

Discourse and Idea Development

Male: **[00:00]** You can, you can learn and assess so much about a child through just looking at that discourse. By looking at what they say, what they think, how they respond when people talk to them about ...

Female: Mm-hm.

Male: ... about their ideas. And I think that's one of the, one of the, one of the simple activities. Ri—simple activities is the wrong word. One of the simple actions that a teacher can take is to just write down what the children say.

Female: Absolutely.

Male: Right? Just write down what they say. Instead of writing down what you say as the teacher, right? Which is what, you know, we do most of the time in traditional situations, right? You write down, you know, your ideas about the math lesson, right? You write down the procedure, write down what you say.

[00:48] You know, if you just write down what the children say, and then keep that day after day. Then you have that discourse logged down in some way.

[Talking over each other]

Male: And you can just see, you can see the change, right? You know, if, if I do that—you know, I did that at the beginning of my unit on electricity and all they were—and, you know, the words they were using were, you know, batteries, wires, power and ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Male: You know, on and off, right? You know, and by the end, they were talking about electrons, atoms, voltage, force, right.

Male: Mm-hm.

Male: **[01:25]** You know, and the, the, the discourse shows, right?

Female: Yeah(?).

Male: And the, those words that the children say that I've written down shows in the most dramatic way what the learning has been.

Female: Mm-hm.

Male: Right? And you can see it individually, between one child at the beginning and one child at the end, and then you can see it collectively ...

Female: Yeah.

Male: In terms of what we talked about at the beginning and what we're talking about now.

Female: And, and some people think that we're trying to give words to kids that they don't understand, or to accelerate them.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: **[01:52]** But in fact, we're using those words because they're the right words ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: For what they, they need to describe and what they understand.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: I—I think for the SKs it's a little bit different, because the developmental piece is huge within—within that. These children are coming in, they're four years old, they're five years old. And just the idea of having 22 children all in a circle talking, taking turns, listening to each other, that's something that takes time to build. Learning what their role is within that takes a little bit of time and you see it developing over the year. And we've kind of hit a time in, in mid to late October where suddenly one of these conversations has just taken off.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: **[02:29]** Where instead of a child really directing their, their comment to me and me kind of throwing it back to the group, and it's kind of a little bit of ping pong between me and the rest of the group, I actually do. I'm—suddenly I'm not talking anymore.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: And the kids are just waiting for one person to finish because they actually want to respond to that immediately.

Male: Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

Female: And it's absolutely beautiful watching it happen, but it takes time.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: It takes time for them to learn that. And this same thing would happen in terms of the vocabulary.

Male: Yeah.

Female: So when we studied weather they were talking about raindrops and clouds and snow and sun.

[03:00] And then they started talking about evaporation. And then some of them started using the word "condensation."

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Not all of them, but some of them did. And that was so powerful, because the other kids started ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: ... hearing those terms in the proper context.

Male: Yeah, yeah.

Female: And so it made more and more sense to them. But I think there are children who don't seemingly participate in that discourse, that you can't think that because they're not talking, they're not engaging.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: And that's why we also have to find different ways of figuring out how they're engaging in that discourse.

[03:31] And, and again, providing those experiences that let us see inside that black box.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: You know, what, what is their understanding at this point?

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: And I like throwing the kids blank pieces of paper and saying ...

Male: Yeah.

Female: "Show me everything you know now about weather," or ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: "Show me everything you know now about trees," or, or whatever it happens to be that we're talking about. And even that very quiet, quiet child that isn't willing to, to venture their voice in that huge group might be picking up an enormous amount.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: **[03:58]** And if we don't stop and take the time to find out in other ways what that looks like ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: ... and not just by writing but through art, through hands-on experimentation ...

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: Through giving them something to make and do ...

Male: Yeah.

Female: We might not know that. So the discourse is enormous.

Male: Yeah.

Male: Mm-hm.

Female: But we have to find out how ...

Male: Each child, yeah.

Female: How it affects each child ...

Male: Contributes to it.

Male: Yeah.

Female: ... within that.

[END OF RECORDING – length, 04:24]