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CASE STUDY 1

Sample Learning Activity: K–Grade 3—Computers, page 29

Key Understanding 1: We describe where things are in relation to other things. There are special words, phrases, and symbols that help us with this.

Working Towards: Recognizing phase

LEARNING PURPOSE

I had noticed that my students' use of directional language was somewhat limited. When asked where objects were kept in the classroom, they would point or use general terms such as "over there" or "near the door" instead of using more specific positional language, such as "under the bookcase" and "next to the table." I wanted to develop this positional language, while helping my students see the value of using these words to be more precise when describing locations.

ENGAGING IN ACTION

Initially I engaged the group in lots of physical movement, giving them opportunities to position themselves in various locations around the room, while I modelled the language they needed to develop. I gave directions such as, "Krista, stand in front of the bookshelf," and then described their positions, "Krista is in front of the bookshelf, next to the door."

After a number of similar sessions, the class decided to produce a "talking book" about what they had been doing. They used a digital camera to take photos of students in different locations around the room, and then they all looked at the pictures on the computer and decided on the appropriate oral text to describe the student's position in each one. The student concerned then recorded text using Kid Pix Deluxe® Slide Show (software such as PowerPoint could also be used) to complete the book. Students had the opportunity to use the language of position in several contexts—to suggest positions to be photographed, to discuss which oral text would describe each position for the recorded voice-over, and to actually record a description of their own position in a photograph.

The class had been taking part in a travel-buddy project, and had a toy

My name is Carrie and I'm sitting on the table next to the bookcase.



Students need to hear the language of position and have the opportunity to respond to it before they can begin to use the language of position themselves.

Unless students are given a real purpose for using the appropriate language, they are unlikely to make it a useful part of their vocabulary.

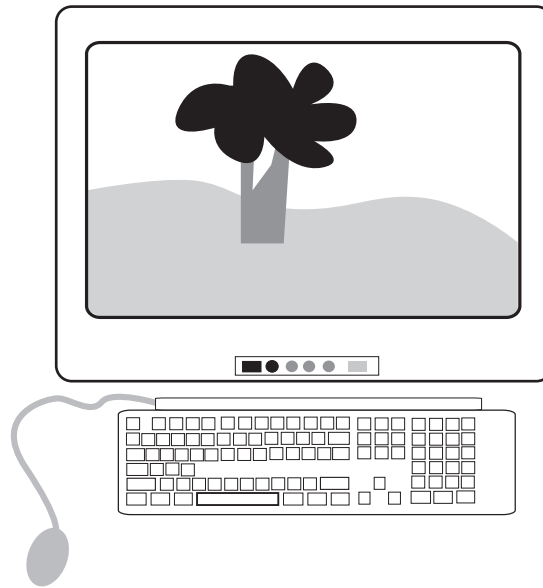
This required students to externalize the actions in order to successfully carry out the instruction and, for many, this was challenging.

Some children were using language that suggested they saw the picture only as a 2-D image and related location words to the screen itself (e.g., “The birds are at the top”). Others used language such as “The rabbits are jumping away to a shed,” which indicated they were visualizing the screen space as a 3-D environment. The need to see a 2-D image as representing 3-D space underlies the ability to interpret maps and therefore that students have reached the end of the Recognizing phase.

kangaroo in the classroom that had been sent to them from a class of students in Australia. Several students were keen to make a similar talking book about Kramer the Kangaroo to send to their pen pals. I asked students to place Kramer in various locations around the room in response to the kinds of directions used in the earlier activities. This time, instead of saying, “Krista, stand in front of the bookshelf,” I said, “Krista, can you put Kramer in front of the bookcase?”

Extension of Individual Language Skills

The following day, I worked individually with each student at the computer to help them to create a picture using a stamp pad program. Each picture began with a simple horizon and a tree, and students used a “stamp set” to add animals in varying positions. Other objects like ponds, rocks, and buildings were added as desired.



I asked Robert where he wanted to put his frog.

“There,” he said, pointing to a location near the tree.

I replied, “Ah, yes, next to the tree.” They continued to add several frogs and some birds to the picture, with Robert continuing to point at the screen when asked where he wanted to put the animals.

I wanted Robert to begin talking about the position of his animals in his own words, so I said, “Tell me about your picture.”

Robert said, “There’s a tree and some birds and some frogs.”

“Let’s begin with the birds,” I said. “Tell me where you put the birds.”

“There,” Robert said and pointed at the screen.

“Try to say where they are in your picture without pointing at them, so I can write it down,” I said, but Robert did not respond. “Well, I can see a bird up in the tree. Where did you put the other bird?”

“In the sky.”

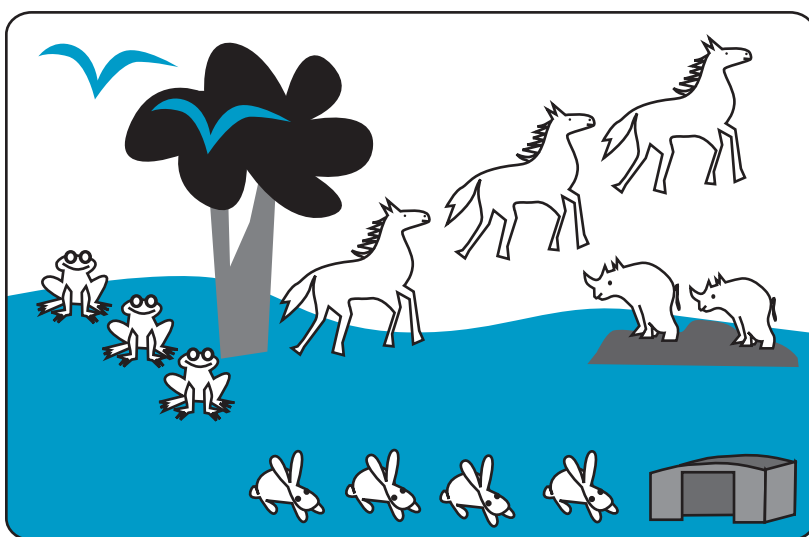
“Is it flying high in the sky or near to the tree?”

“It’s near the tree.”

“What should we write down, then, about the birds?” I asked. “We could begin with ‘There is a bird...’”

“There’s a bird in the sky near the tree, and there’s a bird in the tree as well.”

These final responses were written beneath the pictures and later shared with the rest of the group and parents.



There is a bird in the sky near the tree,
and a bird in the tree as well.
There are 3 frogs jumping forward.
There are 4 rabbits jumping away to a shed.
There are 2 rhinoceroses sitting on a rock
watching the other animals.
There are 3 horses and they are galloping
into the sky.

I was pleased to see students practising the language during free-play activities in the block corner. Many students constructed houses, boats, and such for their teddy bears and then spontaneously used location language in their talk: “I’m putting my teddy bear in the car, you put your teddy bear next to mine.”