

Stenhouse Close-Ups

Literacy Attendance



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WORKSHOP GUIDE

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Literacy Attendance

Workshop Overview

1. Copy and distribute “Literacy Attendance” (pages 4-5) and “Making Literacy Attendance Work” (page 7) to participants before viewing.
2. View DVD and discuss.
3. Ask participants to try Literacy Attendance for at least two weeks in their classrooms, noting what they learn about their students’ literacy at home.

Literacy Attendance

by Debbie Miller

Literacy Attendance takes about ten minutes every day. After children have gathered their books from their cubbies, they chat with each other a bit and begin reading. When they hear the music playing (“Oh What A Beautiful Morning”) they mark their places and come up to the meeting area. We do the morning message, and then it’s time for Literacy Attendance. I always say “Good morning, _____, and the child says back, “Good morning, Mrs. Miller.” The child then has the option to share literacy learning from home that connects with something we have been learning in school.

In the beginning, before I instituted Literacy Attendance, this attendance session was a time when children could share anything they felt was important with the class. After months of hearing about play dates, new toys, grandma’s visit, and trips to the mall, I grew weary. It took so much time, and I began to wonder, “What have I gotten myself (and them) into?” And even more important, “What’s the point?”

Every now and then children would share a new book, or something they had done at home that connected to what we were learning at school. When that happened, I’d always think to myself “I wish they’d all share things like this...kids could really learn from each other.” I knew it was important for me to model the kinds of things that readers, writers, scientists and mathematicians do, but how great would it be for kids to model the kinds of things they do, too. Particularly the kinds of things they do outside of school.

That’s when Literacy Attendance was born. I explained that we would still say good morning to each other, but if they’d like to share something, it needed to connect to our learning at school in some way. I gave some examples, flash-

ing back to the kinds of things kids had shared previously. I emphasized that everyone wouldn't share every day; maybe only once a week or so. But I didn't assign kids certain days—what if they didn't really have anything to share?

I learn so much from them during this time. When I think of the gradual release of responsibility model, this really is the application phase—how do kids apply their learning in other contexts? Outside of school? And kids learn from each other. I can almost hear some of them thinking “Wow. That sounds cool. I'm going to try that, too!” Especially when they get to share it!

Sometimes there are kids who are reluctant to share. I confer with them when they first come in—maybe they took a book home, wrote me a note, etc. I encourage them to share, and offer them my support if they need it.

Are there problems with Literacy Attendance? Sometimes the same child has something to share EVERY DAY. I take children like that aside and say something like, “I love hearing you share your learning, but if you share every day, it's kind of like monopolizing the conversation. I want you to try listening to what other kids have to say. So how about this? How about if you share one day a week? Maybe keep a list of the things you want to share, and then when Friday comes, you can choose the most important one. You can choose something that you haven't shared before.”

Sometimes it seems like everyone has something to share. In those instances, I say something like, “Wow. It seems like so many of you have something to share that connects to our learning. Turn and talk in twos and threes today—that way everyone will get to share. I'll stop by and listen in.” That way, we still have time for everyone to share, and the rest of our plans for the day.

Questions for Discussion

1. What do you notice about the connections students make in the video between home and school?
2. How does Debbie respond to children who exaggerate or ramble in their stories?
3. What attendance routines do you have in place now?
4. How might you adapt Literacy Attendance to work in your classroom?

Workshop Suggestion

Ask participants to try Literacy Attendance for a week in your classroom, taking brief notes about topics/stories that are shared. In small groups, look for patterns across the days.

- What do you notice about the kinds of stories that are shared?
- Who shares the most?
- What connections do you make between what you are teaching in reading and writing workshops and what children talk about from home?
- What adaptations to Literacy Attendance have you made, or plan to make?

Making Literacy Attendance Work

- Limit the attendance session to no more than ten minutes.
- Give it a go for at least two weeks—it takes time to get in the rhythm of it.
- Use Literacy Attendance as a transition to another whole-class activity in the sharing area (i.e., a mini-lesson or discussion).
- Really listen to kids, and marvel in what they have to say. Smile. Act like it's the first time you've heard it said in exactly that way.
- Help the process along by thinking aloud about something you did, or even suggesting something kids might want to try.
- Use stories from Literacy Attendance as a springboard for informal discussions with parents about home literacy.

Also by Debbie Miller:

The Joy of Conferring

One-on-One with Young Readers

(available on VHS and DVD)



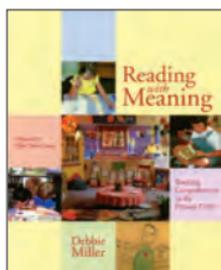
Happy Reading!

Creating a Predictable Structure for Joyful Teaching and Learning

(available on VHS)

Reading with Meaning

Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades



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