

Create a problem!

Creating a problem is a powerful way to get children to act, think and talk actively. This works with all children, even the less talkative or less proficient ones.

For instance, when playing in the sandbox, the child tries to make moulds to build a sand castle. But he discovers the sand won't come out of the container. The teacher, playing along as playmate, looks surprised and asks: "Hey, why do you think it won't come out?" Then she is silent and the child takes the opportunity to think up an explanation and put his ideas into words.

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Eefje van der Zalm & Resi Damhuis (2013), *Uitdagen tot gesprek*. Marnix Academie, Utrecht, The Netherlands

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Why does a child need active acting, thinking and talking?

Only when the child acts, thinks and talks actively, his **language learning mechanism** is triggered. This mechanism enables the child to learn new language in natural conversations during play:

- the child expresses his ideas himself,
- he discovers he lacks the proper word,
- the teacher offers the word in her natural response,
- the child picks up that word and adds it to his knowledge of the language.

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Example:

- the child expresses his ideas himself
- he discovers he lacks the proper word
- the teacher offers the word in her natural response
- the child picks up that word and adds it to his knowledge of the language
- Child: **That's because the sand, it it uh holds on to itself.**
- “**holds on to itself**”
- Teacher: **Ah, it sticks together?**
- Child: **It sticks together too strongly!**

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One of 10 powerful ingredients

- “Creating a problem” is one of ten powerful ingredients to provoke children to participate in conversation. We designed these ingredients in a project called “Provoke to talk” (‘Uitdagen tot gesprek’), that we conducted with practitioners in preschool and kindergarten in the Netherlands.
- Another ingredient, closely connected to it, is: Be less helpful! In other words: do not offer the solution to a problem yourself, but let the children think, act and talk.

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Combine ingredients

The power of the ten ingredients lies not in their novelty (some are well known indeed). It lies in the **purposeful combination** of the ten.

Preschool educators and kindergarten teachers who worked with these ingredients, experienced that creating a problem works as a trigger for the other ingredients. So a good starting point for experimenting in your own group would be that one: **Create a problem!** And then the others will follow.

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10 ingredients

Powerful approach = Combine strengths

1. Create a rich verbal learning environment
2. Join as playmate, do not ask test questions
3. Connect to the L1 life of the child
4. Create communication immediately, put into words what the child is doing
5. Create space on the speaking floor and challenge with respect to content
6. Use surprise and provocative statements
7. Give implicit feedback and continue the communication
8. Offer fixed phrases ('chunks')
9. Be less helpful: linguistically and in terms of actions
10. Create a problem

→ Create opportunities & seize opportunities

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