

DOINGWHATWORKS



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

About Oceans: Integrating Language and Literacy Activities

Syracuse City School District, New York • June 2007

Topic: Preschool Language and Literacy

Practice: Teach Phonological Awareness

Highlights

- A preschool teacher describes how she incorporated language instruction into a thematic unit
- Importance of planning—knowing what your learning goals are, what you want to accomplish, and how you want to go about it
- Value of dramatic play in preschool, and how to teach phonological awareness skills through a themed dramatic play area (the Crab Shack)
- Value of using “teachable moments” to broaden children’s learning
- Examples of how to extend learning through activities related to storybook themes
- Importance of monitoring student learning

About the Site

Syracuse City School District
Syracuse, New York

Demographics:

- 93% Children living in poverty
- 79% Non-Caucasian
- 22% Special Needs
- 15% English Language Learners

Site Highlights

- Developmental continuum of phonological awareness that guides planning and differentiation of instruction based on children's skill levels
- Phonological awareness instruction integrated throughout the day into classroom activities, routines, and thematic units
- Explicit and contextualized instruction
- Teacher training in interactive and dialogic reading focused on increasing vocabulary, oral language, and comprehension
- Intensive and ongoing professional development with on-site mentoring by literacy coaches and a focus on individual class needs
- Coach-teacher partnerships that involve teachers in a feedback process focused on inquiry and improvement based on classroom observations and self-reflection

Full Transcript

The unit we're teaching in the summer is the Ocean unit, and we have developed it according to our continuum of how kids learn, the things that they would need to know. And it's not always what age level they are. It's where they're at, at a particular time that they do come into our classroom.

Summer lends itself to the ocean and there are so many wonderful stories in literature and the creatures—the sea creatures themselves are amazing, and I think children are really interested in them. And I just thought it would be a really fun way to cover all bases. Not only learning a little bit about the animals and the sea, but also in getting all that wonderful phonological awareness and dialogic reading. And the whole idea, I think, of the ocean is a big thing. And so I really had to think

about what I wanted to have the kids learn and how I was going to go about it.

Kids need to know how to play in this area. And the things that they would need to do to run a restaurant. So during our small group activities—my assistant is very good in the dramatic play and she very much enjoys being in this area—so she will usually start the play. She'll show them how to play here, how to take an order, the things that they might need to get the order together, to bring it to the customer, how to be a customer, how to be a cook. So the play will be set and then she will then move on to another activity, and so that when another small group comes through, they've already known how to play in this area. But they can start to play the way it was set up as a crab shack and how Mrs. Carter had taught them how to play, or they might choose to play it in a different way. And that's okay, too.

One thing I do like to do is always leave something from a previous book, a previous unit, a previous way that the area was set up, such as Henny Penny and the hat that we used for a prop. And leave it in the dramatic play area and see how that is used in their play. Do they remember some of the things, some of the vocabulary they used? Some of the way they wrote things down? Whatever play it was that they established in that unit— is it carried over? Have they internalized it?

I think it's easy to follow a lesson plan and to teach according to your plans and...but when you're thinking about those teachable moments, those times when you want to really jump in—you do want to jump in, but the play is happening and you hate to kind of interrupt that play. I think that those are the times that are so essential to really broadening their way of thinking, their vocabulary, the way they're writing. You can work with your sounds. You might also talk about the beginning sound in "lobster." "What other things do you know of that have the same sound as 'lobster'?" "Do you have the letter 'L' in your name? Do you have that sound in your name?"

We developed these characters from the books. We copy the pages, of course, and put them on sticks so the children are able to internalize the story and really bring that story and all that wonderful vocabulary out into their play and using it in their conversations.

We can now take a page from a book, put it through the computer, and it will come out like this. And then I've sewn the squares together and now they can take this lap quilt as we call it, and tell the story with a friend.

Our kids can do this and they can, they are capable of, of phonological awareness and all the things that it brings with it. They will be ready for kindergarten.