Children, Language, and Literacy

Genishi, C., & Dyson, A. (2009)

**I. Play, Story, and Imagination**

A. Imaginative play as a means for learning language…and vice versa

-Vygotsky: children at highest level of development in play

-language a large part of play

-insight to what they know about the world

1. Luisa at the edges: pretend it’s a birthday

-children have a social and imaginative history with each other

-group understandings of symbolic potential of objects

-adults make decisions about when and how to interact

-not all children enter in: Luisa playing with puzzles

2. Luisa enters in: pretend its mucha raining

-she enters into imaginative play about 6 months later and can even lead the play

-lots of code-switching at this point

B. Play with and through voices: communicative flexibility

-creating social scenes through another’s perspective

-may use language appropriate to that character

-knowing what to talk about when

-tone of voice

-reasoning skills

-social roles and actions

1. Unofficial play in official space: pretend it’s a party

-transform individual tasks to communal play activities

-range of practices and customs included: allow children to enter and sustain play

-children employ strategies to be included

C. Telling stories: constructing selves and others through language

-through language acts (stories) children construct ideas about their world

-may both tell and enact a story

-diversity often not accounted for in story format

1. The social and language possibilities of group storytelling: “this is what happened to me”

-teacher asks questions and encourages elaboration

-helps children learn about themselves and other people

-establish social affiliations and discover commonalities

2. The interplay of culture, situation, and individual style in storytelling: “guess what?”

-ways of telling stories learned through observation of own culture

-individual variation in story telling

-provides rich resources for fostering language and building relationships

D. Stories enacted and told: the language of childhood

-language and play reveal children’s experiences, interests, and concerns

**II. Assessing Children’s Language and Literacy: Dilemmas in Time**

-teachers typically not fond of standardized assessments

A. Assessment in these postmodern times

-assessments may be timed or untimed

-postmodern education: curriculum squeezed around mandated tests and standards

-NCLB: standardized tests

1. The impact of federal policies: something is terribly wrong

-NCLB: changing the way teachers can think and act

2. How the news is worse: reducing children to “readers”

-very young children seen by early childcare centers as “students” and assessed as such

-later defined as “readers”

-mastering skills only a small part of communicative flexibility

-standardized testing has reduced reading success to a list of skills to be mastered

-DIBELS

-these authors think testing for prereading skills is pointless, especially for ells

-teachers required to label students

3. Teachers assessing children: diverse time lines on classroom stages

-testing often accepted without question

-teachers really know students and are inadvertently assessing constantly

-children show skills in informal situations

4. Ways of assessing: observing as the foundation

-natural ongoing assessment helps teachers plan curriculum

-teachers document observations for future reference

B. Teachers’ assessment in preschool: collaborations having their say

-SYC: instruction is play-based

-tests cannot accurately assess each individual child

-informally document milestones over time

-collaboration of other knowledgeable adults helps serve children’s individual needs

-documentation is never a straight-line story

-miscommunications between parents and teachers can cause confusion

-there are some benefits of testing: determining need for certain special services

C. Assessment in Ms. Hong’s kindergarten classroom: a story-in-an-interview

-parents often seen kindergarten as the time when children “should” begin to read, regardless of their internal clocks

-ms hongs classroom: mostly ells

-ms hong defines assessment as analyzing children’s abilities and needs

-assessed child by collecting readings and tests

-starts by looking at her notes

-looks at teaching next

-colleagues helped her along the way

-direct instruction involved teaching important words that she noticed students were missing in their stories

-this student learned best with direct instruction

-found it easier to assess and set goals for struggling students

-assessments used: notes, checklists, curriculum tests, portfolios, tape recordings

D. Assessing children’s language and literacy: it’s never simple

-nonlinear

-different for each child

1. Changing views of intervention: their relationship to theory

-children learn language on a social plane

-language exists in dialogue

-culture can dominate the way we approach a child

-direct instruction in English may be needed for children with no language delays in their home language

2. Flexible maneuvering in changing times

-must be truly child centered: this means changing the techniques along the way

Genishi, C., & Dyson, A. (2009). *Children, language, and literacy: Diverse learners in diverse times/ Celia Genishi, Anne Haas Dyson.* New York: Teachers College Press; Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, c2009.