

Integrating the Teaching of Literacy Skills and Language

This handout highlights the literacy skills and language-related knowledge and skills that are supported in the “Spring Walk,” the “Grits Conversation,” and the “Letter Clue Game” experiences described in the power-point presentation.

A Spring Walk

Literacy skills addressed:

- Letter shape and name knowledge.
- Letter-writing knowledge: The specific lines, and their order and direction are modelled.
- Phonological awareness: Spoken words are made up of a series of sounds.
- Phonological awareness and letter correspondences: The sounds in a spoken word are related to the letters used to write it.
- Phonological awareness: The first sound in a word can be isolated and linked to the letter used to write it.
- A letter appears in many different words. For example: Yellow, daffodil, and rocks all have ‘o’; yellow, daffodil, and bicycle all have ‘l’. Bicycle, daffodil, and big all have ‘i’. Both rocks and bicycle have ‘c’.
- When writing or reading English print, we move from left-to-right and top-to-bottom.
- Space is used to separate words.

Language-related Knowledge and Skills:

- The teacher expanded the child’s “I saw a lot of yellow flowers” to, “Yes, we did see a lot of daffodils blooming in someone’s yard.”
- The teacher added vocabulary: daffodils, blooming, yard, bright, spring.
- The teacher expanded the child’s “I saw big rocks” to, “Yes, there were some big rocks on

both sides of a driveway. We were thinking that maybe people put the big rocks there to keep people from pulling into their yard to park.”

- The teacher added vocabulary: driveway, yard, park.
- The teacher expanded the child’s “Some bikes” to, “Yes, we saw maybe 6 or 7 bicycles for teenagers and adults parked in a metal rack. People can rent a bicycle for a while, ride it somewhere, and then return it. There weren’t any helmets to rent, were there? People need to bring their own helmets.”
- The teacher added vocabulary: bicycles, parked, teenagers, adults, metal, rack, helmets, rent, return.

A Conversation about Grits

Setting: Twenty children are sitting around 3 large round tables, having breakfast, in a Head Start classroom in a large Midwestern US city. Each child has a disposable tray, a fork and a spoon, a napkin, and a juice or milk box with a straw. A large bowl of grits is on the table. Other food items include scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast and rolls. An assisting teacher in the room circulates to help with managerial duties of breakfast.

Participants: Classroom teacher (T) and the children at her table (C, C2, and others)

T: (to one of the children who does not have grits, after food has been served) Did you want any grits?

C2: [] give you energy.

T: Yes, they give you energy, too.

C: But I don’t like grits.

T: Grits? But grits are made out of...does anyone know what grits are made out of?

(pause; no answer)

T: It’s made out of corn.

C: Grits? Grits?

T: Mhm. Made out of corn. You don’t like corn? Don’t you like corn?

C2: Grits make the [].

- T:** Yes, I like corn too.
- C:** (to T) At least that's your favorite color - yellow.
- T:** It sure is.
- T:** The corn is yellow. They just take out the inside of the corn, grind it up, and make grits.
- C:** And you eat it?
- T:** Mmmhmmm.

Language-related Knowledge & Skills

- The teacher modeled a conversational bid (initiation) and contextualized language by talking about a topic in the here-and-now (e.g., grits in a bowl on the table).
- The teacher modeled syntax for questions and declarative sentences.
- The teacher introduced or repeated new vocabulary: grind, energy.
- The teacher expanded utterances. For example, when a child said, "At least that's your favorite color- yellow," the teacher expanded the utterance to clarify how the child's comment was related to grits and corn: "The corn is yellow."
- The teacher affirmed children's offerings which reinforced correct ideas and participation. For example, when a child said, "[] give you energy," the teacher said, "Yes, they give you energy too." Other responses included, "Yes, I like corn, too," and, "It sure is." Doing this contributes to discourse skills.
- The teacher supported discourse skills and thinking by listening to children and providing contingent responses. This enabled multiple conversational exchanges and fostered depth of talk about the topic.
- The teacher tried to bring other children into the conversation and to build upon their background knowledge by asking, "Does anyone know what grits are made out of?"
- The teacher made logical connections which supported discourse skills and thinking. When the child said, "But I don't like grits," the teacher

clarified, "Grits? But grits are made out of...?"

- The teacher supported conceptual knowledge by telling children that grits come from corn, and briefly describing the process and noting that corn has parts that we eat.
- The teacher supported related content knowledge in dramatic play, and also supported both food- and math-related knowledge development by helping children graph their favorite foods.

The Letter Clue Game

Literacy Skills and Understandings (across numerous episodes using different letters)

- Letter shape and name knowledge.
- Letter-writing knowledge: The specific lines, and their order and direction are modelled.
- The understanding that many letters differ from one another by just a little bit. For example, F and E differ by just one line, as do B and P, and T and L. Other letters (e.g., W/M; b/d; N/Z) differ only in orientation.

Language--related Knowledge and Skills

- Spatial language (e.g. vertical, horizontal, next to, top, middle, bottom, above, below).
- Ordinal number words (e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd)
- Other vocabulary: (e.g., across, line, curved line, another, one more, long, short, clue, ideas, next, last, thinking, mind).
- Thinking/reasoning: Solving the puzzle by comparing and contrasting current knowledge with information the teacher provides.

References for the Letter Clue Game

Schickedanz, J., & Collins, M.F. (2013). *So Much More than the ABCs: The early phases of reading and writing* (p. 99). Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Schickedanz J., & Marchant, C. (2018). *Inside preK classrooms: A school leader's guide to effective instruction* (pp. 145-153). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.