

Building Oral Language

Teacher: Cindy Wilson

Years Teaching: 25

School: Josiah Quincy Elementary School, Boston, Massachusetts

Grade: Kindergarten

Class Size: 24 students

Lesson Dates: February 6 and 8

“Many people who come into my classroom—casual observers—do not notice that many of my students have learning and behavior issues. And that, to me, is a really good thing. I feel very pleased. It means that my management system, the structure of my classroom, is working.”—Cindy Wilson

Overview

Video Summary

In this full-day kindergarten, Cindy Wilson and her bilingual aide, Ms. Li, promote oral language development and individual responsibility through reading, writing, listening, and sensory experiences. Students take leadership roles as “Room Readers and Writers,” guiding classmates through daily routines and gathering useful information for the class and school community. Students share personal stories through art and writing, and read and listen to carefully chosen literature. In hands-on activities they explore holiday celebrations, including Valentine’s Day and the Chinese New Year. Using thematic curriculum and integrated learning opportunities, Ms. Wilson and Ms. Li help students connect their own and each other’s linguistic and cultural knowledge.

Ms. Wilson’s literacy lessons demonstrate the following:

- Appreciation of the students’ diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds
- Student responsibility for their classroom environment, materials, and routines
- Development of students’ ability to use print and language in “real-world” ways
- Use of play, hands-on experience, and sensory exploration to increase conceptual and oral language development
- A thematic and integrated instruction to help students link what they learn with their own lives

“The most important piece in my classroom is the development of oral language. All children need the experience of having a dialogue to make sense of the world. Read-alouds, dramatic play, story telling—hearing things orally is so important.”

Literacy Teaching Practices

Read-Aloud

Shared Reading

Independent Reading and Writing

Putting It in Context

The Teacher and the Class

Cindy Wilson teaches full-day kindergarten at the Josiah Quincy Elementary School in the heart of Boston's Chinatown. Josiah Quincy's diverse student body is predominantly Chinese-American and many are English language learners.

A former special education teacher, Ms. Wilson designs her instruction around the particular needs of her students. With her eye on the English language learners in the class, Ms. Wilson makes oral language development her primary literacy focus. Influenced by the thinking of Mary Ellen Giacobbe, she believes that telling stories is the first step toward reading and writing stories. She aims to make even her quietest students verbal.

Ms. Wilson plans class activities that are thematic and hands-on to reinforce the literature students read in class. "What some people view as play creates a meaningful experience with print." In Ms. Wilson's opinion, students may have the skills to decode language, but not the familiarity with concepts and vocabulary to understand the content. She believes that experiencing new things—dances, food, cultural traditions—is the best way to improve comprehension. "I could show them pictures, and I could talk about it, but actually feeling it, seeing it, is the most powerful way for them to understand."

Ms. Wilson works closely with Ms. Li, her full-time bilingual aide, to connect home and school. "Ms. Li brings an understanding of the Chinese culture to me which impacts my instruction. She also communicates with children and parents who speak Chinese so they are able to fully participate. She really is that link that helps me keep the channel open between families and school."

Day at a Glance*

9:20	Morning Responsibilities/ Independent Reading
10:15	Morning Meeting/ Shared Reading
10:55	Read-Aloud
11:20	Recess
11:45	Student Storytelling
12:00	Center Time/Guided Reading
12:35	Storyteller of the Day
12:45	Lunch
1:50	Read-Aloud
2:15	Writing Stations/Conferences
2:40	Students Share Writing
3:00	Interactive Writing

*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Wilson's class on February 6 and 8. On a typical day, math, science, and social studies lessons are also part of 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 language development 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 note how Cindy Wilson implements some of the Literacy Teaching Practices. In particular, note how Ms. Wilson supports students' language development.

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 Cindy Wilson's Classroom

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

Consider Ms. Wilson's comment, "I really have to look at how my classroom environment is set up and if I am differentiating instruction to meet the children's individual needs and differences [so they are all] able to participate and be fully involved in the classroom." How does Ms. Wilson differentiate instruction in her classroom? Consider Ms. Wilson's organization, types of instruction, choice of materials, and the way she works with her bilingual aide. What implications are there here for your own instruction?

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?

Ms. Wilson makes deliberate decisions about each aspect of her classroom environment: her instructional practices, materials, and the routines she puts in place. Consider the elements of a classroom environment (page 5) in light of what you saw in Ms. Wilson's classroom. How does Ms. Wilson demonstrate her respect for the students in her class? What management routines and techniques does she use for transitions, cleanup, and gaining attention? Why are the Room Readers and Writers important in this setting?

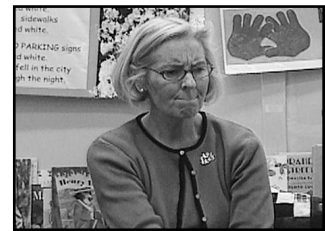
Looking Closer

Take a second look at Cindy Wilson'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 9 minutes and 54 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 44 seconds.

Ms. Wilson believes that reading aloud is "the heart of the reading program in kindergarten." As she reads *The Runaway Rice Cake*, she highlights the importance of accessing students' background knowledge to build new knowledge. She also demonstrates how to develop common understandings through shared, concrete experiences.

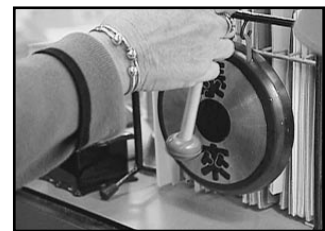


- Ms. Wilson comments, "I think it enriches all of us to learn about and understand those experiences we might not all have had.... Those experiences enrich the whole classroom, the whole community." As you watch this segment, think about what she means by this statement. Notice her verbal and nonverbal actions.
- What does she do to help students understand and relate to the story? On your checklist, note the ways she addresses the Essential Components of Literacy Development.

Centers: Video Segment

Find this segment 13 minutes and 29 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 4 minutes and 19 seconds.

In Ms. Wilson's classroom, centers are more than just a place. They offer opportunities for building oral language, for increasing independence, and for reaching individual learners at their own levels. "I make sure that the centers have a wide variety of learning activities and instruction that's differentiated. That includes a lot of hands-on activities presenting instruction in different modalities so that you are able to reach all learners."



- As you watch, identify the multiple ways center activities promote oral language.
- How does Ms. Wilson use a thematic and integrated approach to instruction? In what ways is literacy woven throughout center activities, and how do the different activities support language and literacy learning? On your checklist, note the Essential Components of Literacy Development that are addressed.

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Student Storytelling: Video Segment

Find this segment 17 minutes and 49 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 24 seconds.

Storytelling is an essential element of Ms. Wilson's curriculum. In this segment with Justin, a shy English language learner, she demonstrates how to link oral language and illustration to writing. Note the sequence of steps Ms. Wilson uses to elicit and scaffold Justin's language.



- How does Ms. Wilson validate Justin and help him realize he has a "story?" What does the teacher do? What does Justin do? How else might you approach this? Consider why Ms. Wilson chose Justin on this occasion. Which of your students might you choose and why?

In this class, Ms. Wilson uses the easel to enhance Justin's ability to share with peers, and allows other students to study the illustration, and then the story. Ms. Wilson believes strongly that students who may be reticent because of shyness or language differences need to be seen and recognized for what they know. She comments that Justin understands much more than he can communicate. Pay particular attention to the students' response to Justin's picture story.

- How does Ms. Wilson encourage the students' use of language to describe what they notice? Think about how this reinforces the value of his story.
- On your Observational Checklist, note the Essential Components of Literacy Development Ms. Wilson models and reinforces in this segment.

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

Compare this article on integrating English language learners into the classroom with what you observed in Ms. Wilson's classroom.

Abbott, S., and C. Grose. "I Know English So Many, Mrs. Abbott': Reciprocal Discoveries in a Linguistically Diverse Classroom." *Language Arts* 75, no.3 (1998): 175–184.

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, "Becoming Readers and Writers" and "Writer's Journal," and compare their approaches to teaching English language learners with Cindy Wilson's. Or view the second-grade video "Staying on Topic" and compare the teacher's approach and techniques for supporting the writing of older English language learners to what you saw on this tape. What elements remain the same? How are they different in response to developmental differences?

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Becoming Readers and Writers," "Writer's Journal," and "Staying on Topic" in this guide.

Take It Back to the Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Wilson'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. Wilson

Clay, M. *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1993.

Fountas, I. C., and G. S. Pinnell. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996.

Pinnell, G. S., I. C. Fountas, and M. E. Giacobbe. *Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1988.

Rigby Literacy Development Plan: <http://www.rigby.com/profdevel/school.htm>

Books for Students in Ms. Wilson's Classroom

Carlstrom, Nancy White. *Happy Birthday Jesse Bear*. Hong Kong: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Chinn, Karen. *Sam and the Lucky Money*. New York, N.Y.: Lee & Low Books, 1997.

Compestine, Ying Chang, and Tungwai Chau. *The Runaway Rice Cake*. New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2001.

Thong, Roseanne. *Red Is a Dragon: A Book of Colors*. San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 2001.

Wong, Janet S. *This Next New Year*. New York, N.Y.: Frances Foster Books, 2000.

Additional Resources

Books and Articles

Abbott, S., and C. Grose. "I Know English So Many, Mrs. Abbott': Reciprocal Discoveries in a Linguistically Diverse Classroom." *Language Arts* 75, no. 3 (1998).

Da Silva, K. E. "Drawing on Experience: Connecting Art and Language." *Primary Voices* 10, no. 2 (2001). Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English.

Diamond, B., and M. Moore. *Multicultural Literacy: Mirroring the Reality of the Classroom*. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1995.

Fassler, R. "'Let's Do It Again!' Peer Collaboration in an ESL Kindergarten." *Language Arts* 75, no. 3 (1998).

Harris, V. ed. *Using Multiethnic Literature in the K-8 Classroom*. Norwood, Mass.: Christopher Gordon, 1997.

Neuman, S. B., and K. Roskos. "Play, Print, and Purpose: Enriching Play Environments for Literacy Development." *The Reading Teacher* 44, no. 3 (1990). Newark, Del.: International Reading Association.

Spangenberg-Urbschat, K., and R. Pritchard, eds. *Kids Come in All Languages: Reading Instruction for ESL Students*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1994.

Selected Resources, cont'd.

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>

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE): <http://www.nabe.org/>

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

Notes
