



Signs of Literacy: What's Miss Nelson Got to do with It?

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Optimal Preschool Language Environment for ALL Children

- Language-rich, including frequent, interesting conversations with adults and peers in a variety of contexts
- Regular and frequent *interactive* read-aloud experiences
- Conversational exposure to “rare” words to enhance vocabulary
- Cognitively challenging language use



Book Sharing: A Rich Context for Learning

- WHY??



Book sharing contributes to the foundation for literacy learning

- Enhances language development
- Builds emergent literacy concepts
- Builds cognitive structures needed for learning to read and write
- Provides opportunities to interactively construct meaning with an adult
- Promotes a positive attitude towards books and reading



Challenge for teachers when sharing books: (Part I)

- “It is hard to engage in conversations that are slightly challenging yet also comprehensible when talking with groups of [hearing]children who have diverse levels of language skill and book-reading experience.” (Dickinson, p. 177)
- In Dickinson, D. & Tabors, P. (2000). *Beginning Literacy with Language*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.)



Challenge for teachers when sharing books: (Part II)

- “...skilled teachers need to be attuned to children’s understanding, to find places in a book that are likely to be confusing and to engage the group in conversations that are challenging but that they can understand. This is asking a lot!” (Dickinson, 2000, p. 177)



Confessions of a Hearing Teacher

- Not satisfied with quality of my book sharing experiences with my deaf preschoolers.
- Noticed how captivated the students were when my Deaf co-teachers shared books (NOT my experience when sharing books)



Improving my Practice through Teacher Inquiry

- I began my own informal inquiry process to try and improve my book sharing skills
- Eventually led to the research I will share with you today



My Question:

- How did the teachers I worked with make book sharing events understandable for all the children in these linguistically and culturally diverse groups of Deaf preschoolers?



Participants

- Two Deaf teachers
- Two supporting adults (one Deaf, one hearing)
- 13 3-5 year-old Deaf preschool children from diverse backgrounds; some with special learning needs
- The children's parents



Effective book sharing practices:

- The teachers used many of the research-based book sharing practices that have been shown to be effective in both monolingual and bilingual classrooms for hearing children.



Effective Book Sharing Practices

- Modeling
- Explaining
- Translating
- Demonstrating
- Expanding
- Questioning
- Problem solving
- Interacting



Deaf Biliteracy Practices:

- Making the book sharing visually accessible for the children
- Translating the text into ASL
- Demonstrating multiple and complex links between ASL and English



Deaf Biliteracy Practices:

- Using visually-based participation strategies
 - To encourage interaction
 - To scaffold language and communicative competence
 - To mediate comprehension



Translating the text into ASL: A critical tool for building meaning

- The teachers used a level of ASL that was understandable for young Deaf children
- The teachers varied the amount of contextualization and the levels of ASL complexity as they translated the texts to include all the children



Child Directed Signing (CDS)

- A simple, easily understood form of ASL Deaf adults use that attracts the visual attention of deaf infants and young children
- Guided by cultural knowledge
- Hart & Risley (1999) called this “parentese”



Characteristics of Child Directed Signing:

- Expressiveness
- Redundant
- Slower pace
- Contextually embedded



Characteristics of CDS:

- **Expressive**
 - Increased use of ASL prosody (rhythm, emotion, emphasis), usually more easily understood by young Deaf language learners
 - Exaggerated sign size and facial expression
 - Expanded sign space
 - Rhythmic movement



Characteristics of CDS

- **Redundant**
 - o Multiple exposures to sign within ASL sentence and throughout book sharing event
 - o Multiple ways to represent meaning (demonstrate equivalent meaning)



Characteristics of CDS:

- **Slower pace**
 - Overall
 - At strategic times
- **Contextually embedded ASL**
 - Pictures as part of the sign
 - Linking more familiar form of ASL with more decontextualized ASL
 - Signing on children's bodies



Implications for Teachers: Continually update your understanding of:

- the nature of language, literacy and cognitive development and
- strategies required to boost children's development



Implications for ECE Teachers: (for Whom ASL is a Second Language)

- Choose to use ASL and deaf cultural knowledge as resources for teaching, learning and empowerment
- Increase your ASL fluency (especially Child-Directed Signing register)
- Learn how to teach using Deaf cultural teaching practices



Parting quote:

(from Dickinson & Tabors (2000) *Beginning Literacy with Language*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

- “...attention to quality preschool environments is an excellent investment. We know right now what needs to be better in those environments, and we have a number of strategies for upgrading them that have proven successful (p. 334).”



Parting thought:

- We can no longer say “We didn’t know.” We DO know.
- Signs of Literacy: What do YOU have to do with it?

