



Working with Counting Cups A Lesson for Kindergarteners and First Graders

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Children need a good deal of practice counting objects. Second language learners especially need many opportunities to deal with words such as more, less, fewer, most, least, fewest, some, in order, and equal. Working with Counting Cups can be repeated from time to time throughout the year to reinforce children's counting, ordering, and comparing skills.

I placed on the floor a number line I had made by taping sentence strips together, marking off even intervals about 2 inches apart, and writing the numbers from zero to 35. Working with four to five children at a time, I gave them cups and asked them each to count out some beans into his or her cup and then put the cup on the number line where it belonged. If a child needed help getting started, I suggested a target number of 5 or 6; for those who needed a challenge, I suggested a larger number like 32. In most instances children chose their own target numbers that were appropriate challenges for them.

We then discussed the cups. I asked the children to tell what they noticed about the cups on the number line. Then I posed questions such as:

- How many cups are on our number line?
- Which cup holds the *most* number of beans?
- Which holds the *least* number of beans?
- Which cups hold *more* than 5 beans?
- Which hold *less* than 5?
- Where should we put this cup if we put 2 *more* beans into it?
- Which cups hold *more* than 1 bean?
- Which cups hold *fewer* than 30 beans?

At other times during the year, I repeated the activity, varying it by using different counters and a different range of numbers on the number line and gearing the conversations to the needs of the children in the group. In order to collect different objects to count, I sent the following letter home to parents, filling in the missing information for each child:

Dear Family,

Today your child counted orally all the way to ____! Further, he or she counted out ____ beans accurately. This week's assignment is for your child to collect ____ objects and put them in a bag with his or her name clearly visible. We will have fun counting these objects in class and displaying them in our collections museum. Some suggestions for items to collect are bread tags, acorns, nuts, paper clips, pennies, buttons, bottle caps, game pieces, jar lids, washers, etc. Please have your child bring these items to school next week. Have fun with your collections.

Sincerely,

Ann Carlyle