
Supporting Language in Culturally Rich Dramatic Play

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, “Supporting Language: Culturally Rich Dramatic Play,” from The National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Discuss how culturally relevant dramatic play centers support meaningful learning during young children’s play experiences.
- ◆ Discuss the various ways to create language-rich dramatic play centers that promote dual-language learners’ communication skills.
- ◆ Develop a plan to create a culturally rich dramatic play center designed to support imitation and symbolic representation in young children, while building on their communication skills.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ Use the questions below to guide your reflection and action plan to partner with families in supporting infants’ and toddlers’ pretend play through imitation and symbolic representation.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support imitation and symbolic representation through pretend play.

Regularly assess the materials and props in the dramatic play center to make sure they accurately reflect all of the children and families in your class and accommodate the children with disabilities.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ Culturally relevant dramatic play centers include a variety of materials and props that help young children develop imitation and symbolic representation skills by drawing from their daily experiences. This promotes meaningful learning during play. Reflect on the cultures of the families in your care.
 - How do you currently incorporate children’s experiences and cultures into the dramatic play center?
 - What can you do to learn about families’ cultures to create a diverse and culturally rich learning environment that promotes meaningful learning during dramatic play?
 - How can you be intentional about ensuring that the use of language, materials and props are reflective of children’s culture? Be mindful of children’s individual needs, ensure that props are accessible to all children.

- ◆ The article offers multiple ways of planning language-rich dramatic play centers that help dual-language learners develop imitation and symbolic representation and communication skills.
 - Using new vocabulary in conversations repeatedly helps children learn unfamiliar words. How are you practicing verbal mapping in your learning environment? Consider ways to collaborate with families to share ideas for using verbal mapping at home and within the learning environment.
 - Including props can connect children’s dramatic play to their culture and language. The article mentions adding props in phases to build on children’s knowledge and hold their interest. What props do you have that could enhance pretend play through imitation and symbolic representation? Reflect on how the three phases can be implemented in your teaching.
 - Adding print materials to the dramatic play center is another way to help children develop imitation and symbolic representation skills. What can you do to encourage children to notice print and understand that it symbolizes language? If you’re already doing this in one language, have you thought about including other languages?

- ◆ Develop a plan to create a culturally rich dramatic play center designed to support imitation and symbolic representation in young children, while building on their communication skills.
 - Think of each child’s culture and how you can work with families to ensure there’s equal representation of their cultural experiences in the dramatic play centers and at home.
 - Offer suggestions to families about how they can build children’s communication skills through conversations, new vocabulary, labeling and the use of props.
 - The final result should be a culmination of culture, print, and props that are representative of the children in your care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about imitation and symbolic representation in culturally rich dramatic play centers.

- ◆ **Source:** Virginia Infant & Toddler Specialist Network
- ◆ **Article:** Celebrating Cultural Differences: Activities to Make Diverse Connections
- ◆ **Link:** <https://va.gapitc.org/celebrating-cultural-differences-activities-to-make-diverse-connections/>
- ◆ **Description:** This blog teaches children about cultural diversity in a few ways that encourage multicultural representation.

- ◆ **Source:** Penn State Extension
- ◆ **Article:** Dramatic Play: Let's Think Beyond the Housekeeping Corner
- ◆ **Link:** <http://bkc-od-media.vmhost.psu.edu/documents/Activities1602.pdf>
- ◆ **Description:** Dramatic play extends past the housekeeping corner into a more robust, diverse area that introduces new concepts and reinforces others.

- ◆ **Source:** Wilmington Bilingual Preschool
- ◆ **Video:** 2 Year Old Dramatic Play in Spanish
- ◆ **Link:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GT40fjxL4d0>
- ◆ **Description:** A two-year old counts food in Spanish with her teacher while labeling each food prop in the dramatic play area.