Curriculum Class Two

Parent Engagement in Literacy

Early Evening-Dinner and Class

*Language, Context, Vocabulary and Common Core*

**Key concepts (background for facilitators)**

1. Language is a system of communication that enables humans to cooperate. Children acquire language through social interactions. It can be spoken (oral) or written (reading and writing). Children need lots of practice in speaking and listening in order to become proficient with reading and writing skills.
2. Reading comprehension involves making meaning and requires us to think while we’re reading in order to understand the information that’s being presented more clearly. Having conversations at home gives children practice with speaking and listening skills AND it helps them to think about ideas that are being proposed.
3. The more children know about many different things (background knowledge), the better their reading comprehension. Knowing things about the topic they’re reading about helps children have a deeper understanding of what they’re reading and gives them something to connect the new information to.
4. Knowing what words mean (vocabulary knowledge) is another critical reading skill that is highly correlated (related) to reading comprehension. When students have a word in their mental dictionary, they read it more automatically. If they don’t know what the words mean when they’re reading or listening to stories, it will impact their ability to make meaning.

**Background on Common Core (for facilitators)**

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative is a state-led effort intended to provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country. Until now, every state has had its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students at the same grade level in different states have been expected to achieve at different levels.

The common standards define the **rigorous skills and knowledge** in English language arts and mathematics that need to be effectively taught and learned for all students to be ready to succeed academically in college and workforce training programs. The goal is to provide more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences.

This initiative also aims to provide all students with an equal opportunity for a quality education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of their zip code. This includes students who are English language learners (ELLs). However, these students may require additional time, appropriate instructional support, and aligned assessments as they acquire both English language proficiency and content area knowledge.

The standards have been criticized for being developmentally inappropriate, especially in the early grades. Research supports the fact that young children can attain these standards and by doing so, they will have a better chance of finding success in their adult lives. Because the standards focus on results rather than the means, teachers are not told how to teach the content. There is flexibility in determining how students will reach these standards in the classroom.

**Class # 2: Language, Context, Vocabulary and Common Core**

*Facilitator Preparation*

*For the international café of cultural and neighborhood stories, arrange the room so that there is a small cluster of tables, or, if there are no tables, chairs in circles. Whatever works in the room. If there are tables, put little flowers or something special on each table to make it feel like a tour of culture. (I use little flowers and fabric table cloths to make it special. A lot will depend on what the school has and also on the number of parents and children attending).*

*First 30 minutes*

Dinner with family together.

*Next 20 minutes*

Meeting with Parents on Core Intention of Evening-

Children are taken to child care. Facilitators spend first 20 minutes with parents alone.

**1. Welcome Parents**

* Introduce self and team, as some parents will be new.
* Summarize briefly what took place at the first meeting for those who are newly attending and for those returning.
* Share the details of this reading initiative again, informing parents that their school:
  + was one of a few selected;
  + trains teachers in how to assess and help each child with emerging reading skills and
  + works with parents so they truly and fully partner at school and at home on reading excellence (which is what you are doing now).
* Call on Principal to share how he or she hopes to partner with parents on this initiative.
* Inform parents that they will meet this evening and one more evening in the spring.
* Give some examples of ‘juicy words,’ from the first meeting and ask if any parents continued juicy words at home.

**The Evening’s Tour of Culture, History and Neighborhood**

* Explain to parents that this evening you will focus on a fun café tour of culture, history and neighborhood. You will also be explaining how the skills learned tonight are some of the skills being required of your child as their skills take part in the new Common Core initiative, a national initiative to bolster our educational skills in the United States.
* During this playful activity, parents will be seeing how to help their child both **remember** the main idea and important details about stories and to **think about** narrative.
* These skills help improve reading comprehension, just as learning ‘juicy vocabulary ‘words helps improve comprehension. This is important because children need to both remember and recount what they read, but they also need to think deeply about it.

One type of comprehension involves **remembering** what you read and requires some **memory** skills.

The other involves **thinking about** what you read and relating it to what you know and things you’ve experienced. This requires children to use **reasoning** skills.

**2. Practice for Parents in Role Play Before the Children Return**

Facilitator asks someone to role play with them. Have the parent tell a story from their history that would be of interest to their child. Facilitator pretends to be the child and asks questions. (Note as you ask it, or just after, that the question was a memory or a thinking question, so you are modeling the kinds of questions a child might ask). *Make this fun and interesting. It will be easy to do so as the story is likely to be compelling and to grab the parents immediately.*

Following the role play note that parents can help with what and why questions in fun, playful ways. Tonight will be an example. Also, it does not matter whether your primary language is English or not. Do this sort of game at home in your primary language and the lessons are fully learned and relished.

Parents are key to this learning at home and tonight will give them an opportunity to practice with their child what they can do at home all the time.

You will also continue the juicy words strand by picking one word from the story they tell. The children will make a path of words this evening that tell of history and neighborhood.

**3. Children return**

***Opening exercise – A Walk through History, Neighborhood Culture***

**Goal 1:** To have parents see the importance of context and experience so they can further understanding and meaning for their children.

**Goal 2:** To have parents see how talking about a context or new experience further enriches their child’s use of words, communication and thinking.

**Goal 3:** To have parents see the benefit of asking both memory questions and thinking questions to help children deepen their understanding of books, situations and to become comfortable as thinkers in conversation.

**Goal 4:** To have parents see the opportunity and literacy benefits of giving words to activities and objects as a way to expand vocabulary and to link wonder and joy to words.

**Goal 5**: To have a teacher or principal at the school share his or her insights regarding the literacy initiative in the school. How is it helping the children?

**Goal 6.** To understand that the Common Core is looking for precisely these kinds of skills in students--the capacity to probe and deepen understanding of a topic. Parents can partner at home, with fun and intentional activity.

**Ask parents to tell a story** to their child about their family history, culture, or neighborhood. It might be a story that surprises them, coming from a previous point in time and not part of their everyday experience.

The story should be a story they would feel comfortable sharing with others, as they will be sharing their stories with other students and parents in small groups. Story should take five minutes or so.

They tell the story to their child. Together, they draw something from the story, or any section of it. They also pick one juicy word from the story and put the word on the same piece of colorful paper. They can shape the word on the page, however they wish.

The student asks the parent one question about the story. This will come naturally to the child. No need to guide the question, at this point. It might be a ‘what’ or a ‘why’ question. (The ‘what ‘question is a fact/memory question. The ‘why’ question is a thinking question).

The student asks one more question of the parent about the story. It might be a ‘what’ or a ‘why’ question.

The parent then helps the child ask questions, to be sure that both a ‘what’ question, (W*hat color was the house?*), and a ‘why’ question, (*Why did the family have to leave the yellow house in Russia?*) are asked.

**Walking Culture and History**

Half the families are assigned to leave the table they are at and to go sit at another table

Half the families are assigned to stay at the table where they were originally seated.

(So half are walking and moving, half are remaining. The idea is to have parents and children seated at new tables to hear a story and to have some parents and children remaining to tell their stories).

Those who stay at a table tell their story to the newly arriving parent and child. Those traveling to another table, listen to the story of the family remaining.

Have them ask questions as the stories are told, so the *why* and a *what* questions are continuing in the new group of parents and children.

Have them show the pictures and the words selected to capture the story. Facilitators play up the noise, the fun, and the interaction.

*(Facilitators will determine how many tables those travelling the tables will visit and how long the visits will be, based on the number of people attending. Ideally, families will travel to at least one or two tables to learn one or two other stories. Families seated will tell their story at least two times.*

*This offers lovely interaction, exchange of culture and will lead to what and why questions. Each stop with a travelling family and a storytelling family should be about five or ten minutes. More than one family can travel to a table. You can have two families listening and one family telling. This creates a special group feeling.)*

**Walk a Path of Words**

Facilitators have the children make a path of their selected words and illustrations. They can hold up their words and pictures or place them on the floor by them.

Have parents line up to walk the path and hear the special words selected.

Have children say the words to the line of the parents as the parent comes by their word. Parents can comment on the word at any point so this is an interactive parade of parents and children with words that silhouette the stories of culture and neighborhood.

**Mural of Words**

The school can make a mural of these words. It can be a mural of **juicy words** on history and neighborhood. The principal can do whatever would be fun and honoring of these words, if he or she wishes.

Facilitator shares briefly that the new Common Core framework that our state and most other states has taken on, seeks to improve the skills of our students as learners. The goal is to heighten the critical thinking of our students so they are ready and exceptionally talented for our new, global workforce.

Common Core seeks to help our children deepen their understanding of text. It attends to both fiction and non-fiction. There is exposure to all kinds of materials in science, history, art so that our children have broad range.

Parents can partner at home through vocabulary, dialogue regarding books, exposure to various texts, exposure to experiences that help us understand the world we live in.

If parents are not literate, the skills they can teach are still very strong. Through story and dialogue, they will help their children think deeply about situations, people, and reasons for action or inaction. Narrative and exploration help give a child depth that they will bring to their experiences and to their textbooks.

If parents speak another language, they should do all that is being taught tonight in their language of origin. The exposure to two languages or more, enriches a child and promises profound intellectual skills, if both languages are mastered.

Facilitators share that parents can become concerned about new initiatives and how our children will be evaluated within them. But if we are partners and know what is expected, we can adapt and have fun activities that help with any shift in focus in the classroom.

Tonight we did just that. We learned about some of the expectations of Common Core. Then we did exercises that showed the kinds of activities, questions, and listening that we as parents can provide, to help our children have fun with words, meaning, thinking and enjoying stories.

**4. Civic Canopy Partners**

If there is a school librarian, or town librarian attending, the librarian shares where they can find books on history and culture and offers library cards.

**5. Activities at Home and Summary**

Books are handed out for each family.

Suggest that parents continue finding ‘juicy words’ and hanging them up at home, using the book they just received.

Suggest that parents utilize the questioning they did this evening with both the book and in general conversation, probing for both **memory** and **thinking** questions.

Summarize the evening.

Share next date of third evening.

Give out evaluations.