Language Considerations to Think About when Observing and Interacting with Young Children

By A. C. Parker

My research centres on introducing French Immersion Kindergarten children to vocabulary words in such a way as to ensure a lasting memory. After I read stories to the children, they have playtimes to dramatically retell the stories and so indirectly reinforce affective vocabulary. During playtimes, I listen for words that represent typical oral expression, as summarized by child development theorists such as Halliday (1971), Piaget (1964), Vygotsky, and others. I create a qualitative linguistic profile (Housen et al 1984) of each child as they transition from their homes or day-cares to a full-day at school.

It is necessary to consider that Kindergarten children’s oral expression changes merely because schools are social places that encourage some kinds of speech and not others. It is important to note that children can be easily impressed with story characters and their words and actions. I would like to develop the children’s oral expression and would introduce different kinds of ‘pragmatic’ syntax into the stories, defined as a manner of speaking that we all understand and use when we want to ensure an intended message is heard. Apart from the influence of the stories on their vocabulary, I would be interested in the extent to which children of this age mutually understand each other on any level, be it affective, rational, imaginative, social, needs-based and so on.