

My Teaching Beliefs and Practices

Elementary Reading Instruction and Assessment

Reading instruction involves multiple components, all of equal importance. It is composed of reading accuracy, fluency and comprehension. Although each part should be given attention when teaching a child to read, depending on the child's strengths and weaknesses, age and grade level, different areas may need more focus than others. This is why reading instruction should be individualized and careful analysis to pre and post assessments should be made to guide instruction. Although these are all things I have learned in my undergraduate studies as an Elementary Education major and Language Arts minor as well as now during my studies in Literacy Education in the MAED program, they were also strongly emphasized during my four years of teaching second, third and fifth grade in a diverse title-one school near Atlanta, Georgia.

In each of my years as a student learning to be a reading teacher, as well as my four years of actual teaching experience, I have learned the importance of teaching a well rounded reading curriculum. I always begin the year with a pre assessment of my students' individual reading abilities. In the past I have always used the Fountas and Pinell Benchmark Reading Assessment System. This comprehensive system incorporates reading fluency, accuracy and comprehension in one test that gives teachers a descriptive picture of not only the child's instructional and independent reading level, but their specific reading strengths and weaknesses as well. Using this test, I am able to determine the exact type of error the child is making, for example, were they sounding the word out incorrectly, looking at the picture and making a guess, skipping the word completely or not making self corrections? This information will help guide instruction because I will be able to focus on their specific area of need (chunking words, using context clues, making self corrections, etc.).

After determining each child's running record level (A-Z), I group my students (ideally 4-6 per group) based on reading level as well as specific reading area. For example, I might have two groups of students reading at a level L, but one group really struggles with comprehension, while the other mainly needs to focus on reading fluency. After forming my groups I assess my students on their reading interest. It is important to allow students a choice in their reading to boost motivation and show them that reading can and should be an enjoyable activity. Once I figure out what genre of books my students are interested in I pick a book that is on their

reading level for everyone to read during group (each child should have their own copy). Each group would then meet with me at the guided reading table for 15-20 minutes every day. In that group the children participate in a number of reading activities that allow them to practice all areas of reading (accuracy, fluency, and comprehension), paying extra attention to each child's specific area of need. The students will do reading as well as writing activities and we also spend a lot of time discussing the book they are reading. Communication is a crucial aspect to reading and is one of the best ways to boost reading comprehension. It is important that you teach children at a young age how to discuss a book they are reading, not just the characters, setting, etc. but higher order thinking questions such as, "what would you do in that situation?" and "how did that make you feel?". The children know at the very beginning of the year not to get too "comfortable" in their group. Their reading is constantly being assessed and due to individual progress the students are always moving around and changing groups. I set individual goals for each of my students and track and monitor these goals through careful assessment along the way. Some students will fly through the groups, making significant growth throughout the year, while others will not learn as quickly. As a reading teacher I understand that you cannot expect each child to learn at the same rate. I never compare my students and their reading abilities because I know that many other factors that are out of their control contribute to their reading ability. For example, students may have a learning disability, be an English language learner or have limited resources and parental support at home. By the end of the school year I expect that all of my students have met their individualized goals, whether that is reading on or above grade level or simply mastering all their letter sounds. Each child is different and unique and as a teacher I know this carries over into their reading abilities as well.