

Unit 4 – Language and Literacy

Getting Ready for the Unit and Connecting to Experience



Focus Statement

Students think about their roles as teachers in planning curriculum related to language and literacy by connecting their own early literacy experiences to those of the children they will teach.

Getting Ready for the Unit

This unit is designed to help students explore the language and literacy domain of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1* (PCF, V1) and learn how the PCF, V1 can be a resource as they plan curriculum to support young children’s essential development in language and literacy. It is suggested that you review the key topics for this domain to help determine how they can meet the needs of your students and your course. Although language and literacy is certainly a part of children’s integrated learning across domains, this unit is not intended to provide students with opportunities to plan how to integrate the content of the language and literacy domain across the other domains. Following the approach of this instructional guide, the focus of this unit—as with the other three domain units—is to help students learn about each domain individually before addressing integration across domains. The topic of integration is addressed in Unit 7 of this instructional guide.

As described on page 9 in Chapter 1, “Introduction to the Framework,” of the *California Preschool Curriculum Framework, Volume 1*, the framework builds on the four domains in the *California Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1* (PLF, V1). The PCF, V1 is organized by the same domains, strands, and substrands that are in the PLF, V1. However, some components of the PCF, V1 are presented at the domain level while others are at the strand and substrand level.

In this unit on language and literacy, the 12 domain guiding principles and the listing of environments and materials are at the domain level while the vignettes with accompanying teachable moments and planning learning opportunities and interactions and strategies are at the foundation level within each strand and substrand. However, the PCF, V1 uses slightly different wording to describe the language and literacy foundations—skills or areas—and combines the foundations at the 48-month and 60-month levels into one skill or area. For example, the foundations “Speak clearly enough to be understood by familiar adults and children” and “Speak clearly enough to be

understood by both familiar and unfamiliar adults and children” are worded “Speak clearly” in the curriculum framework.

As mentioned previously, the PCF, V1 follows the content and structure of the PLF, V1. Therefore, it is very important that instructors are familiar with the language and literacy domain in the foundations before working with the domain in the PCF, V1.

If students need an introduction to or a refresher on the language and literacy strands, substrands, and foundations, you may want to review “Language and Literacy: Piecing Together the Language and Literacy Domain Puzzle” (Activity 2 of the Instructional Guide for the PLF, V1, Language and Literacy Domain). It is recommended that students use the PLF, V1 as a guide when they do this activity. Or you could have students read the introductory and language and literacy chapters in the PLF, V1 prior to class.

It will also be helpful if students have a basic knowledge of young children’s language development and what early literacy is. Information on these topics can be found in the PLF, V1 on pages 49-55 and pages 71-88. A very brief description of oral language is presented on pages 98-99 of the PCF, V1. There are glossaries related to the language and literacy domain on page 89 of the PLF, V1 and pages 323-325 of the PCF, V1.

It is also important for instructors and students to be familiar with the English-language development domains in both the PLF, V1 and PCF, V1 as it is strongly recommended that the English-language development and language and literacy domains from the foundations and framework be used in tandem. *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning, 2nd ed.* (PEL Resource Guide) is another important resource for both instructors and students.

Some of the active learning in the key topics involves students making observations in preschool classrooms. Therefore, it may be helpful to have a list of programs that students can visit if your college does not have a preschool class on campus. It will also be helpful to have photographs or video clips of classrooms to use during class sessions, especially if it may be difficult for students to visit programs.

Reflection activities are recommended for each key topic as a way to have students understand and begin to implement the following overarching principle from the PCF, V1: “Time for reflection and planning enhances teaching” (PCF, V1, pp. 5 and 8). If you have students keep journals, suggest that they write their responses to the suggested reflection questions in their journals. Consider providing 10-15 minutes at the end of each class session as that may help students appreciate the value of this process.

Motivator and Connection to Experience

Before You Start

As an introduction to this unit on language and literacy, it may be helpful for students to connect their own early literacy experiences to those of the children they will teach and begin to think about their roles as teachers in planning curriculum related to language and literacy.

A guided visualization is suggested to help students begin to think about teaching language and literacy to young children based on some of their own early experiences in learning to read and write. This visualization is similar to the one in the instructional guide for the language and literacy foundations: “Exploring Our Early Connections to the Language and Literacy Foundations.” As with any activity in which students are asked to reflect on past experiences, there may be students whose memories will not be positive ones. It is important to acknowledge this and allow students to participate in the discussion as much or as little as they choose. If possible, encourage students to think of what might have made the experience less negative and more supportive or positive. How much you choose to explore these possibilities depends on the student’s readiness and willingness as well as your level of experience and comfort in engaging in this kind of discussion. It is also recommended that a short break be planned after this activity so that there is an opportunity for students to deal with any strong emotions that may have surfaced.

You may wish to record the students’ responses to the last two discussion questions and save them as reference points for future work in this unit. Responses captured as a Word or PowerPoint document projected through an LCD projector or on flip chart paper instead of on a white board will facilitate their later use.

If you are having students keep a journal, you may want them to write down brief responses to the visualization questions. You could also have them write their own answers to the last two discussion questions.

Active Learning

Getting it started

Explain that you are going to ask the students to think about when and how they learned to read and write. You are going to do this by asking them some questions that will require them to reach into their memories. It may be helpful if they close their eyes during the exercise, but, of course, that is their choice. Encourage them to sit comfortably and try to minimize any distractions in the room (e.g., close the door, remind students that cell phones should be on silent).



Slides 2-3

Here are some questions that you may wish to use:

- What is your earliest memory of being exposed to books and reading? Who was part of this experience? Where and when was it?
- Do you remember anyone sharing and reading books with you? Who was this person? When did they do this? How often? What was it like? What did you do?
- What other book and reading experiences do you remember?
- How were you taught to read? Was learning to read a pleasant or challenging experience?
- What was the first word you remember learning how to write? How did you learn this?

Keeping it going

Ask for volunteers to share some of their memories. Encourage the students to be as specific as they can when describing their experiences—how old they were, the name of a book, who read to them, the way they learned to read, what they liked or didn't like about books and reading.

Putting it together

Then have a class discussion about the experiences that were shared by asking students these questions:



Slides 4-5

- What are some things that stand out for you from people's remembrances?
- Which ones resonated with you? Which ones surprised you?
- Why is it helpful to think about the ways we learned to read and write?
- What are some themes that emerged from these experiences?

What do you want to remember as you plan curriculum to support young children's development in listening, speaking, reading, and writing?

Close the activity by restating that the purpose of the exercise was to have students begin to think about the role of adults in helping children develop strong language skills and early reading and writing skills. The exercise focused on learning to read and write because most of us can't remember when and how we developed language. However, as teachers of preschool children, the students will be planning appropriate environments and experiences to promote children's language as well as literacy development.