

Becoming Readers and Writers

Teacher: Sheila Owen

Years Teaching: 10

School: Wellwood School, Beaumont, California

Grade: Kindergarten

Class Size: 21 students

Lesson Dates: October 18 and 19, 2001

"I believe that the best thing a teacher can do is to watch her students. And so kid-watching is what I do ... so that we are immediately following up on the children's needs and moving them farther every day."—Sheila Owen

Overview

Video Summary

In Sheila Owen's kindergarten class, all five- and six-year-olds are "readers and writers from day one." In this video, her students listen and respond to a story about pumpkins, create sentences using the word wall, and chant a poem focusing on the letter D. Carefully guided by Ms. Owen, they write a group account of the pumpkin life cycle, and then work independently on their writing. Students use books, poems, games, and manipulatives as they listen, converse, read, and write independently and in large and small groups.

Ms. Owen's literacy lessons demonstrate the following:

- "Authentic" experiences that help students develop a love of reading and writing
- Language development for native English speakers and English language learners
- Links between reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- Connections across content areas and with students' lives and experiences
- Ongoing assessment that guides planning and instruction

"There is a gradual decrease of my responsibility and an increase in their independence. We go from where I'm doing all of the work in read-aloud, to where the students are doing all of the work in independent reading."

Literacy Teaching Practices

Read-Aloud

Shared Reading

Guided Reading

Interactive Writing

Independent Reading and Writing

Putting It in Context

The Teacher and the Class

Sheila Owen teaches half-day kindergarten at the Wellwood School in Beaumont, California, where she is also literacy coordinator. Once a very rural community, Beaumont is changing. Its proximity to Los Angeles has brought new housing development and a swell in the population. Still, local agriculture continues to be a major source of jobs for the community.

Ms. Owen's students are diverse, both economically and racially. Almost half are English language learners. While the class is conducted in English, Ms. Owen encourages her students to use their first language as a bridge to English language learning. "I encourage the children who come to school with another language to use that language. It's a great window, or a door, actually, for me to reach them." She is assisted part-time by a bilingual aide.

Sheila Owen starts her school year with undecorated walls. But they don't stay undecorated for long. From day one, her students create their own literacy-rich space. "They put the art on the walls; they put the writing on the walls.... They have access to the whole classroom, because really it's theirs. So I want them to have ownership of it."

With words and literacy activities readily available in the classroom, Ms. Owen follows a literacy routine built around the idea that reading lessons should happen in context, not in isolation. "The purpose for reading is to gain meaning from text. And I believe children can only really comprehend and only really enjoy reading if it is in an authentic experience—in a real piece of literature, in a real activity, not just a segmented component of a program."

Ms. Owen's literacy routine, modeled after the California Early Literacy Learning (CELL) Program, includes the following literacy instructional practices: read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, and independent writing. In each practice, Ms. Owen addresses one or more of the Essential Components of Literacy Development such as oral language, phonics, and comprehension.

A copy of Ms. Owen's weekly lesson plan is available on the library Web site; go to www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/.

Day at a Glance*

8:00	Arrival
8:10	Morning Meeting
8:30	Independent Reading
8:45	Shared Reading
9:00	Literacy Centers; One-on-One Assessment With Kids
9:15	First Guided-Reading Group
9:30	Second Guided-Reading Group
10:00	Read-Aloud
10:10	Recess
10:35	Interactive Writing
11:00	Independent Writing
11:20	Author's Chair
11:25	Dismissal

*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Owen's class on October 18 and 19. On a typical day, other content areas are also included in the schedule.

Analyzing the Video

Before Viewing

The following activities prepare you to observe this classroom video, whether alone or with a group.

Prepare To Record Your Observations

Make a copy of the Observational Checklist (found in the Appendix) to record your observations, reactions, and further questions that come up throughout your viewing. Copy the KWL Chart (also in the Appendix) and record what you already know and what you would like to learn about teaching reading and writing in kindergarten. Groups can use the KWL chart to generate discussion and questions to consider while viewing.

Consider Key Questions

Consider these questions as you view the video:

- How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?
- How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?
- What forms of assessment are apparent in this classroom, and how does assessment guide instruction?
- How are reading and writing connected in this classroom?

Review Important Terms

Review the definitions of the following Literacy Teaching Practices (page 4): read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, and independent writing.

Review the following definitions of the Essential Components of Literacy Development (page 2): oral language, phonological awareness, word study (vocabulary/concepts and word identification/phonics), comprehension, composition, and fluency and automaticity.

First Impressions

Use the following activities to reflect on the classroom video.

Watch the Video

On your first viewing, use the Observational Checklist to take note of how Sheila Owen implements some of the Literacy Teaching Practices.

Review What You Saw

After watching the video, review the Observational Checklist and reflect on what you saw. How do the practices you just watched compare to your own? Think about your classroom and the needs of your students. How are they different from or similar to what you saw in the video?

Relate the Key Questions to Sheila Owen's Classroom

How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?

Consider Ms. Owen's comment: "Oral language development is a large priority in our classroom, and accounts for a class that is never encouraged to be quiet." What does she mean by this? What evidence do you find for how she supports language development for all students? Make a list or share what you observed.

How does the classroom environment encourage students to become independent readers and writers?

Think back to what you saw on the tape, and list ways that Ms. Owen's classroom environment supports literacy instruction. What did you notice about the physical arrangement, the tone and atmosphere, materials, and tools? Write or share your responses to these questions.

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Looking Closer

Take a second look at Sheila Owen's classroom to deepen your understanding of specific literacy strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.

Read Aloud: Video Segment

Find this segment 4 minutes and 44 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 5 minutes.

Each day, Ms. Owen reads aloud to her class. In this segment, she reads *Pumpkin Day*, *Pumpkin Night*, a book chosen because of the class's upcoming trip to a farm and ongoing study of the pumpkin growth cycle. Notice the steps Ms. Owen takes in introducing the experience, the way she conducts the read-aloud, and the connections between students' lives and the text that she elicits.



- Ms. Owen comments, "The children, not the clock, serve as my timetable." What does she mean by her comment?
- On your Observational Checklist, add specific examples of ways Ms. Owen addresses the Essential Components of Literacy Development: oral language; phonological awareness; word study (word identification, phonics, and vocabulary); and comprehension.

Shared Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 9 minutes and 56 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 1 minute and 23 seconds.

Ms. Owen leads the students through a choral reading of several kinds of texts.

- On the Observational Checklist, note the variety of shared-reading tasks students completed in this segment. Observe the students. What does Ms. Owen do to maintain their engagement?
- Compare the read-aloud segment to the shared-reading segment. Notice and mark down the Essential Components of Literacy Development emphasized by Ms. Owen during the shared reading.
- How does shared reading differ from read-aloud? How does shared reading extend literacy learning? Notice the change in the teacher's role and the students' roles.



Independent Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 18 minutes and 55 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Students spend time reading independently each morning, beginning on the very first day of school. Ms. Owen believes this develops their love of reading and their confidence in reading even when she is not there. During independent reading, students show her what they have learned.



- What kind of reading materials do the students use?
- What different forms of assessment are apparent in this classroom, and how does assessment guide instruction? How does Ms. Owen assess individual learning to guide her planning and instruction?

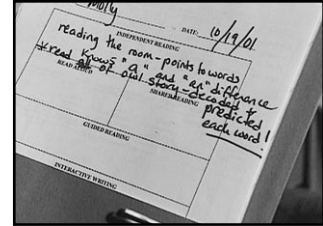
Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Interactive Writing: Video Segment

Find this segment 21 minutes and 24 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 11 seconds.

In this segment, Ms. Owen and her students “share the pen to negotiate and create text.” Guided by Ms. Owen, students write about the growth cycle of the pumpkin.

- How is this writing task connected to the earlier read-aloud?
- Note the sequence of steps that Ms. Owen takes to set up this task, and the way she engages students. How would you describe the teacher’s role and the students’ roles? What skills and strategies are being taught and practiced? Record your observations on your Observational Checklist, paying particular attention to the Essential Components of Literacy Development practiced by the students.
- How does interactive writing relate to and support independent writing?



Summing Up

Wrap up your impressions of the video with a final reflection.

Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your completed Observational Checklist and other notes such as your KWL chart.

- What surprised or interested you?
- What did you find that affirmed what you already knew or had been doing?
- What new approaches or ideas will you try?
- What questions do you have?
- After watching the video, do you think differently about your own practices? About the students you teach? About how young students develop literacy?

Making Connections

Apply and Extend

Here are some opportunities to apply and extend what you've seen.

Read This Article

Read this article on interactive writing and compare what you read with what you observed in Ms. Owen's classroom.

Button, K., M. J. Johnson, and P. Furgerson. "Interactive Writing in a Primary Classroom." *The Reading Teacher* 49, no. 6 (1996): 446–454.

This reading is available as a downloadable PDF file on the *Teaching Reading* Web site. Go to www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/.

Watch These Videos

View the other kindergarten videos in the *Teaching Reading* library, "Writer's Journal" and "Building Oral Language," and compare their approaches to shared and guided reading in kindergarten with Sheila Owen's.

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Writer's Journal" and "Building Oral Language" in this guide.

Take It Back to the Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Owen's lesson that you would like to try in your classroom. List supports or resources that you would need to implement it. Use the Classroom Strategy Planner (found in the Appendix). If you are participating in a study group, share what happened when you tried out the new strategy. Or keep a reflective journal of your experience, focusing on the benefits for you and for your students.

Selected Resources

Resources Used by Ms. Owen

California Early Literacy Learning (CELL): <http://www.cell-exll.com>

Books for Students in Ms. Owen's Classroom

Randell, Beverley. *Mom*. From Rigby PM Starters 1. Barrington, Ill.: Rigby Education, 1996.

Rockwell Anne F., and Megan Halsey. *Pumpkin Day, Pumpkin Night*. New York, N.Y.: Walker Publishing, 1999.

Additional Resources

Books and Articles

Armbruster, B. B., F. Lehr, and J. Osborn. *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. Jessup, Md: National Institute for Literacy, 2001.

Button, K., M. J. Johnson, and P. Furgerson. "Interactive Writing in a Primary Classroom." *The Reading Teacher* 49, no. 6 (1996).

Campbell, R. *Read-Alouds With Young Children*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2001.

Cary, S. *Second Language Learners*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1997.

Fields, M. V., and K. L. Spangler. *Let's Begin Reading Right: A Developmental Approach to Emergent Literacy*. 4th. ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill Publishing Company, 2000.

Fisher, B., and E. F. Medvic. *Perspectives on Shared Reading: Planning and Practice*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2000.

Hall, N. "Interactive Writing With Young Children." *Childhood Education* 76, no. 6, International Focus Issue (2000): 358–64.

Heald-Taylor, G. *The Beginning Reading Handbook: Strategies for Success*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2001.

Henry, J., and B. J. Wiley. "Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Interactive Writing." *Classroom Connections*. Columbus, Ohio: Reading Recovery Council of North America, Inc. Winter/Spring 1999.

International Reading Association. *Second Language Literacy Instruction: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2000.

Miller, W. *Strategies for Developing Emergent Literacy*. Boston, Mass.: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000.

Neuman, S. B., C. Copple, and S. Bredekamp. *Learning To Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2000.

Opitz, M. F., and M. P. Ford. *Reaching Readers: Flexible & Innovative Strategies for Guided Reading*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2001.

Opitz, M. F., and T. V. Rasinski. *Goodbye Round Robin: 25 Effective Oral Reading Strategies*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1998.

Parkes, B. *Read It Again: Revisiting Shared Reading*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 2000.

Rigg, P., and V. G. Allen. *When They Don't All Speak English: Integrating the ESL Student Into the Regular Classroom*. Urbana, Ill.: National Association of Teachers of English, 1989.

Selected Resources, cont'd.

Strickland, D.S. *Teaching Phonics Today: A Primer for Educators*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1998.

Strickland, D. S., ed. *Beginning Reading and Writing*. New York, N.Y.: Teachers College Press, and Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2000.

Taberski, S. "Give Shared Reading the Attention It Deserves." *Instructor-Primary* 107, no. 7 (1998): 32–34.

Web Sites

International Reading Association: <http://www.ira.org>

National Council of Teachers of English: <http://www.ncte.org>

National Association of Education of Young Children: <http://www.naeyc.org>

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Ability (CIERA): <http://www.ciera.org>

For more resources on literacy, see the General Resources section of the Appendix.

Notes
