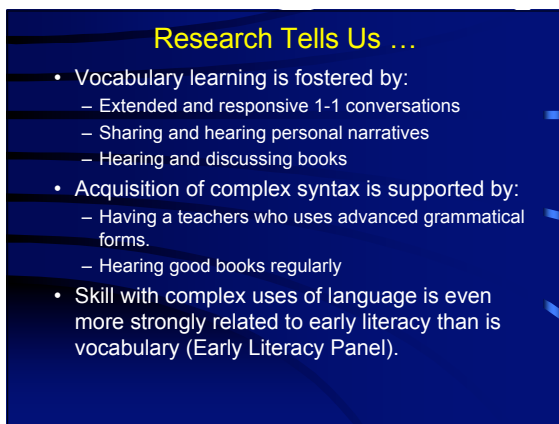


Supporting Oral Language Through Effective Conversations in Preschool Classrooms

David K. Dickinson, Peabody School of Education, Vanderbilt U.







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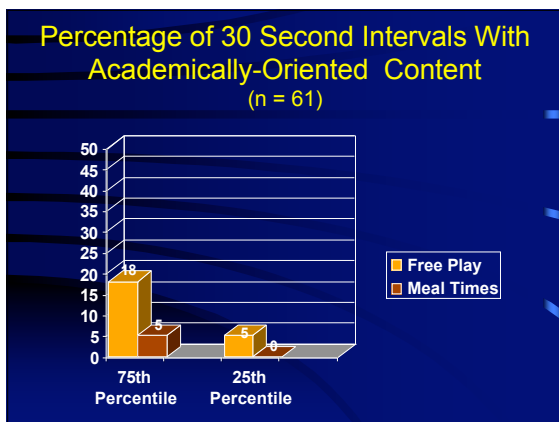
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Implications

- **Personal Narratives**
 - Teachers need skill in helping children to tell stories about their experiences.
- **Pretending and Intellectual Explorations**
 - Teachers need to encourage children to use language to create characters and roles
 - To form hypotheses and consider ideas
- **Team Planning:**
 - Teaching teams need to find ways to ensure that effective conversations occur regularly.
- **Book Reading:**
 - Teachers need to use books effectively to teach vocabulary and build story understanding skills.

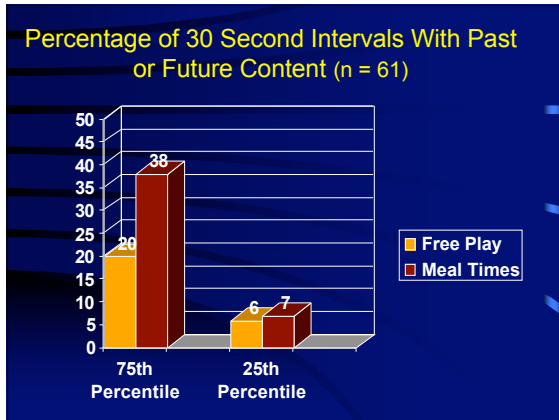
There Are Many Missed Opportunities

- Children less than 3 feet away: 81% of the time teachers did not talk to children. (Susan Kontos)
- 20% of 119 classrooms: 50% + children had no interaction with teachers all day. (*Life in Preschool*)



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- ### Personal Narratives
- End-of-lunch chance conversation
 - Cindy Hoisington:
 - Head Start teacher
 - Was a Head Start parent
 - Boston area program
 - Three year old boy

- ### Noteworthy Features
- Intensive focus on the child, building a relationship.
 - Supported and challenged language skills:
 - Sequence of carefully tailored questions; beyond “open ended;” intentionally formulated to foster clarity.
 - Extended and in-depth conversation exploration of a single topic. Cohesive discourse.
 - Support for vocabulary learning and precise use of language. (“eyes open” = “awake”)
 - Modeled correct syntax (“its eyes was/ were open”)
 - Used complex syntax (“Last week, when I was ...”)
 - Others are encouraged to listen and thereby:
 - Experience a high level conversation.
 - See teachers as conversational partners.
 - See peers as conversationalists.
 - Shares own experience without taking over.

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Language Teaching Strategies

- **Understand** what is happening:
Observe, Wait, Listen (OWL)
- **Engage** and talk **with** the child:
 - Ask clarifying questions; really try to understand.
 - Expand the child's comments.
 - Make your own comments, but don't take over.
- **Extend**: Stay on one topic: "Strive for five."
- **Enrich**:
 - Vocabulary: use varied words
 - Grammar: express complex ideas in full sentences; do not intentionally avoid adult-like grammar.
 - Knowledge: presume no limits

Occasions That Give Rise to Literacy-Supporting Language

Content that moves beyond the immediate present:

- recounting past and future events
- discussing objects that are not present
- considering ideas and language
- speculating, wondering
- pretending

Provide an Intellectually Engaging Experiences

- Plan activities that engage children's interests and minds.
- Draw on family & community resources.
- Talk about curriculum topics all day long.
- Select and focus on key vocabulary and concepts.
- Respect children's minds and opinions.

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Curriculum-Related Conversations

- Cindy Hoisington's Classroom:
 - 17 children
 - 12 children learning English
 - 9 different language groups
- Spring
- Curriculum:
 - studying living things
 - girl brought in snails

Support Strategies for Classrooms

- As a team identify times conducive to 1-1 conversations:
 - Meals, choice time, waiting, transitions to and from school
- As a team plan for and protect those special times
 - Create roles within the classroom to ensure that at least one teacher can take advantage of them.
 - Set up and maintain routines designed to foster conversations.
 - eat in the room, read books in small groups, use time spent outside for conversation and/or book reading
 - Create plans to ensure all children engage with teachers 1-1
- Set and work on goals for conversation and work individually, as a team and with supervisors:
 - Extended conversations
 - Use of and talk about vocabulary
 - Model good listening by ignoring distractions
 - Draw other children into the conversation

Work with Families to Support First Language Development at Home

- Strong language is what matters
- The parent must use his/her strengths
- Long-term evidence:
 - 1) Skill in the first language transfers
 - 2) Children have better long-term academic success when they have strong first language

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Selected Settings to Discuss With Parents

- Meal times
- Waiting: in line, doctor's office, for the bus
- Arrivals: child's return, other adult return or visit (coach child in recounting interesting events)
- Quiet times: before bed, rest time, bath time
- During activities that allow for talk: washing dishes, art, outdoor time
- Supporting pretending: housekeeping, blocks, outdoors, dress up (home or preschool)
- Book reading as enjoyable time to talk
- On trips: neighborhood walk, shopping, zoo
- Looking at pictures of family and past events
