

Mealtime Conversations in Classrooms Can Contribute to Language Development

(Barnes, Grifenhagen & Dickinson, under review)

- ▶ Are a context that can bring home experiences and culture into the classroom.
- ▶ 7 – 14% of the time in preschool classrooms
- ▶ Provide opportunities for extended conversations and talk about past and future events (academic language).
- ▶ Study:
 - 44 Head Start classroom mealtimes transcribed
 - Coded for topics of talk
 - Fall-spring PPVT score
 - Found general patterns of conversations

Patterns of Talk: Conversational Cultures

- ▶ Home focus (20%): talk about homes
 - Limited academic vocabulary language
 - Managerial and manners
- ▶ Classroom focus (11%)
 - Academic talk (often about food)
 - Managerial and social-personal talk
- ▶ Mixed Low use: (11%) all types of talk(43%)
 - Limited amount of talk
- ▶ Mixed, high (25%): all types of talk
 - Academic vocabulary and topics (most)
 - Social-personal topics (2nd highest)

Mealtime Talk in a Head Start

Social-Personal Focus

- ▶ Child: Everybody was sick.
- ▶ Teacher: Who was sick?
- ▶ Child: My granny and my poppa mamma.
- ▶ Teacher: What's wrong with granny?
- ▶ Child: She had to get a shot.
- ▶ Teach: She ok? What's wrong with mamma granny?
- ▶ Child: mm she had surgery.
- ▶ Teacher: She did? She in the hospital?
- ▶ Child: Yes.

Food/Academic Focus

- ▶ Teacher: Do we have a vegetable today?
- ▶ Child: yeah.
- ▶ Teacher: What kinda vegetable do we have on our plates?
- ▶ Child: Banana!
- ▶ Teacher: Umm. Banana's a fruit. What kinda vegetable do we have?
- ▶ Child: Broccoli!
- ▶ Teacher: Broccoli and potatoes. Well potatoes are sorta like something that you call a starch.

Did Mealtime Talk Predict PPVT Growth?

- ▶ Growth in expressive vocabulary was related to conversation cluster:
 - Mixed use (high and low) was related to larger gains.
 - Social talk provided opportunities for talk about home.
 - Academic talk supplied vocabulary and conceptual knowledge.
- ▶ Managerial talk
 - May have created good climate for talk
 - Fostered self-regulation
- ▶ Take home message:
 - View mealtimes as occasions to foster language.
 - Encourage sustained talk that engages children.

Lunchtime Conversation

- ▶ Cindy Hoisington
 - Head Start teacher
 - Classroom with 12 ELL children speaking 9 different languages
- ▶ Lunchtime after girls had explored snails during centers time.

Using Music to Teach Vocabulary



Music in Classrooms

- ▶ Music and movement are a standard component in most classrooms.
- ▶ Typically teachers do not intentionally use it to build language.
- ▶ Yet it has ideal design features:
 - Children are attending and producing language.
 - Lyrics are repeated multiple times and can include interesting words and grammatical structures.
 - Sounds associated with words can help support word learning (Lawson-Adams & Dickinson, under review).

Language for Reading Study

- ▶ Prior to the song words are introduced with picture cards. 10 words are taught with a song.
- ▶ The first time words are introduced the teacher gives the definitions. The second use of the song the teacher elicits the words and definitions from children.
- ▶ We tested learning after words were taught using music twice.
- ▶ Long-term recall was tested for words that were never reviewed and for words that were reviewed twice using the same song .
- ▶ Watch it:

Factors that Support Learning

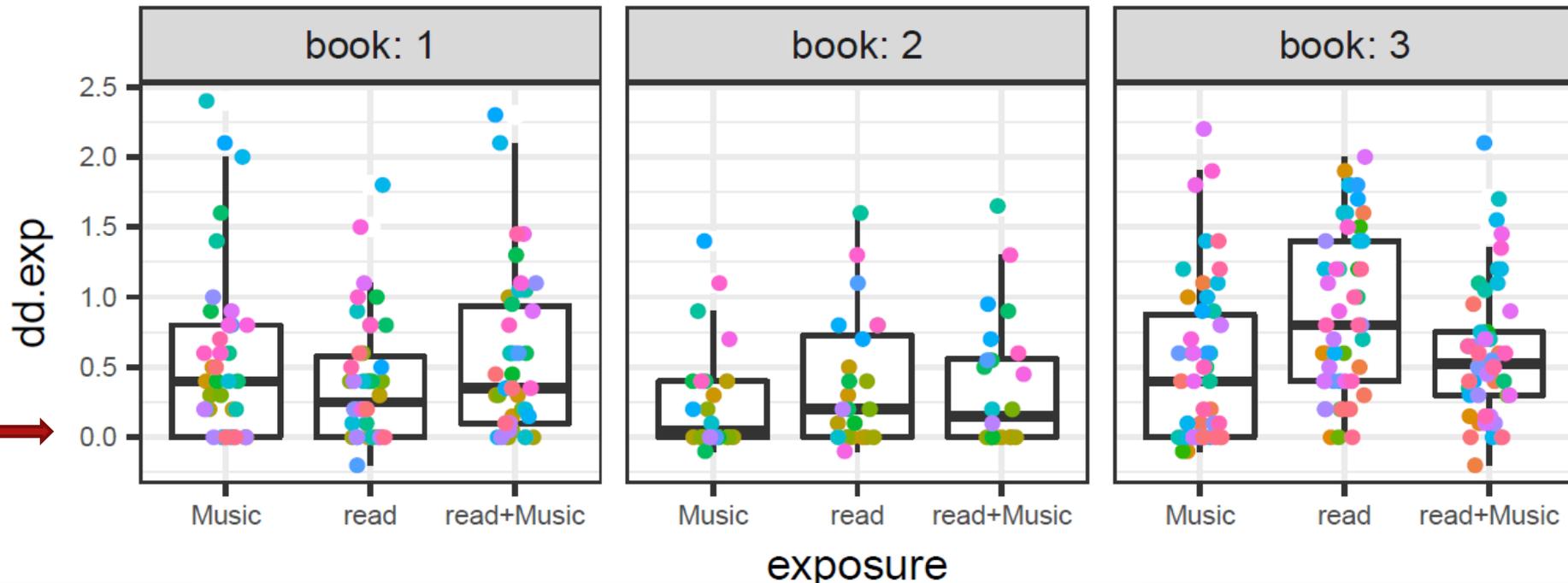
- ▶ Children Talk (and sing).
 - Children are highly engaged
 - Use novel words in ways that build meaning.
- ▶ Ask questions
 - Participation is fostered with closed questions
- ▶ Teaching
 - Word meanings are explicitly taught
 - Repeated exposure.
- ▶ Model use
 - Teachers use words in complex sentences.
- ▶ Culture of use (not exactly conversations)
 - Repeated format that invites child participation.

Research Design

1. Will children learn words when they are taught through music?
 2. Will teaching words using music be as effective as teaching them:
 - a) During book reading?
 - b) With a combination of book reading and music?
- ▶ Words were taught in three ways: music, book, music and book.
 - ▶ We compared learning of taught words with words that were not taught.
 - ▶ We used this method with 3 books.

Teaching Words in Music, Book Reading and Combined: Expressive Task

Music resulted in significant learning on our expressive knowledge task ($p < .003$)





Other Strategies

Book Reading

- ▶ Consistently associated with improved vocabulary learning.
- ▶ Key elements:
 - Reread books 3-4 times
 - Teach selected 8 – 10 words explicitly.
 - Support understanding of the story across readings:
 - Begin by establishing basic events, characters.
 - Later encourage inferential thinking, often about character motivations and feelings.
- ▶ Use nonfiction informational books.

Centers Time

- ▶ Provide activities linked to your theme that encourage use of words being taught.
 - Prop boxes with theme-related toys
 - Centers with thematic connection
 - Books that are read to the large group
- ▶ Develop a conversation station (Bond and Wasik, 2009). Have toys, pictures books to prompt talk.
- ▶ Spend time playing and talking with children in varied locations.
- ▶ Post words and phrases you want to remember to use in key locations. Model use.
- ▶ Engage and support, do not interrupt with didactic instruction.

Involve Parents

- ▶ Let parents know the topics of your units.
- ▶ Encourage them to tell children their personal stories related to the topic.
- ▶ Have parents encourage to children to talk. Pictures can be good starting points.
- ▶ Send home the vocabulary you are addressing (in L1 and L2 if possible).
 - Create simple games to provide a meaningful way to practice words.
 - Invite parents to share learning moments from home.

Changing Patterns of Informal Language Use Is Hard

(Dickinson, 2011)

- ▶ Extended effort is needed
- ▶ Strategies for becoming aware of your patterns.
 - Checklists
 - Systematic self-reflection
 - Audio or videotaping
- ▶ Teamwork – coach, co-teacher
 - Others see things you may be unaware of.
 - Observing others can help your self awareness.

Changing How You Plan Teacher-led Activities is Easier Than Changing Informal Uses

- ▶ Unit planning should include identifying words and concepts for systematic instruction.
- ▶ Identify words, create definitions and plan questions to use in structured activities.
- ▶ Plan for home involvement
- ▶ Return to the same topics in future years. Build a reservoir of resources and activity ideas.

Use a Content-rich Curriculum

- ▶ Topics should include intellectual challenge.
- ▶ Extend topics long enough to build and deepen understanding (at least 2 weeks, preferably longer).
- ▶ Build connections among activities and materials to provide multiple opportunities for learning and practice.
- ▶ Include hands on science-related activities and discussions.

Strong Leadership Is Needed

- ▶ **Adopt a strong curriculum and support effective use**
 - Support planning consistent with your goals
 - Seek to provide time for planning
 - Develop systems for sharing ideas and materials
- ▶ **Be Reflective:**
 - See yourself as a researcher
 - Engage teachers self-reflection
 - identify issues/questions
 - Develop systematic a method to address it

Teachers Must Be Supported

- ▶ Effective professional development that builds knowledge and pedagogical skills.
 - sustained and focused on learning
 - includes coaching or mentoring
 - has clear linkage to curricula
- ▶ Mentors/coaches are available
 - know how to work with teachers in ways that support improved instruction
 - provide concrete, objective feedback
 - are knowledgeable about development, instruction
- ▶ Building level administrators know instructional expectations; support educational goals

Sensible Accountability

- ▶ Reliable and valid information about children's learning of different types
- ▶ Strive to ensure teachers' progress monitoring does not only focus on easily measured, "basic" skills. Include:
 - Children's talk about past and future events, ability to answer different kinds of questions.
 - Children use of language to solve problems and communicate feelings
 - Children are learning new words
 - Rating tool that has been useful: The TROLL (Dickinson et al., 2003)
- ▶ Encourage use of observations to plan activities and target needs of individuals.

Guiding Principles



Teach with intentionality.

Reflect constantly.

Believe passionately in the importance of your work.

Be "The One" for Each Child

I am only one.
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything.
But still I can do something.
And because I cannot do
everything
I will not refuse to do the
something that I can do.

Rev. Edward Everett Hale

from: [Singing the Living Tradition](#),
Unitarian Universalist hymnal

