

Kindergarten

Did you ever marvel at what a child has accomplished before the first day of kindergarten? Think of it. They are born into a totally alien world from an environment of darkness with eyes that cannot even focus. Slowly they perceive what is around them, first by smell, sound and feel, and eventually with sight.

Their rapidly evolving brain permits them to start identifying objects, but since they do not have the capacity to label the objects, their perception and evaluation is totally non-verbal. Finally they begin to recognize favorite toys, things that make noise, and even individuals. But they still are label free even though these large moving things about them keep saying “mama” and “dada”. Eventually, the words start to become associated with certain objects, and even though children have yet to speak, they are becoming verbal. And over a period of time, more and more objects acquire labels, courtesy of the incessant chatter of those very large creatures surrounding their tiny frame. Then one day, voila! this information sponge manages to vocalize one of the labels stored in memory. And the race is on.

For the rest of our lives the process will remain essentially the same. We will perceive, process the information non-verbally, verbalize it by attaching labels, then speak. We can share our experience with others, and we can share others’ experiences, even with persons long dead. This ability defines us as human time binders, that is, we are not limited to what we see for ourselves, but are free to visit the past and future.

In contrast, let’s consider my large hound. During the winter, if I told him to get my gloves, he would go to the floor by the coat rack, and bring me a pair of gloves, knowing that this meant walk time. If he got impatient, he got the gloves and brought them to me on his own. My wife would ask him to go get the newspaper. Fair weather or foul, he would go to the end of the driveway and bring in the paper. He had associated the object with the word, so he was at one edge of the verbal spectrum. But in thirteen years, I never once heard him say “gloves” or “newspaper”, nor stop to read the paper on the way back. He had reached his limit.

And when your students, these future scholars, first darken your kindergarten doorstep, what can you do to prepare them for the benefits that can be derived from “Cognitive Evaluation and Communication”? You can channel the student’s nervous system into accepting that the words we use for objects are labels, and have no meaning in themselves. This may sound deep; the method is extremely simple. To wit:

To date the child has probably repeatedly heard phrases such as “this is a ball”, “this is a rattle”, “this is red”, etc. You can change the students’ tendency to mis-identify the label with the thing back to one of simply naming and labeling by saying “we call this a ball”, “we call this a rattle”, “we call this color red”, “we call this letter A”, “we call this number 2”, etc. This clearly connotes separation of the label or name from the thing in question. Accepting that the label is not the thing now will avoid semantic conflicts later on.

Will the child continue to use this vocabulary once they leave your domain? Probably not. But the die has been cast. Their mind has been exposed to the fact that what we call things are but labels. It will be far easier for this child to understand the lesson on “IS”, which they will encounter in about fifth grade. For your further reading, the lesson on “IS” is included in Chapter 13.

NON-ALLNESS

We are sure that your students believe you to be the font of wisdom. Prepare to slightly dissuade them. Without making a major case of the subject, we want them to start learning that we cannot know everything about anything. Here is a simple exercise to use when you want a change of pace.

Simply hand one of the children a regular pencil. Ask him/her to tell you just one thing about the pencil, and then pass it on to his/her neighbor. Each child can tell one thing, but it must be a new thing. When they run out of things to say, suggest that they could find out where it was made, or where the wood came from. But we will never know who chopped down the tree. We simply do not know all that can be known about this pencil, but we do know one important thing—we can write with it.

Repeating an exercise like this two or three times in Kindergarten should set the stage for future discussions about non-allness.