’m sitting down at the table next to Carlos. I want to see what Carlos is doing with the play doh.”

“Now I am writing a ‘W.’ I start here and go down, up, down, and up again. There---a ‘W’.”

“I am digging in the sand with Monique. Deeper...deeper...deeper. Oh no---the sand is starting to cave in!”

Parallel Talk is a technique in which the adult describes what the child is doing or seeing. When an adult uses Parallel Talk, she is acting like a broadcaster. She watches the action and describes it to the child, without expecting a response. The teacher does not ask the child questions during parallel talk.

Examples of Parallel Talk:

If a child is playing with colored blocks, a teacher using Parallel Talk might say:

“Oh, you put the yellow block on top. Now you’re sliding the green one next to the long red block. The tower is getting taller.”

If a child is playing with Sesame Street characters, a teacher using Parallel Talk might say:

“Here comes Oscar the Grouch. He’s riding in the car with Cookie Monster. Cookie Monster’s in the back. He’s looking around while the car goes faster and faster.”

If an infant is upset and crying after her mother leaves, a teacher using Parallel Talk might say: “Tanisha, you really hate to see your mom leave! You are feeling very sad. You wish that she could stay with you.”

Self Talk and Parallel Talk help adults and children develop a relationship. The strategies of Self Talk and Parallel Talk give the adult a starting place, something to talk about. The adult makes comments on the child’s actions and follows the child’s lead. If the child is upset, Parallel Talk helps him to feel respected and validated. If the child is engaged in play, she enjoys the time and attention.

Self Talk and Parallel Talk helps children who are shy or have limited language.

Self Talk and Parallel Talk are a good way to begin talking with any young child, at any time. The child has the opportunity to develop receptive language, but there is no expectation that the child will respond. These techniques can be especially effective with non-verbal children, with children who are shy, and with English language learners. It builds language for all children.

Adults often feel self-conscious or awkward when they begin to use Self Talk and Parallel Talk.

To use Self Talk and Parallel Talk the adult learns to talk in a new way---describing, not questioning. But speaking is only part of it. Observing the child's action carefully is the key.

Beginners using Self Talk and Parallel Talk often overwhelm children with too much description.

In the beginning, it's easy to concentrate so hard on becoming a good describer that the natural pace and flow of conversation is overlooked. The adult doesn't need to comment on every single action. Commenting on every second or third action creates a more natural conversational pace and gives the child a chance to respond, if he chooses.

For dual language learners Self Talk and Parallel Talk are excellent strategies for giving attention to the child while also building the child's receptive language.

The adult using Self Talk and Parallel Talk in English with a dual language learner is modeling language, giving attention to the child, developing a relationship with the child, and facilitating the child's receptive language development. With a dual language learner, the adult controls the number of words she uses and may select a high frequency word to physically demonstrate and repeat. Adults can even use Self Talk and Parallel Talk with children who speak languages that the adult is unfamiliar with.

Specific strategies for using Parallel Talk with dual language learners:

- Slow down and use fewer words. Avoid overwhelming the child with too much language. Speak using a natural pace remembering that the listener may not understand what you are saying.
- Select one or two target words that you will use repeatedly during your Parallel Talk. Typically, these words are nouns or verbs that are concrete and readily understood by the dual language learner.
- To help the child understand your target words, use gestures or point to the object that represents the word.

"You're using the blue car [pointing to the blue car]. The car [pointing again to the car] is going fast. The car [again pointing] might crash. Oh no! The car [again pointing] crashed!"

Other terms for Parallel Talk: information talk, narratives, commentary, broadcasting.

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