

Eating and Reading at Home

*Links Between Family
Conversations with
Preschoolers and Later
Language and Literacy*

By Diane Beals

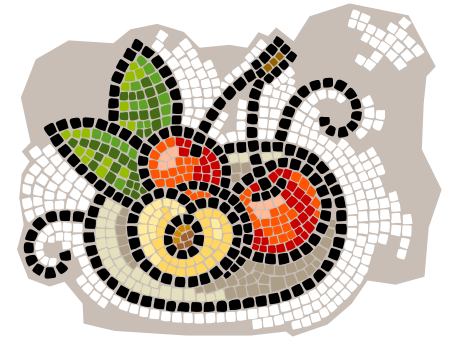


Mealtime Data Collection



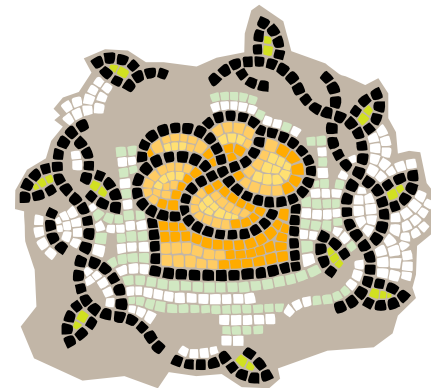
- 3,4, and 5 year olds and their families were left an audio cassette tape recorder and three blank tapes to record meal time conversations.
- 160 audiotapes of mealtime conversations were collected. (68 different families returned one tape, 20 families returned two tapes, and 36 families returned three tapes).
- Fathers were present at only 52 of the mealtime conversations

Key Aspects of Mealtimes Conversations



- Researchers focused on two types of talk: *Narrative* and *Explanatory*
- Talk during mealtimes was marked as narrative when the topic was a past or future event.
- Talk that requested and/or made some logical connection between objects, events, concepts or conclusions was marked as explanatory talk.

Narrative Mealtime Talk Results



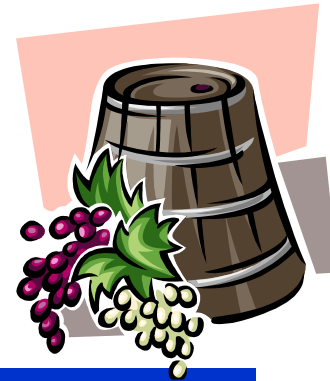
- Accounted for 17% of all mealtime talk at age 3
- Accounted for 11% of all mealtime talk at age 4
- Accounted for 17% of all mealtime talk at age 5
- The drop in narrative talk at age four is a mysterious finding

Explanatory Mealtime Talk Results



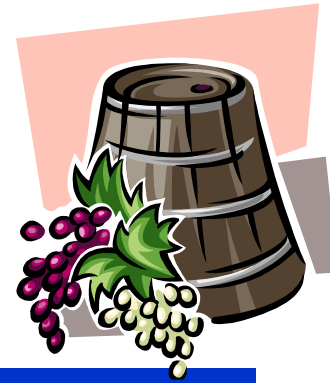
- Accounted for 15% of mealtime talk at age 3
- Accounted for 16% of mealtime talk at age 4
- Accounted for 14% of mealtime talk at age 5
- Unlike narrative, explanatory talk remained relatively stable over the period of ages 3-5

Literacy Outcomes



- The amount of narrative and explanatory talk were both positively associated with a number of the SHELL-K Home Early Language and Literacy Battery.
- More explanatory talk at ages 4 and 5 = higher scores on the PPVT-Revised at age 5
- More narrative talk at age 5 = higher PPVT-Revised scores at age 5
- More explanatory and narrative talk was positively associated with the ability to give definitions of words at age 5.

Literacy Outcomes Continued



- More narrative talk at age 4 = higher scores on the Story Comprehension Task at age 5.
- There were strong positive relationships between narrative and explanatory mealtime talk during the preschool years and children's scores on literacy-related measures when children were 5 years old.

Suggestions to Parents



- Take time each day to have extended discussions with children
- Allow the children to choose their own topics
- Answer you child's questions, particularly those about cause and effect.
- Discuss people's intentions and motivations for what they say or do, including your own.
- Describe objects and events together interactively. Raise questions and extend the descriptions.
- Expose your children to new words. Give a definition or a synonym for the words. Use them in that conversation and in future ones.