



# It's All About Natural Language

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# Objectives

- At the end of the sessions, participants will be able to identify and distinguish between natural language opportunities and structured/directive activities
- Integrate strategies to provide the most opportunities for children ages 0-5 to use and generalize language and communication skills one-on-one and with peers.
- List three ways to take a structured lesson and integrate natural language use



# What Is Natural Language?

## What it is

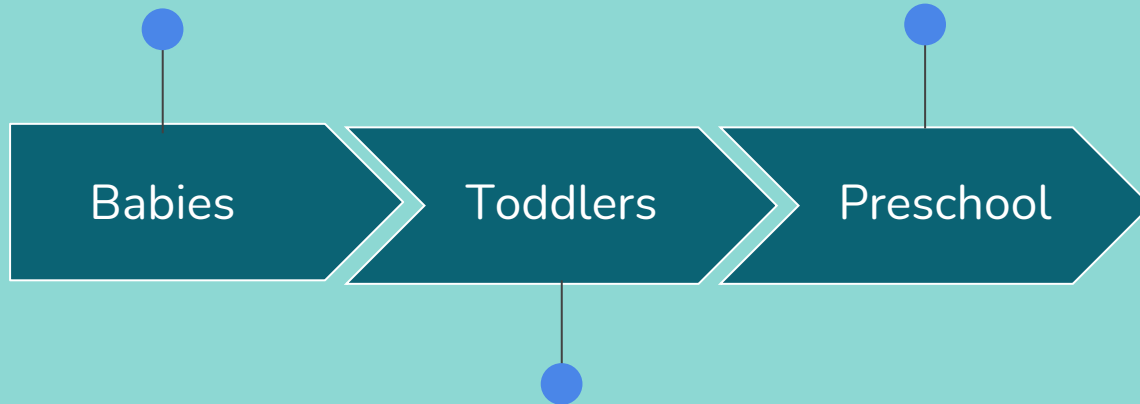
- Unstructured
- Spontaneous
- Motivating and Fun
- Following the Child's Lead
- Done in the context of functional experiences
- Building a safe relationship

## What it is NOT

- Extremely structured
- Scripted and directed
- Always sticking to the plan
- Getting the Project Done
- Drill and Kill in isolation

- Building Relationships
- Turn taking
- Experiencing the World

- Social Play Skills
- Academic vocabulary and concepts



- Independence
- Routine directions
- Functional Language

# Babies: 0-12 months



“...accept the child’s spontaneously occurring verbal or nonverbal behavior as meaningful communication, interpret it in a manner that is contextually appropriate, and to become a collaborator with the child in communicating the messages more effectively.”

# Babies: 0-12 months

Building relationship with caregivers

- Joint attention
- Labeling names of objects and individuals
- Cause & Effect

Understanding their environment

- Building receptive language
- Learning about the events/routines that happen everyday (cause & effect)

Social Games - turn taking

## Toddlers: 1-2 Years



**“...assists the child in evaluating the situation or context, attaching meaning to the events that are occurring, determine some action or activity within the context and formulating some language to accomplish this goal.”**



# Toddlers: 1-2 Years

## Functional Language

- Learning family names
- Labeling wants and needs
- Rejecting or refusing

## Following Directions

- Grab your shoes
- Give \_\_\_\_\_ a hug!

## Toddlers: 2-3 Years



“At each phase of the activity, the SLP observes the child in order to determine what the child understands about the situation, and then organizes new information for the child to attend to....Children are likely to change activities or abandon toys because they have exhausted their understanding of what actions can be performed...”



# Toddlers: 2-3 Years

Labeling their wants and needs

- “I want one”
- “I no sleep”

Expressing themselves

- Sharing toys
- Peer or sibling relationships

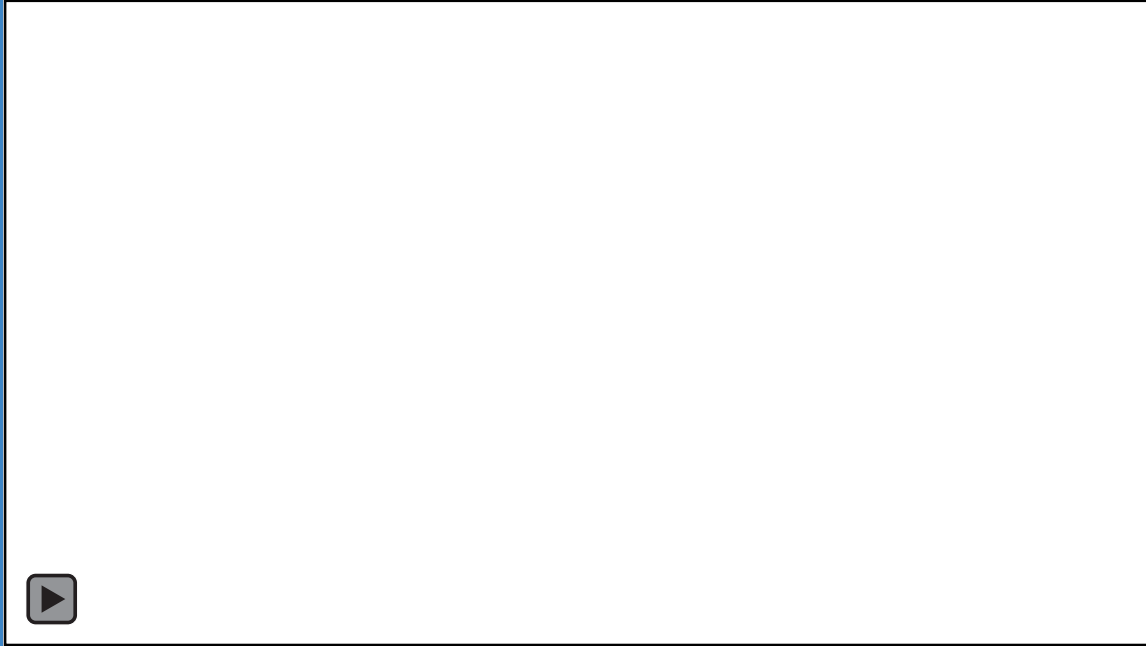
Following directions while handling emotions

- First we read a book and then you will go to bed.

**“...help the child elaborate and extend the topic by formulating communication acts such as commenting about how the doll looks, finding out if the doll wants to see herself in a mirror, asking if the doll wants a aht or offering to brush another person’s hair”**



# Unstructured Free Draw



## What The Viewer Sees

- Child directed
- Playful
- Unstructured

# What the Practitioner Did to Craft This:

- Organization of the environment
- Identifying appropriate levels of play for students *and responding with adjustments* to complexity, which is *child initiated within the lesson*.
- Influencing complexity (pointing out new options)
- Providing communication opportunities between peers
- Using language to affect others
- Providing consequences (acknowledging, specific praise, summarizing, rewording, modeling)



# Structured Science Lesson



- Use Questions (especially hypotheticals)
- Adjust to child's levels
- Bring child's attention to their peers

# In Summary

Natural language is our avenue to achieve session targets and goals while building relationships, having fun, and engaging the children in our care.

Unstructured doesn't mean uninvolved—it actually takes more in the moment decisions, adjustments, and planning to ensure that the child never has the thought that they are not in total control.

# Thank you

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# References

Norris, Janet A., and Paul Hoffman. "Language Intervention Within Naturalistic Environments." *Language Speech and Hearing Services in Schools*, vol. 21, no. 2, Apr. 1990, pp. 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.1044/0161-1461.2102.72>.