

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE THROUGH WORKJOBS

At different times during the morning workperiod, several children, in succession, may select the same activity, such as the bolt board. Even though each child will perform the same task—i.e., screwing the bolts into the nuts glued to the board by fitting the three different size bolts to their matching nuts—there is a great difference in the children's ability to express this experience in words. For example, one child might be able to explain his work in the following way: "I was working with these metal things glued onto this long board. I screwed the long things into the metal pieces on the board. Some of them were small ones and some were big and some were in between. I could screw them together because they have these raised-up lines on the metal parts that make them fit together." A second child, on the other hand, may only be able to say, "Uhh . . . I filled up the holes," and will stare in silence and shrug when asked how he went about it.

Because children come to school in all stages of readiness, they have different abilities and different needs. The first child who explained his work with the bolt board needs his teacher to help him mainly with vocabulary—"bolt" for "long thing," "nut" for "metal piece," and "thread" for "raised-up lines." The second child needs far more from his teacher. He needs help in clarifying his thinking: in naming the objects he used, in expressing the actions he performed, in identifying the colors or materials or shapes of the objects, in seeing relationships, and in gaining facility in expressing his thinking in words. Clearly, the

teacher can only touch on a few of these areas in the brief period of time she will spend with this child when he has completed his activity, but it is in this conversation that the teacher begins to meet each child's need for language development.

The child may not express himself clearly and precisely on *this* occasion, but certainly he will make gains. The accumulated confidence and skill which this child, and others like him, gain by going one step at a time does lead to clearer and more confident self-expression. This discussion between the teacher and the child at the completion of each activity is crucial: it provides the opportunity, the need, for each child to express himself in language. Unless the teacher creates this opportunity, through her questions, a child who does not have the verbal facility to express himself clearly will have no reason to attempt to organize his thinking and express his thoughts in words.

Each teacher will find the basis for her questions for follow-up discussion after each activity primarily from the child she is working with. The child who needs to increase his vocabulary will be helped to learn new words. The child who needs a review of his colors will get it. The child who wants to learn to write all the words in a workjob will be given the opportunity. And the child who has difficulty expressing even the simplest thought will be helped step by step to confident expression.

Ideas for follow-up discussions are given for each workjob. With one child a teacher may have the opportunity to cover all the skills and questions for a particular workjob. With another she may use only one or two. And with still others, because she is following the child's cues, she may find the listed possibilities not appropriate at all. The importance of the follow-up discussions doesn't lie in the particular question asked; rather, it is the opportunity afforded each child to verbalize his experiences and be able to put his thoughts into words.