How Can We Encourage Kids to Think Critically?
Exploring Mindful Use of Language
By Parents and Professionals

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Individuals with social communication difficulties have core areas of challenge
- Seeing the big picture
- Reading nonverbal communication
- Problem solving in real time
- Taking the perspective of others
- Self-regulating/impulse control
- Being flexible

Let’s develop these areas!
Here are FIVE foundation skills that we can work on.

1. Improve Observation Skills
   Visual Referencing, Using Our Senses
   - Know what to observe
   - Observe more often
   - Understand or derive meaning from what we see and hear
     - Verbal
     - Nonverbal
     - Contextual information

2. Use Episodic Memory
   - Access prior memories that are relevant to the here and now
     - Have I encountered a problem like this in the past?
     - Of the solutions I know, which is the best for the problem I have right now?
   - Store important memories for future retrieval
     - What could I remember to do next time this happens?
3. Appreciate opinions and be comfortable with different perspectives
   - No one has to be right or wrong.
   - Different opinions can exist in the same space.

4. Feel okay making mistakes
   - Take small risks and try new things
   - Become comfortable with uncertainty
   - Develop resilience

5. Think in alternatives and possibilities
   Think Flexibly
   - Appreciate that there is always more than one way to do something

Here's the good news!
Declarative language is a GIFT we can give to our students within each interaction that will help develop these areas.

But first... imperative language:
   - Questions or directions with a right/wrong answer
   - Not flexible
   - Doesn’t give information, just “gets”
   - Places demands on student to perform
   - Not Experience-Sharing in nature
   - Tells people what to do or say

Examples of imperative language
   - Get in line.
   - What color is your shirt?
   - Say hello to Grandma.
   - Look at me.
   - What did I say?
What exactly is Declarative Language?

- A comment
- Thinking out loud, sharing your inner voice
- Invites Experience-Sharing and observation
- Does not place demands
- Flexible - many possible responses
- Encourages “seeing the big picture”
- Empowers!

Declarative Language is a really powerful tool!
We just have to try it, trust it, and be patient.

Imperative | Declarative
Get in line. | Hmmm... it looks like it might be time to go to lunch.
What color is your shirt? | We have the same color shirt. I like red too!
Say hello to Grandma. | Oh look! Grandma is here.
Look at me. | I'm worried you might miss something if you don't look.
What did I say? | I'm wondering if you heard what I said.

Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts
May be a simple comment that observes:
- The dog looks hungry.
- Those flowers are really colorful!

Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts
Can include first person pronouns that emphasize my thinking or our togetherness:
- I wonder if your friend likes pretzels.
- I want to read this book to you.
- We had fun yesterday!
- Let’s go get our shoes.
- The teacher is waiting for us.

Freddie and Desmond – thinking about our shared space

video
Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts
Can include cognitive (or “thinking”) verbs:
- think........Hmmmm... let me think about that.
- hope...I hope you will play too.
- remember, forget ....I remember last time this happened we...
- decide
- wish ................I wish it wasn’t raining!
- wonder.... I wonder what we need now.
- know/don’t know

Noah and Ben (age 5) – becoming curious and interested about the thoughts of others

Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts
Can include words that emphasize uncertainty, possibility and alternatives:
- maybe.........Maybe your friend wants to play too.
- perhaps
- might....We might go to the store later.
- possibly
- sometimes
- sure/not sure...That’s a great question! I’m not sure.

Declarative Language – Nuts and Bolts
Can include observational words or words related to our senses:
- notice........I notice everyone is ready for our story!
- see
- hear .......... I heard your friend ask for a cup.
- smell
- feel..........I can tell your Mom felt upset about that.

Lena (age 4) – taking perspective

Harry (age 7) and Mom – sharing our opinions
Mindful Pacing
It is really important to give kids time to think.
Pause so your student can process and respond in his or her own unique way.
Don’t be afraid of silence.
Be ready to slow down.

Troubleshooting
But what if it doesn’t work...?!

Troubleshooting – Our Declarative Language Toolbox
- Get closer
- Wait a bit longer
- Add a gesture
- Secure child’s attention first
  - Tap shoulder, call name
  - Remove distractions
- Give more information (not less)
  - I notice all the kids are lining up .... I think that means it’s time for lunch.
- Don’t give up!

Michael (age 10) – guess what I’m thinking!

Declarative Language Examples from Social Thinking and Me!
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How many real problems can you come up with for each size? List them below in the space provided. It’s okay if the number of problems for each size is different.

| BIG problems we’ve observed, heard about, or experienced |
| SMALL problems we’ve observed, heard about, or experienced |

Christopher (age 21) - it is never too late to use declarative language!

Video

Fast Forward: Christopher (age 24)

Video

Fast Forward: Lena (age 10)

Video

Back to the cereal...

Ready now for a challenge?
Turn these into declarative statements!

- Go get your backpack.
- Ask your friend what she wants to play.
- Sharpen your pencil.
- Stop making those noises!
- Tell your friend your name.
Declarative Language Pilot Project
an invitation for interested parents

- Get trained in declarative language use
- Be part of an exciting pilot project to gather information related to this effective and underused strategy
- See flyer for more information!

Let's Empower Our Kids!
Social Thinking and Me!
How We Use Language and the Language We Use
I Get It! -- Audra Jensen

Articles on my website to print and share:
- Sept. 2015 blog entry: Declarative Language

Thank you for your time!
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