

- *8:45–9:05. Children arrive at school.* Children enter school and engage in independent work until the day formally begins. These activities include checking in at the attendance and lunch station, folder check-in and note basket, helper chart activities, journal writing, and buddy and independent reading.

- *9:05–9:40. Morning meeting.* The whole-group morning meeting includes the following: morning message, daily schedule, daily news, Word Wall, shared read-aloud, calendar, weather report, shared reading of literature, and a skills-based lesson.

- *9:40–9:50. Introduction of learning centers activities.* The teacher describes independent and cooperative activities at centers and provides time for children to get organized, so that they are working productively. This is in preparation for meeting with individuals and small groups.

- *9:50–11:40. Guided reading.* The teacher meets with the four or more groups of children she has organized, based on similar needs for literacy instruction. Each group meets for about 20 minutes.

- *After lunch.* Writing workshop can occur during the Language Arts Block. It can begin in the morning as part of the block and continue after lunch. The entire workshop could also occur after lunch. Writing workshop includes a whole-group skills lesson, a writing assignment, and conferencing with peers and or the teacher to revise and edit.

A Description of Danielle’s Language Arts Block

The children arrive at school over a 15-minute span in the morning. As they enter, children check themselves in at the attendance/lunch station, proceed to their cubbies, and unpack. They place their folders in a designated “Folder Holder,” and their notes are placed in a basket labeled “Note Basket” on Danielle’s desk. Following these routines, the children then complete any “Class Helper” jobs that they have been assigned.

As arrival routines are completed, the children get their “Important to Me Journals” and record an entry for the day. The date is recorded on the chalkboard and serves as a reference for the children, so they can record the date on their entry. Children can select to write about anything important to them that day or the day before. For children who may have trouble selecting a topic, a page entitled “Journal Ideas” is stapled into the cover of each child’s journal. Four times a year, the children bring home a blank copy of this page and work with their families to brainstorm five things to write about in their journals. The resulting pages are stapled in the cover of the journal, so children have a variety of personally relevant topics from which to choose.

As the children are writing in their journals, Danielle greets individuals, answers notes that have been placed in her “Note Basket,” and facili-

tates journal writing. As the children finish their journal entries, they share them with Danielle, who provides every child with specific, positive feedback. For example, when looking at Jill's work, she said, "I like how you tried to hear the beginning, middle, and ending sounds in your words."

Once all of children arrive, attendance and lunch count are recorded. Two "Class Helpers" then deliver the slips to the office, and two others lead the flag salute.

The children gather on the rug in the Literacy Center for the morning meeting. During this time, the morning message, the daily schedule, the daily news, a word study skills lesson with the Word Wall, the calendar, a read-aloud, and the weather report are all carried out.

After the other activities were completed, Danielle read a story to the class. She held up the book—*The Mitten* (Brett, 1989)—so the children could see and read the title, the author's name, and the illustrator's name. Danielle had selected the book to match their winter thematic unit. She asked the children to share their predictions about what might occur in the story related to the mitten, based on the book's cover picture and title. Before beginning to read, Danielle said, "As I read, see if what you think is going to happen in this story is what actually does happen."

As she read the story, Danielle stopped occasionally for some discussion. As she neared the end of the book, Danielle said, "I'm wondering what you think will happen at the end of the story?" When they did get to the end, the children compared predictions. After that, Danielle invited the children to share the part of the story they liked best. The students began a discussion that focused on their own stories involving mittens. Danielle made this reading an interactive discussion during which she modeled for the children some comprehension strategies.

At the end of the morning meeting, the class participated in an activity in which the children say a letter of the alphabet as they stretch to the sky, make the letter's sound as they touched their hips, and say a word that begins with that letter as they touch the ground.

Activities in the various centers were reviewed. Those available to the students were as follows:

- *Partner reading.* Children pair off and read the same book together. They may also read separate books and then tell each other about the stories they read. Because they are studying winter, they are to select books from the open-faced bookshelves that include stories and expository texts about this season. Discussion about what is read is encouraged. Each child must fill out an index card with the name of the book read and one sentence about the story.

- *Writing activity.* Children are to rewrite the story read to them earlier in the day. In their rewritings, the children can write just one word

to depict a sentence, if that is what they are capable of doing, or entire sentences. They may consult the book, if necessary. Each day there is a writing activity related to the story read earlier; however, the writing assignments vary.

- *Working with words.* The words *chilly* and *slush* have been discussed as new vocabulary words with a focus on the winter theme. For this activity, children find words around the room that have the *sh* or *ch* digraph in them. In addition, they look for words that begin or end in the digraphs. After they find them, words with *sh* are written in one column and the words with *ch* in another. Children may look through books to find the digraphs.

- *Listening center.* The children listen to taped stories. For each story, there is a sheet of paper with a question to answer about the story. Two titles on tape for the unit about winter were *The Snowy Day* (Keats, 1962) and *The Wild Toboggan Ride* (Reid & Fernandes, 1992).

Once all children were in their centers and actively engaged, Danielle called her first guided literacy instruction group. When the group assembled, Danielle put on a colorful beaded necklace with 24 beads—one bead to represent each person in the class, including the teacher. Danielle refers to this as her “Cooperation Necklace.” When she is wearing it, the children are not to disturb her or the group/individual she is working with, unless it is an emergency. The necklace is a constant reminder to the children that they need to work together to solve problems and to respect the learning time of others.

The four children in the first guided reading group were working with a book entitled *The Birthday Cake* (van der Meer, 1992). Danielle began the lesson by having the children sing the song “Happy Birthday to You.” After singing, the group members discussed what the song made them think of. Danielle handed out a copy of the book to each child and asked the group members to predict what they thought the story might be about.

Danielle led the children through a picture walk of the book and then gave each child a rubber fingertip with a long rubber fingernail. The children slipped these on their pointer fingers and then proceeded to read chorally and point to the words in the title. They continued in this fashion as they read the book. After the choral reading, Danielle invited each child to do an independent reading of the story. She made a note that her objective for this group was to aid them in developing a one-to-one correspondence between words read and words on the page.

Once all the children finished, Danielle provided each child with a plastic bag containing index cards that had all the words from the story written on them. After modeling how to build a sentence using their word cards, Danielle asked the children to try and sequence the cards to cre-

ate the story. At the end of the lesson, the children placed their book, finger pointer, and word cards for the book in their plastic bag. They put their bags in their cubbies, so that they could share their book and materials with their families.

Danielle met with two other groups. The materials and activities used varied for each group. To signal that center time was over, Danielle sang a cleanup song. The children returned to their tables after cleaning up. As part of their routine, Danielle and the children then proceeded to share compliments with one another, focusing on behaviors observed during center time. Student compliments included "I like how Ivory helped me retell the story *Lunch*" [Fleming, 1993]. Jennifer said, "Whitney, Josh, and me did a good job with finding the *sh* and *ch* words." Brandon said, "I like how I worked with somebody new in the Writing Center." These brief exchanges brought about a positive closure to this important instructional time.

Writing Workshop followed lunch. Children worked on books about winter, and the teacher led a minilesson about capital letters at the beginning of a sentence and periods at the end. Children in the final editing stages with their stories have conferences with the teacher.

At the end of the day, before going home, Danielle provides a shared reading experience of the story *The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly* (Westcott, 1980). Danielle guided the exercise by first reading the title of the book and author's name. She turned to the title page, where she reviewed the name of the publisher and noted the copyright date. Following the reading, the class used highlighting tape to mark the pairs of rhyming words found in the text. Next was an interactive writing experience, in which the class generated a T chart of rhyming words. Students made observations concerning the similarities in the spelling of some rhyming words and the differences in the spelling of others. Danielle encouraged and praised these student observations. After generating the list, the class chose one pair of rhyming words with which to work and made a sentence with each pair.

When it was time to go home, the children gathered their work and lined up to leave school. Once all children were in line, Danielle handed a pointer to the line leader and clapped out a pattern to get the class's attention. The line leader then pointed to the words of the poem "Ready for Going Home" as he led the class in a choral reading.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The children in this early-childhood classroom experience literacy in many different forms. The children are involved in an environment that

incorporates literacy as a part of the entire day. The literacy experiences are planned to be appropriate, because there is concern for individual needs and learning styles. Danielle is enthusiastic about her teaching and excitement is contagious. As a result, her students assume a positive attitude toward literacy learning, one another, and themselves.

The children have extensive exposure to children's literature through the use of shared read-alouds, independent reading, buddy reading with a peer, and guided reading for skills development. Writing experiences included journal writing, Writing Workshop, and language experience activities. Both reading and writing include systematic skills development and, in addition, skills development is also done with an authentic purpose.

Danielle's room was rich with materials for children to experience choice, challenging activities, social interaction, and success. The school day was structured to include varied experiences that were developmentally appropriate, yet still retained an emphasis on the acquisition of skills. Children were taught rules, routines, and procedures for using the classroom materials when in self-directed roles. Danielle was consistent in her management techniques. Therefore, the children knew what was expected of them and, consequently, carried out the work that needed to be done. Consistent routine allowed the day to flow smoothly from one activity to another.

The affective quality in the room was indeed exemplary. Danielle speaks to the children with respect and in an adult manner. She does not raise her voice, nor does she use punitive remarks, facial expressions, or intonations. In this atmosphere, children learn to understand appropriate classroom behavior.

Danielle allowed time for children to unfold at their natural pace, with concern for social, emotional, and intellectual development. She also was aware of the need to foster development with appropriate materials for exploration and specific skills instruction for individual needs. She integrated the language arts curriculum and content area teaching by building one on the other to develop listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. In addition, she utilized information from content areas to help to teach literacy skills.

Although we know a great deal about early literacy instruction, we need to continue to research literacy development in the early years. We need to place a great deal of emphasis on preschool literacy instruction. Most of the research has been done with children in first grade, and little has been done with preschool children. We do know a lot about early literacy; however, organizing and managing what we know within the language arts block is an untouched area. We do not know enough about the delivery of instruction, that is, comparing explicit approaches to more

open, embedded approaches. We need to study exemplary teachers more to determine how they became exemplary.

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. Observe the Language Arts Block in an early childhood class. Using the list in this chapter that describes general and literacy exemplary practice, check an item when you observe it and record what the teacher was doing.
2. Observe the language arts block in another early childhood classroom at a different grade level. Determine the theory, philosophy, or research discussed in this chapter that influenced specific teacher behavior and instruction. Record the teacher behavior.
3. Select a social studies or science theme and create a language arts block for an early childhood classroom. Be sure to include all elements that describe a comprehensive literacy program. Be sure to integrate the theme into the literacy instruction.

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