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

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Where did WE 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

The practice-Research dialog

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.

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
Rich Language is Foundational to Reading Comprehension

"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.

Play Talk Makes the Difference for Language Development!

- Chit-chat
- Conversation
- Singing
- Silliness
- Story-telling
- Word Play
...because Play Talk is rich talk!

- 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

Play Talk Creates an Upward Spiral

- Increased vocabulary & word knowledge
- More opportunities to use their words
- More sophisticated questions
- Popular pretend play partners
- Adults respond with richer language
- More input & practice
- Better readers
- Elicit more information
- Larger vocabulary; communicate with more confidence

Evidence-based practices to consider

- Reading
  - 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

- Writing

- Pretend Play

- Science Vocabulary

- Dialogic Reading

- Decontextualized Language

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.


Vocabulary-Rich content

- rodent
- omnivorous
- store food
- cheek pouches
- burrow
- desert
- nocturnal
- hibernate
- handle
- gentle
- curious
- active

My Hamster

Writing

- 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.

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?

Using Science to infuse vocabulary development

- 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?

Children learn more when teachers wonder more & instruct LESS


High/Scope Study: Preschool Experience in 10 Countries


High/Scope 10 Country Findings: Implementation

• 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

Making More Changes: Upward Spirals

• 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

Making the Shift from Weekly Themes to Extended Studies

NEXT Steps to Literacy

The Alphabetic Principle

Building Phonemic awareness

Creating Upward Spirals of Literacy – Using Environmental Print

- Use writing to convey messages and share experiences (e.g., morning messages)
- Organize materials (e.g., room labels, cubbies)
- Organize behavior (e.g., visual schedules and rules)
- Give directions (e.g., room signs, recipes, snack prep)
- Display important concepts/learning taking place in the classroom (e.g., bulletin board displays, posters)
- Use print in pretend play (e.g., labels for creations, signs indicating directions, menus, lists)
- Use print to convey stories/retelling stories and creating new ideas (e.g., create class books, plays, recreate favorite books)
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

Teachers were Thrilled!

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
Ready for K: Social-emotional & executive function Skills

• 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

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Final Visit: Culmination of our collaboration