

Project GLAD® in Early Childhood: Oracy is the Key

by Christie Baird, Ed.D.—Coordinator, Orange County Department of Education Project GLAD® National Training Center

*“Reading and writing float on a sea of talk.”
(Britton, 1970)*

Preschool GLAD® is cognitively rich, developmentally appropriate, and focused on oral language development because oracy plays a critical role in early literacy, providing the foundations for reading and writing (Shanahan & Lonigan, 2012). Project GLAD® for Preschool/Early Childhood is founded on research about how children learn and on the impact educators can have when providing language-rich environments that support all dimensions of learning.

Research validates that young children can achieve early literacy competencies that will prepare them to be successful readers and writers (Grifenhagen, et al. 2017). Teachers’ use of sophisticated vocabulary in preschool and kindergarten is related to fourth-grade reading comprehension and decoding skills (Justice, Jiang & Strasser, 2018; Barnes, Dickinson, & Grifenhagen, 2016).

Preschool GLAD® focuses on language development with the early childhood strategies because of the research showing a significant relationship between children’s language development and their literacy development. The amount of adult-child talk has a direct impact on how children use and understand language.

Early childhood classrooms need to be places of productive noise. Jim Cummins reminds us, “When you hear the motor running, you know the brain is engaged” (Presentation, 1999). It is what we hear children saying that lets us know

what they are learning. Research tells us that 70% of the talk in the classroom should be student talk (Landry, 2004). This research is true throughout the grade levels. In Preschool GLAD®, we emphasize to teachers that their job is to “get students talking!”

The Preschool GLAD®/Early Childhood training model and strategies are explicitly designed to build oracy, which is the ability to communicate effectively using spoken language. Instruction in each strategy begins with a focus on oral language, building vocabulary, and providing multiple opportunities for children to talk together and create meaning for themselves. The oral language builds the foundation for reading and writing.

One example of how teachers can begin focusing on oral language and see that focus extended into reading and writing is the Observation Chart strategy.

Observation Charts begin as a teacher-directed oral language activity and progress through the early years to become a student-directed, peer-partner activity by first grade.

The Observation Chart strategy focuses students’ attention on the theme and provides opportunities for teachers to assess what children already know and what they are interested in learning.

The strategy begins in preschool and transitional kindergarten as a small-group strategy. Small groups of children with the teacher examine several interesting pictures related to the theme. Together, they discuss what they notice and what makes them curious. The teacher models how to think aloud, ask questions, and build on what other people say.



The Observation Chart strategy begins as a teacher-directed oral language activity and progresses to become a student-directed partner activity by 1st grade.

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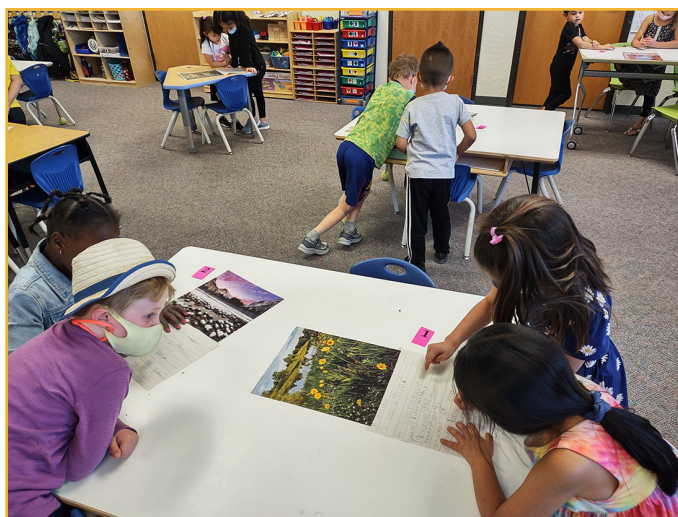
With the youngest learners, the teacher makes anecdotal notes about the discussion, assessing what children know and what they are interested in learning. With four- and five-year olds, the teacher invites them to choose a picture and sketch or write on a blank sheet of paper what they notice in the picture. Students are given a pencil rather than a crayon to emphasize that they are not recreating the picture they are looking at, but rather, recording their thoughts about it. The teacher takes dictation from the students about their comments or questions, remembering to write exactly what the student says. These notes support the teacher in planning instruction focused on students' interests and needs.

In kindergarten, the teacher begins with single pictures and small groups of children, just as the strategy is used in preschool. The goal is for the teacher to model and teach how to have a discussion with others. The teacher begins the process as a guided activity in order to ensure children understand what they are being asked to do and have the knowledge of how to look at a picture and talk about it with another person. In the second or third month of school, the teacher introduces the idea of children working in pairs and sharing a pencil. The teacher is gathering information about student understanding and development in working with a partner. The partner pair chooses a picture and talks together about it and shares the pencil in recording their thoughts. The teacher is still part of the conversation, helping to develop the students' skills in making comments, asking questions, and sharing their thinking.

In the second semester of the kindergarten year, the teacher sets up picture stations around the room. The teacher ensures there are enough stations for each pair to have a station. The teacher numbers the stations and places one pair at each

one. The pair discusses the picture, records their thoughts and questions, and moves to the next station when the teacher gives the signal. The teacher intentionally chooses when to listen and when to come alongside a pair to model active listening and interpersonal skills, which are essential for collaboration and teamwork.

By the beginning of first grade, students are ready to be in AB partnerships, choosing picture clusters to observe, responding to other's statements and questions, and moving from chart to chart as they are ready.



Second-semester kindergarteners work with a partner in Observation Chart centers.

Throughout the process of using Observation Charts, children learn how to think and talk about something they observe. They learn how to listen to other people and respond to the ideas of others. They develop the understanding that what they say can be written down and responded to. Observation Charts begins as an oral

activity and ends as an activity that combines oral and written language (sketches and words). Building oracy in the early years enables students to participate in the strategy purposefully and successfully in elementary school.

The continuum of using the Observation Chart strategy is just one example from *Preschool GLAD*®.

Another strategy that begins as an oral language strategy and builds to a reading and writing strategy is the Narrative Input Chart.

In Preschool/TK/beginning of K, the Narrative Input Chart is based on the oral tradition of storytelling and is used to support students in learning the elements of a story (characters, setting, plot, problem, solution). The teacher chooses or writes a story related to the theme and that has a repetitive phrase and a strong beginning, middle, and end. Because the story

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is not used for direct input, it does not have to be factually correct. For example, if the theme is Construction, the story could be “The Three Little Pigs”. This story would never actually happen, but it meets the element requirements for using this strategy to build a language foundation. The teacher tells the story, inviting the children to join in with the repetitive phrase. After telling the story two or three times, the teacher invites the children to join in the telling by distributing the pictures and having the children come up and put the picture on the background when they hear the words that describe the picture they are holding. When distributing the pictures, the teacher encourages the children to turn to their neighbor and talk about the picture they received. This involves all the children in the process, even though not every child is holding a picture. After a few days of whole-group storytelling, the teacher moves the story into a center and children can retell the story with each other during center time.

In Kindergarten, children are beginning to read print. The Narrative is still used for the oral storytelling tradition, but the teacher creates word cards or speech bubbles with words and “talk” from the story. After telling the story two or three times for oral language development, the teacher distributes the word cards or speech bubbles to the students. The teacher is intentional when distributing the cards, saying the word if needed or just handing the card to the student. Students turn to each other and read the words. This gives everyone practice and involves all students. The teacher retells the story and students come up and put their word or speech bubble on the appropriate picture when they hear the word they are holding.



After a few days of group story telling, the teacher moves the Narrative Input Chart into a center where children can retell the story to each other.

As children grow as readers, teachers can write phrases rather than words.

At the end of Kindergarten or at the beginning of first Grade, teachers can begin to use the Narrative Input Chart as input for new information. The basis is still a story, but the focus has expanded beyond the oral tradition of storytelling and has the added dimension of providing factual information that continues student understanding of the material.

Every strategy in Preschool GLAD® is based on these two questions: “How does this strategy support building needed skills?” and “What does this strategy look like at each stage of development?” Key to every consideration is how oracy influences literacy development in any language.

Reading and writing float on a sea of talk (Britton, 1970). Play, talk, sing, read, and write every day in your classroom. Make your classroom come alive with student talk!

References

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