

Chapter and Case Study Discussion Activities

Chapter 5: Talk for Learning and Classroom Management: Using Language for Learning and Self-Regulation

In this chapter, we learned how “talk for learning” is essential to build children’s knowledge and support classroom management. We also reviewed strategies and tools to improve educators’ talk for learning skills. Use the following case study from Chapter 5, along with the questions below, to reflect on how concepts and key takeaways from the chapter apply to your professional work and setting.

It is 9:30 at the Explorations Early Learning Center, and Pre-K teachers Jada and Maria are working to clean up breakfast so they can begin story time. Jada was able to stop by the library yesterday and after searching through several titles, found a new book she thought the children would really enjoy. The cute little mouse in the story makes the most over-the-top facial expressions; once she saw the illustrations, Jada was sure her children would get a kick out of it. Leaving the library, she felt accomplished.

With the children settled on the rug, Jada reaches into her bag for the new book. Eager to get started, Jada nevertheless pauses to remind the children what the rules are for story time, asking everyone to sit criss-cross-applesauce and to remember to raise a hand if they have something to say. Jada then holds the book up high, opens the cover, and gets ready to read, scanning the group. Although most of the children are sitting quietly waiting for Jada to start, Anthony and Mya are still talking and Kylie is laying on her back instead of sitting as she should. Jada says to Anthony and Mya, “Do you want to lose your outside time today?” and to Kylie, “Is that what we do on the carpet? We are not laying down right now.” Anthony and Mya stop talking and turn to Jada, but Kylie is still lying down. “Do you need to leave the circle, Kylie?” Kylie shakes her head no and slowly sits up. By now, the other children are talking, and Jada tries to get their attention. Jada feels herself getting upset, but takes a breath and begins to read in a loud voice as the children quiet down and listen.

After reading through the book, beginning to end, Jada asks the children “Who was the mouse hiding the strawberry from?” and “What color was the strawberry?” Jada is proud that the children know the answers to her questions and says to the children, “Good job!” Then, Kylie calls out, “I love strawberries!” and Anthony shouts, “I’m not scared of bears!” Jada frowns and reminds them to raise a hand to speak. Feeling discouraged, Anthony hangs his head down, and when Mya puts her hand on his shoulder, Anthony slaps it away. Jada says, “Anthony! That wasn’t nice. You need to leave the circle.” Anthony shouts, “Fine. It’s a dumb book anyway!”

Questions for Leaders to Consider

What does Jada do well in this situation? What skills does she need to further develop to improve her practice? How do you assess and address educators’ skills and knowledge gaps in your setting? If you observed this kind of lesson as part of your professional work, what next steps would you take to support the educator (this could be directly or indirectly)?

Resources for Implementation

The Early Education Leader's Guide

Case Questions for Leaders to Use in Professional Learning Discussions

- What did Jada do well in this situation? What could Jada have done differently? Have you faced similar situations in your work? What strategies have you used during read alouds to engage children?
- “Talk for learning” is described as intentional use of verbal and non-verbal communication that stimulates conversations, builds knowledge, and nurtures relationships. When did you see this type of communication present in the case study? How do you use talk for learning in your setting?
- We learned about four strategies to bring talk for learning into the classroom. Using books as anchors, asking open-ended questions, prompting extended conversations, and using praise and positive language. Which of these strategies would be particularly helpful for Jada to use to engage her students?
- One of the suggested strategies is asking open-ended questions. How could Jada alter her questions so they are open-ended? How do you use open-ended questions in your practice? When is it challenging to engage with children in this way? What are the benefits of asking open-ended questions?
- How could Jada use positive language to engage with children? Why do you think this is a component of “talk for learning”?
- In this chapter, we read, “talk for learning strategies have a reciprocal relationship with classroom management,” meaning children are more likely to stay on-task and avoid problem behaviors when they are actively engaged in their learning environment. Why are some children disengaged in the case example? How would you handle a situation where some children are not engaged, despite effort to plan and prepare an interesting lesson?

Self-Study Activity

This discussion highlighted four strategies to use talk for learning in the classroom, including using books as anchors, asking open-ended questions, prompting extended conversations, and using praise and positive language.

- How do these strategies relate to and impact your professional work?
- What questions will you ask, what steps will you take? Write them down so you remember to incorporate them in your own work.