



Literacy coaching with Head Start teachers

Karen E. Diamond and Douglas R. Powell
Purdue University

Thanks to:

- Colleagues: Margaret Burchinal, Matthew Koehler, Aman Yadav
- Coaches: Carol Czaja, Hope Gerde, Charissa Leestma, Deborah Newland, Margaret Story
- Research Assistants: Alison Barody, Amanda Beckham, Amy Carey, Mary Cockburn, Jill Kasten, Frances Lin, Patrick O'Leary, Cassie Robbins, Chanele Robinson, Chenyi Zhang
- Participating Head Start programs and teachers
- Supported by grants from the Institute of Education Sciences



Coaching

- Provides an approach for addressing differences:
 - Within teachers
 - Between teachers
- Coaching provides individual teachers with:
 - Specific information that they need, including models of good practice
 - Feedback on their own teaching
 - Supports for implementing new instructional approaches



Sounds

Project Overview

Sounds

Words

Related Skills

Case 4: Introducing Compound Words and Syllables

Helping children understand that some words can be divided into smaller parts (syllables) or consist of two words (compound words) is important to promote after children demonstrate basic skills in identifying sounds. An awareness of syllables is a central component of decoding skills.

Children may find it easier to learn about compound words than syllables because, unlike syllables, the words that make up a compound word have meaning and are often familiar to children.

Most children will not notice syllables without assistance. It is helpful to begin with words that are familiar to children such as their names. Illustrations in this case show how teachers clearly enunciate each syllable and often use clapping and a visual aid to help children pay attention to syllables.



Click on examples of:

- [Introducing the Concept of a Compound Word](#)
- [Using Familiar Objects to Teach About Compound Words](#)
- [Talking Slowly to Emphasize Syllables](#)
- [Using Name Cards and Clapping to Introduce Syllables](#)
- [Actively Engaging Children in Identifying Syllables](#)
- [Counting Name Claps to Promote Syllable Identification](#)
- [Using Rhyming Words to Teach Final Sounds](#)

Sounds

Case 4: Introducing Compound Words and Syllables

Project Overview

Sounds

Words

Related Skills

Using Familiar Objects to Teach About Compound Words

Teacher's goal:

Introduce the concept of compound words by using familiar items children can manipulate

Notice that the teacher:

- describes a compound word by using familiar words and objects, and asking children to repeat the word *compound*
- includes a third object to help children carefully focus on the two words in a compound word
- provides a lot of reinforcement and excitement



Words

Project Overview

Sounds

Words

Related Skills

Case 7: Introducing New Words During Large Group

Children's word knowledge is critical for understanding books that are read to them when they are preschoolers and, later, books that they will read. Because books are written to tell a story rather than to teach the meaning of words, it is often difficult for children to learn new words just by listening to books.



Providing specific instruction on new words during group or circle time is a good strategy for helping children to learn new vocabulary. New words can be taught by:

- explaining a word's meaning in a book (for example, the word *tiny* means *little, small*)
- providing a connection to the way it is used in the story (the *tiny* seed is very, very *little*)
- connecting the new words to other experiences (when you were a baby, you were *tiny*, too, but now you're *big*)
- using new vocabulary words throughout the day, and returning to them during later groups, to help reinforce children's understanding and use of new words

Click on the following examples of ways to introduce the meaning of a new word during large group. They begin with illustrations of teachers introducing new words from books and used in conversation, followed by strategies to reinforce children's understanding of the words that have been taught.

- [Selecting Words to Teach](#)
- [Introducing New Words Related to a Theme](#)

Words

Project Overview

Sounds

Words

Related Skills

Case 7: Introducing New Words During Large Group

Introducing a Common Yet Unfamiliar Phrase

Teacher's goal:

Define an unfamiliar phrase often used by adults

Notice that the teacher:

- uses and explains a new term (*double-edged sword*) as part of an on-going conversation in a large group
- provides a description ("one of those good things, bad things"), uses the new phrase, and then redefines the phrase ("something that's good and not so good")
- connects the use of the phrase "double-edged sword" to children's immediate experience (Isabella's mother is at school)



Elements of Coaching

Onsite

- Coach: 2 hour observation focused on specific language/literacy goals
- Feedback: Coach and teacher meet to discuss observation and next steps
- Examples: Coach models practices or shares specific video exemplars at feedback meeting

Distance

- Coach: Review of 15-25 minute teacher-submitted videotape
- Feedback: Coach provides written feedback linked to elements of teachers' instruction on videotape
- Teacher reviews coach's comments
- Examples: Feedback includes links to specific video examples
- Teacher has access to all (107) video exemplars for intervention semester



TEACHING NEW WORDS-VIDEO #1

- This lesson went very well. You were prepared and you used many of the effective strategies from the Strategies for Teaching New Words.
- The book reading was very interactive and you positively reinforced the children's contributions. It was great to hear the children talking about the new words.
- You modeled use of the words nicely as the children prepared to go to center time. This was a helpful way to reinforce the words you had just talked about.
- Writing the words down is a helpful reminder to review the words with the children. It is also great to have the words visible so that you can talk about the sounds and letters in the words.

Movie Clips:



Commentary:

Teaching Effectively/Everyone: Defining New Words

- You asked the children what the word 'gentle' means. The children responded 'be careful with my baby, be careful with my dog and be nice, be careful with the books'. Listen to how you reinforced their responses. This was wonderful. The children talked about the meaning of 'gentle' and also gave examples or uses of the new word related to their own experiences.
- Then you stated your prepared definition: the word gentle means to be kind, to use a soft touch or a soft voice; to act in a kind way.
- Try to help the children use the word in a sentence. You modeled this after a child said, 'Be careful with books.' You responded, 'Be careful. Be gentle with books.' You might start by asking a question and modeling a response. (What are you gentle with? I am gentle with books.) Help the children practice using the word: I am gentle with my baby. I am gentle with my dog.

PLANNING AHEAD:

- Remember to choose at least three new target words to teach each day. The words can be from any books that you read in class. You are doing a great job going over the words with the children and providing child-friendly definitions. Look at the Checklist for Teaching Words as you plan your teaching.
 - Watch some of the videos in the words section of the Classroom Links website. I found a few that might be helpful to you.
 - [Case 7: Selecting Words to Teach](#) -notice how the teacher chooses words to introduce to the children.
 - [Case 8: Using Children's Curiosity to Introduce a New Word](#) -the teacher introduces new words during center time with a small group of children. She uses the pictures in the book and gestures to help the children understand the meanings.
- There are many good articles on the website as well. Let's Give Children Something to Talk About! Oral Language and Preschool Literacy by Kathy Kalmar may be interesting to you. [Click here to view the article](#)

Intervention design

Coaching Intervention (Onsite + Distance Fall semester)	Comparison (Business as usual Fall semester)
42 teachers	31 teachers
2-day workshop 7 coaching sessions	



Outcomes

Outcome variable	Intervention X Time		
	β	<i>SE</i>	<i>d</i>
Classroom-teacher			
ELLCO: Language, literacy, curric	0.75***	0.17	0.92
Code-focused instruction	0.27 ⁺	0.15	0.62
Word definition instruction	0.13	0.59	0.07
Child outcomes			
Letter knowledge	4.82***	0.97	0.29
Blending	0.93*	0.46	0.18
Concepts about print	0.40*	0.18	0.22
Receptive language (PPVT-III)	- 0.48	0.96	- 0.03



Important elements

- Targeted focus on literacy
- Coach-teacher relationships
- Technology as a tool
- Coaches as supports for teachers (i.e., the coach is not responsible for supervising or evaluating the teacher)
- Some teaching practices (e.g., providing explicit vocabulary instruction) are harder than others



For more information:

Powell, D. R., Diamond, K. E., Burchinal, M. R., & Koehler, M. J. (2010). Effects of an early literacy professional development intervention on Head Start teachers and children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*, 299-312.

kdiamond@purdue.edu

powelld@purdue.edu

