

YOU KNOW WHAT?!

"You know what? If you swallow an eggshell, it stops right here." (gesture indicating mid-neck) ". . .Then your blood can't get through. It stops right here." (gesture) "And when the blood can't get <sup>up</sup> ~~up~~, yo're dead." Mark accompanied the dissertation with appropriate expressions and gestures. It was graphic and convincing and I marveled. Inaccuracies of information aside, I was enthralled with his reasoning and lucidity of expression. I like to listen to children. They speak one at a time because they know I am interested in what each has to say and I cannot hear if more than one talks at once. They know I like to hear each one and it is therefore axiomatic that they take turns speaking. The order, the discipline, the rules are built in and the children maintain order among themselves with no carping from me.

Language. How terribly important it is. Speech is the necessary tool of language. Brandon has wonderful thoughts and a delicious sense of humor. We play speech games that enable me to ascertain that each child is ~~esap~~ capable of producing all the speech sounds. The games are fun and the children repeat them by themselves and thereby practice. This practice is necessarily desultory; more practice is needed, and something else: a desire to communicate. When I can't understand Brandon because he has spoken hastily and left out most of his consonants, he is angry with himself and I am sad that I have

missed an interesting thought or a good laugh. Brandon's speech is improving by leaps and bounds.

A parrot can be taught to speak; language is the thing. We help children build relationships; and vocabulary but understand too that there is "speaking" via pantomime, gesture, eyes, shrugs as well as words. Once it is ascertained that adequate auditory acuity exists, auditory perception becomes the concern. Early language is important and parents and teachers alike can assist in its development by both listening to children and being competency models for them.

"A vampire lives in a box and only comes out at night but he has to go back in the box before it's daylight because he'd melt." Mike waited expectantly for a response. "If you saw a vampire would you be a little bit surprised?" I asked. The children chorused, "I'd be a lot surprised." "Amazed?" I asked. The children considered this. "Amazed," they murmured, running the word around in their mouths and their heads. Acceptable. "Amazed," they concurred. Later, one of the friends hung by one leg from the monkey bars. "Look at me," he crowed. Mark looked at him contemplatively. "I'm amazed," he adjudged. Children within earshot nodded knowingly.

I always admire the language used at show-and-tell time and as a result the children enjoy describing and explaining with detail and color. It is more fun for everybody. No attempt is ridiculed though the teacher may get inner joy from some usages. In a story we read, a character was described as "frugal." We discussed saving and that "frugal" meant to save and be saving. So, of course, when Kristin wanted her paper kept for taking home she asked, "Ms. Prins, will you please frugal my paper?"