

Recording Conversations

This exercise is a good one for children of all ages (I had a lot of fun with it).

An audio or video recorder is necessary. Corey and I began these exercises when he was about four and continued until he was about eight or nine years old. The “programs” got more sophisticated as he got older, and we got better at it as we practiced.

I still occasionally listen to one program in which we recorded a trip into his room after he had been told to clean it up and to pick up all of his toys.

We did not plan the dialogue, only planned in a general way what would happen. We talked about what it would be like to go into a room that was full of toys almost to the ceiling, how it would be hard to get around, and what we would need to help us. We gathered some objects to make sound effects that we thought we might need. We got a metal wastebasket to talk into to give an echo, a pile of pans to knock over, some blocks of wood for crash sounds, and finally, we practiced making the sound of a door knob turning and a door opening. We ended this recording by the sounds of us nailing shut his room door and our deciding to build a room addition on the house. It started something like this:

Announcer: *The Day Corey Cleaned His Room*

Dad: Corey, did you clean up your room as I asked you to?

Corey: Sure I did, Dad.

Dad: Let's go in and look at it, shall we?

Corey: No, that's okay. You don't have to go in there.

Dad: I'll just open this door and see . . .

Corey: Don't open that door! (Long drawn-out sounds of pans and piles of toys crashing on the kitchen table.)

Dad: Wow, what's this?

Corey: I told you not to open the door.

Dad: Corey, you go to the basement and get the pitons and the ice axe, and I'll get the climbing boots out of the garage.

Corey: Why?

Dad: We're going in your room and we have to be prepared. (Sounds of feet running down stairs and doors slamming.)

Corey: Here's the axe and the rope.

Dad: I got the boots. Let's put them on and try and get up this first cliff of toys. (Sounds of boots being put on.) Okay, now I have to loop this rope over that top bike and we can pull ourselves up. (Grunts.)

Corey: Good toss, Dad. Here let me go first, then I can help you up.

Dad: Good idea, Corey. (Sounds of climbing then sounds of falling toys.) Look out, Corey! (Sounds of great effort.) I stopped you just in time. You almost fell on that sled.

Corey: Dad, you use this rope to pull yourself up, and I'll try to get over to the dresser where we might be able to see the bed . . .

We eventually discovered a large green animal living in the room, which messed it up every time Corey cleaned it. We never have been able to get rid of this animal.

Another program we “produced” was our meeting Santa Claus while on a hunt for the “Abdominal Snowman.”

The Abdominal Snowman

Dad: Corey, we're at the top of the world on our hunt for the Abdominal Snowman. (Sounds of wind blowing.)

Corey: Where do we start to look?

Dad: I think we should climb up that ice wall and see what's on top. (Sounds of climbing and great effort. Many calls for help and cooperation.)

Corey: I'm at the top now, Dad. Grab the rope and I'll help you up. (Sounds of climbing.) Now, where is that snowman?

Corey was quite small when we did this recording, and it was difficult to record because he would get excited and run around acting out his parts and the microphone would not pick up his voice. I continually had to call him back to the kitchen to speak into the microphone.

We eventually ran into a man in a red suit who did a lot of laughing. This indeed was an abdominal snowman. Neither Corey nor I knew how this recording was going to come out. We both were surprised when we ran into Santa Claus. When I play this recording now that Corey is grown, it is with great pleasure that I hear that little voice laugh and yell, “That's Santa Claus!”

Creative interviews are also very easy to record. When Corey was in grade school we did one with Christopher Columbus just before he set out to discover the new world. Christopher was in his bath trying to find his rubber duck when the interviewer met him. Corey had been assigned a report on this explorer, and, when he turned in the interview, his teacher didn't like it because Christopher was in his bath. So much for creativity in school.

We had great fun with an interview with a man from the National Weather Service and a groundhog on Groundhog's Day. The weather service man wanted to find out how many more weeks of winter there would be. He had to wake up a groundhog to interview him.

We did interviews with Sherlock Holmes, Batman and some television personalities.

We had one interview with Superman after he had been arrested for changing his clothes in a phone booth.

One time we followed the race between the Tortoise and the Hare and interviewed both of them after the race. During that interview we got all mixed up trying to understand the difference between a turtleneck sweater and a turtle's neck sweater.

Your programs and interviews do not have to be elaborate or staged. In fact, it's better for the children if they don't know how the programs are going to come out. The way to do this is to set the characters and the situations and let the plots develop as you work your way through them. Keep in mind that there is no way that the children can make a mistake, and the only thing that you can do wrong is to not have fun. That's the point of doing this: having fun with language. Preparation for a program could go like this:

Dad: Corey, let's do an interview with the Easter Rabbit. What kinds of sound effects do you think we'll need?

Corey: We should have some eggs to break.

Dad: Wait, now. Let's think of something that might sound like breaking eggs and not waste any food.

Corey: How about crumpling up some paper?

Dad: Good idea. (It didn't work, but so what?)

Corey: We'll need some chicken sounds.

Dad: For what?

Corey: The chickens have to be mad because the rabbit stole their eggs.

Dad: Excellent! I can make a good chicken sound. How about a man who sells egg dye. You know, to make the eggs pretty colors.

Corey: Don't the eggs come in colors?

Dad: Not really. We could have the rabbit and the color man argue about this. The rabbit could claim he could lay eggs in different colors.

Corey: Rabbits can't lay eggs!

Dad: I thought Easter Rabbits could.

Corey: No, rabbits can't do that.

Dad: How about just for this recording?