Strength-Based Coaching:
Empowering teachers to create upward spirals of quality that build language and literacy

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Evidence-Based Practice: “A decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values.” (Buysse & Wesley).

Practice-Based Evidence: Documentation of child and group learning, coupled with reflection that leads to new questions.
STRENGTH-BASED COACHING CYCLE

Plan

Assess

Teacher/Coach Relationship

Research

Reflect

Implement

What do WE want to work on?

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What do WE want to put into practice?

What are OUR next steps?

What successes did WE achieve?

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STRENGTH-BASED COACHING STORY
MY INITIAL OBSERVATIONS...
BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE **WHY**

- Teach children to follow directions - use time out to curb behavior
- Have generic materials accessible that relate to many themes
- Minimize free play to maximize academic learning time
- Provide worksheets for children to practice identifying and writing letters

Success in Kindergarten
Where would you start?

- **Focus on social-emotional development**: Work together to improve children’s self-regulation, and reduce challenging behaviors.
- **Focus on environment and schedule**: Work together to reduce clutter; organize areas so that children can be more independent; decrease interruptions and time-outs and increase learning time.
- **Focus on DAP**: Work together to increase, strengthen, and integrate play-based and hands-on learning activities.
- **Focus on language and literacy**: Work together to strengthen children’s foundations for reading.
Where did WE start?

- **Focus on social-emotional development**: Work together to improve children’s self-regulation, and reduce challenging behaviors.
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- **Focus on language and literacy**: Work together to strengthen children’s foundations for reading.
HOW CAN RESEARCH INFORM OUR PRACTICE?
A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LITERACY FOUNDATIONS

- What Really Matters for Literacy
- Closing the Vocabulary Gap
- The Power of Play Talk & Decontextualized Language
- Some Evidence-Based Language & Literacy Practices:
  - Dialogic Reading
  - Content-Rich Conversations: Science & Pretend Play
  - Meaningful Print & Alphabet Learning
  - Sound and Word Play
  - Writing
1. Seeing, Hearing, Connecting, and Communicating

2. Oral Language, Vocabulary, and Storytelling

3. Phonemic Awareness & Concepts of Print

4. Phonics and Decoding Skills

5. Independent Reading
“Children are natural knowledge seekers. Whether it’s orca whales, dinosaurs, or the latest technological doo-dad, children’s activities are often guided by their need to know.”

“To be successful in reading comprehension, students must acquire knowledge.”

“Children need time--to actively play with ideas, experience and ask questions, connect new learning with what they already know. Activities that pose problems, get children immersed in interesting topics, allow them the time to develop expertise -- all contribute to knowledge gains.”

Language develops in caring relationships, through back-and-forth conversations that build on children’s natural curiosity and desire to connect.
LANGUAGE IS KEY

To literacy: storytelling, vocabulary, how sounds combine to make words

To learning: questions, step-by-step problem solving, concepts, reasoning, memory

To social/emotional development: making friends, negotiating, expressing feelings, self-control, resilience
THE VOCABULARY GAP


- **50M words** heard by age 4
- **30M words** heard by age 4
- **15M words** heard by age 4
PLAY TALK MAKES THE DIFFERENCE FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT!

- Chit-chat
- Conversation
- Singing
- Silliness
- Story-telling
- Word Play
Responsive – Follows the child’s lead
Imaginative and often silly
Open-ended and encouraging
Asks and explores questions
Includes talk about past, future, what if...
Models thinking and reasoning
Richer vocabulary
Longer conversations with more information
More elaborate sentences and descriptions
Word play, songs, & rhymes

...BECAUSE PLAY TALK IS RICH TALK!
PLAY TALK CREATES AN UPWARD SPIRAL

- increased vocabulary & word knowledge
- more sophisticated questions
- popular pretend play partners
- adults respond with richer language
- more input & practice
- learn words at a faster rate
- better readers
- elicit more information
- more opportunities to use their words
- learn more words & facts; good storytellers
- larger vocabulary; communicate with more confidence
Extended conversations include talk about:

- Past
- Future
- What might be
- Imaginary
- Abstract
- What if ...

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

• Go through the same developmental steps in both languages
• May know some words in just one language and some in both
• Develop total vocabularies just as large as those of children with similar experience learning only one language
• Gain many advantages – as long as at least one language is strong!

Learning more than one language can boost verbal and nonverbal IQ and cognitive flexibility.
EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES TO CONSIDER

Reading

Writing

Science Vocabulary

Pretend Play
Use books as springboards for conversation
Read aloud with small groups so you can really talk
Engage child with questions and prompts as you read
Increase participation and learning with repeated readings

It is the talk that surrounds the storybook reading that gives it power.

- NAEYC & International Reading Association
My Hamster

- rodent
- omnivorous
- store food
- cheek pouches
- burrow
- desert
- nocturnal
- hibernate
- handle
- gentle
- curious
- active
- Give children reasons to write and a variety of materials to write with.
- Write children’s words and read them back together.
- Provide models and supports for writing.
- Help children represent the sounds they hear.
MATURE PRETEND PLAY

Mature pretend play:
Dramatic or constructive (building, setting up miniature worlds) play in which children co-construct a story or scenario.

Usually it takes about 30-40 minutes to gather props, negotiate roles, and play out a story. Children who play together frequently often return to the same play themes, elaborating stories over weeks or even months.
TALKING LIKE A TRAVEL AGENT
WHAT DO WE WANT TO PUT INTO PRACTICE?

- What struck you most from the language and literacy training?
  - What are you interested in learning more about?
  - What ideas do you want to incorporate into your practice?
Began with planning curiosity-provoking science activities

Teacher became frustrated that there wasn’t enough time for children to explore the activity and wondered about changing the structure of free play

Teacher lengthened free play and had more time to engage children in science conversations

She got excited about the children’s questions and used those as provocations for her next science activity
REFLECT: WHAT SUCCESSES DID WE ACHIEVE?
ASSESS: WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?
HIGH/SCOPE 10 COUNTRY FINDINGS: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Bring in new materials.
- Arrange and combine items to invite to suggest new ways for children to explore
- Wonder and reason aloud.
- Help children put their questions, hypotheses, discoveries, and explanations into words.
- Introduce vocabulary and concepts that will expand children’s ideas.
ASK AND ENCOURAGE INTERESTING QUESTIONS

- Find out what children want to know!
- **Ask Genuine Questions** – whose answers you really want to know
- **Ask Reflective Questions** – that make children think
  - “I have been watching you build and I’m curious. How could you get the blocks to balance so the tower could stand on its own?”

**Give children time to think** – really listen and respond to their ideas
Teacher began rearranging her environment to make more room for the science center that had previously been in a small corner of the room.

In doing so she created spaces where children could explore independently and had materials that prompted their own investigations.
POWERFUL INTERACTIONS

Be Present
Connect
Extend Learning
MAKING THE SHIFT FROM WEEKLY THEMES TO EXTENDED STUDIES
CREATING UPWARD SPIRALS OF LITERACY

- Adding morning message and enhancing circle time

Good Morning Boys and Girls,

Today is Tuesday. Matthew will be the leader. Mackenzie will shut off the lights and close the door.

I saw some colorful leaves today. Please draw a leaf and color it a fall color. Then write your name.
NEXT STEPS TO LITERACY

1. Seeing, Hearing, Connecting, and Communicating
2. Oral Language, Vocabulary, and Storytelling
3. Phonemic Awareness + Concepts of Print
4. Phonics and Decoding Skills
5. Independent Reading
THE ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE

Phonemic Awareness + Concepts of Print = Alphabetic Principle

- The **ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE** is the idea that letters (or letter combinations) represent the individual phonemes that make up words.

- In order to grasp this idea, children must be able to identify the individual sounds in words and blend them together, and also recognize letters and their associated sounds.
MEANINGFUL PRINT:
UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL
LABEL AND ORGANIZE MATERIALS
We decided:

1. Know the fire drill rules
2. Say you're sorry after an accident.
3. Listen and stay with your teacher.
4. Be careful in the blocks area.
5. Do only what you can do.
6. Think about what you're going to do before you do it.
7. Do what you're supposed to do at school.
8. Clean up your mess.
10. Use an inside voice.

Lydia
Ram
Nicole
Zoe
Chloe

Our schedule:
morning meeting
snack
language arts
math
dramatic play/blocks
outside play
lunch
drama
art
quiet time
closing meeting
GIVE DIRECTIONS

Menu
2 crackers
1 blob of peanut butter
1 cup of water
SHARE INFORMATION AND EXPERIENCES

Writers Workshop

- Writers think before they write.
- We have writing folders.
- We draw and write.
- Authors tell stories with pictures and words.
- We are thinking, sounding out, and writing.
- Sometimes teachers meet with the writers.
- Even is thinking about the sounds in "ducking."
ENHANCE PRETEND PLAY
SHOW CHILDREN HOW PRINT WORKS

Give children many reasons to write, a variety of tools and supports, and lots of time to practice!
WRITING PROVIDES AN OUTLET FOR CHILDREN’S IDEAS

Story Paper
PARENTS WERE THRILLED!

I like the caterpillar and fat
LOOK HOW FAR WE’VE COME!
CONTINUING THE SPIRAL
TEACHER’S EXCITEMENT SPURS PROBLEM SOLVING
THE ENCOURAGEMENT GAP


- **800K encouragements** heard by age 4
- **200K encouragements** heard by age 4
- **100K encouragements** heard by age 4
Ability to consider others’ points of view
Expressing emotions appropriately – without undue tantrums or meltdowns
Holding a goal and steps in mind – working memory
Deferred gratification – waiting a turn, etc.
Ability to focus – or deliberately shift attention
Strategies for self-control, such as self-talk, relaxation techniques, stop and think, breathe
Knowing how and when to ask for help
VISITING KINDERGARTEN
FINAL VISIT: CULMINATION OF OUR COLLABORATION
Strength-Based Coaching:
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