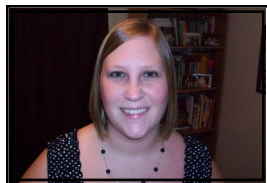


“As a teacher, I’ve made mistakes and from those mistakes I’ve learned a lot. And I’ve sometimes given the right information, and that’s made all the difference.” -Kylene Beers, 2003

My Role in Teaching Literacy: *Using the best practices in teaching reading to meet the needs of every student...*



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Quality Primary Grades Reading Program Components

- ◆ Read Alouds
- ◆ Shared, Guided, and Independent Reading
- ◆ Authentic response activities including writing
- ◆ Parental Involvement

My Education Experiences

Where I’ve Attended

- ◆ St. John’s Lutheran School-K-8th grade
- ◆ Michigan Lutheran Seminary-1996-2000
- ◆ Martin Luther College-B.S. in Elementary Education

Professional Teaching

- ◆ King of Kings Lutheran School, Maitland, Florida- Grades 3 & 4-2004-2008
- ◆ Zion Lutheran ECC, Fort Myers, Florida-Preschool-2008-Present

Future Aspirations

- ◆ Obtain Master of Education in Reading degree
- ◆ Become a Reading Specialist/Coach in the public schools
- ◆ Mentor new teachers

Best Practices in Reading Instruction: *Utilizing what I have learned in continuing education*

As an educator, there is no greater gift I can give my students than to constantly strive to improve. Continuing education past my undergraduate years has been a priority and necessity for me. The ingrained desire to help each and every student learn is the driving force behind reading educational articles, attending teachers’ conferences, and enrolling in graduate school.

Through my continuing education I have learned a substantial list of components that create an excellent reading program—one that puts my students’ needs and learning at the forefront. From tips on how to create a safe learning community in the classroom to offering

a variety of texts to grasp each students’ interests, my students grow in literacy far beyond the worksheet days I experienced as a child.

Making the invisible process of reading visible for my students is an endeavor I gladly take on every day in my classroom. Modeling comprehension strategies and thinking aloud give my students the right amount of support to guide them from guided reading to independent success with various texts.

I strive to assist my students in monitoring their own learning and give them opportunities to reflect on their reading, writing, and overall learning.

Knowing the stages of child development and utilizing diverse teaching strategies ensure that my teaching can reach students of all learning styles on their level. Paying careful attention to students’ authentic responses is a key step in my assessment process. Analyzing ongoing assessments of my students takes my instruction in a direction that makes school meaningful for students.

There is a vast number of theories and pedagogies that create a quality reading teacher’s toolkit. By continuing my education I learn the best practices for instruction that give my students the gift of literacy and learning achievement.

Differentiating Instruction: *Giving students the individualized teaching they need*

The International Reading Association (I.R.A.) states that one quality of an excellent reading teacher is the understanding that “children vary in their responses to different types of instruction, and they select the most effective combination of instructional strategies to serve the children in their classrooms” (IRA, 2010). Once I learned to intention-

ally observe and listen to my students, I discovered the sheer variety of learning styles that inhabit my classroom. Knowing that all the children in my classroom are unique brings to the light the importance of differentiating instruction (D.I.). Just as in the workplace, children have different gifts, talents, and learning styles. If a child communi-

cates more clearly using an artistic mode, my assignment for reading response incorporates creating a visual piece not just a written response. If a student learns better by listening, I purposefully think aloud comprehension strategies and read aloud materials while having students follow along. Giving students who

(Continued on top of pg. 2)

need a kinesthetic component in their instruction chance to act or pantomime a story or text can improve their comprehension substantially.

When I first began teaching I had no idea how many learning styles are present in a classroom. Within my first year of teaching I realized I needed to adjust my instruction if I was going to complete my goal of meeting the needs of all of my students. I attended the Staff Development for Educators Conference in Orlando, FL in November 2006. This conference focused solely on D.I. to meet the needs of all learners. I was able to hear experts in the field of D.I., including Donna VanderWeilde, share strategies they have implemented with great success. As most teachers do, I spent a small fortune purchasing

Differentiated Instruction Resources

- ◆ *Teach the Way They Learn* by Joanne I. Hines & Pamela Vincent
- ◆ *Different Tools for Different Learners* by Donna VanderWeide, M.S.
- ◆ *The More Ways You Teach, the More Students You Reach* by Forsten, Goodman, Grant, Hollas, and Whyte

resource materials (see inset) to aid me in planning for the learners in my classroom.

My current role as a preschool teacher affords a beautiful opportunity for me to practice meeting the needs of all students. Currently we are reading *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault. We have eleven centers in our classroom including a block building area, listening center, writing station, art area, and dramatic play center. After our reading of the story, my students incorporate the story in each center. In blocks, they build coconut trees and letters. During dramatic play, they reenact the beginning, middle and end of the story. While in the writing station, my students create their own letter books and go throughout the room gathering ideas for illustrations to match each letter sound. Here D.I. is at work in an emergent literacy envi-

ronment.

According to the I.R.A., excellent literacy teachers provide students varied opportunities to respond creatively to texts as well as experience a variety of teaching techniques. I did not want to reinvent the wheel of activities if one had already been created by a veteran excellent reading teacher. Moving forward I believe meeting and talking with colleagues about D.I. strategies and practices will be of highest importance.



In the future I hope to go back into the elementary level and take what I have learned about D.I. through conferences, resources, and the multi-center facet of a preschool classroom and implement strategies that work for each unique learner in my classroom.

Literacy & Technology: Keeping up with today's tech-savvy students

Language Arts is, in its simplest form, the study of communication. We communicate by speaking, listening, reading, writing, viewing, and visually representing. Our current level of technology accessibility necessitates a change in our classrooms. As a teacher, I can say this change can be exciting and nerve-racking at the same time.

I consider myself to be moderately tech-savvy. I text, use facebook, keep a calendar on my phone, and skype with my family in Michigan. I can access podcasts and am learning to create websites. I can create presentations and publisher documents. I work with digital photography in my spare time and probably do not go a day without turning on my laptop.

Now that is all well and good in my personal life, but if I am being honest, not much of this carries over into my classroom. I could use the excuse that I

teach preschool but I know that doesn't "cut it." The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) states my situation perfectly. "Research shows that teachers who use work processing, spreadsheets, presentation soft-

ware, and Internet browsers at home do not bring that knowledge into the classroom. Furthermore, two-thirds of all teachers report feeling under-prepared to use technology in teaching, even if they use computers to plan lessons, access model lesson plans, and create activities."

So where is my disconnect? I see the value of technology as a powerful presence in my way of communicating yet I am not preparing my students to use 21st century literacies to their fullest potential. As I reflect, I can only offer this small insight: I forget about technology as I plan my lessons. I believe it has a great deal to do with not having these technologies available when I went through school but then

again, some of the literature choices and studies of comprehension strategies were not utilized in my education either.

As I go forward in growth as a teacher, I have decided to set some "tech goals" for myself in

"As new technologies shape literacies, they bring opportunities for teachers at all levels to foster reading and writing in more diverse and participatory contexts."
-NCTE, *21st Century Literacies: A Policy Research Brief*, 2010

the area of incorporating this idea of 21st century literacies into my classrooms.

1. I will include the guide of technology standards into my planning even if there are not yet adopted by my state.
2. I will practice using technology in my lessons before I

teach them in order to be comfortable and confident during class time.

3. I will attend workshops and professional development opportunities in order to become as current as possible with the technology my students are using outside of school.
4. I will not be afraid to ask my students for help. As simple as it seems, I need to be honest and acknowledge that my students will be able to fix computer issues I cannot begin to solve!

In order to do my students justice, I need to transform and become a truly tech-savvy individual in the classroom. Incorporating webquests, e-portfolios, wikis, blogs, and podcasts will engage my students and give them base skills that will increase their achievement levels and preparedness for higher education.



Mackenzie, age 4, can navigate our class computer independently.

The Great Debate: Whole Language, Balanced, and Phonics—finding the blend that benefits all students

The swinging pendulum of the phonics and whole language debate is one I recall discussing in many undergraduate classes seven to ten years ago. My college took the stance of using a balanced approach. I was taught that balanced approach refers to using authentic, real reading materials to teach phonics and phonemic awareness skills alongside comprehension strategies.

I incorporated this in a variety of ways when I taught third and fourth grades for four years. My students routinely would search for blends, digraphs, and certain sounds after reading Magic Treehouse novels, National Geographic articles and other texts. They actually asked to do word and sound hunts in cooperative groups on a regular basis. Along with searches and hunts, I would pull small groups to reinforce phonics skills for those struggling with decoding, if I had properly assessed that difficulty for the students.

A point that has been repeated often since I began graduate studies at FGCU is that the brain only has so much energy to give toward reading. If a student is struggling immensely with decoding, then there is not much mental energy left over for making meaning. Now I believe that my assessment would be more diagnostic and ongoing in the area of phonics if I had a struggling reader at that level. I would want to make sure that decoding and the micro- and macroprocesses of reading were intact before focusing on comprehension strategies.

Since leaving my elementary level teaching, I have tutored students struggling with dyslexia. I learned very quickly that reading acquisition for these individuals is dependent upon proper phonemic awareness instruction. The ability to break a work down into sounds is nearly impossible and not something that can naturally occur for dyslexic students. Susan Barton, an expert in the field of dyslexia, states that one in five students struggles with some form of dyslexia that often goes unnoticed until fourth grade as these students become memorizers of word shape. I believe that in order to reach these students, we need to include a significant amount of phonemic awareness instruction in the early elementary years and have teachers in the middle elementary level assess for phonics acquisition.

“We must keep in mind, though, that it is success in learning to read that is our goal. For students who require special assistance in developing phonemic awareness, we should be prepared to offer the best possible support.” - IRA, 2010

For more information on dyslexia, visit: www.bartonreading.com/dys.html

In order to have all students make meaning from text, I as a teacher, need to keep a balanced approach to reading instruction. To ignore that phonemic awareness is directly linked to reading acquisition is to instantly leave some students behind. By creating print-rich environments and developing lessons with real writing and reading as the core, I can start to improve reading abilities for my students who struggle with decoding and deciphering. Currently as a preschool teacher I can begin the acquisition of phonemic awareness and alphabet skills with all my students in engaging and low-pressure activities. Early intervention and preparation is key to freeing up the mental energy down the road for meaning making and connecting to text.

Linguistically & Culturally Diverse Students: Creating a classroom that includes all backgrounds

Accessing and activating background knowledge is a key to comprehension. Having classrooms as culturally rich as we do today, our students' background knowledge is vast and ripe for harvesting. However a language barrier can be quite a hurdle to overcome before background knowledge can be enlivened and expanded. As a professional educator it is my responsibility to research and stay current with the best practices for teaching English Second Language (ESL) students.

The current stance of the International Reading Association (IRA) is that the primary or initial reading instruction should take place in the home or native language of the learner and that proficiency of the dominant language is the goal of literacy and language instruction.

Given that I am not multilingual or even bilingual, I see a great challenge before me. If I am responsible to every

learner in my classroom, I must seek out additional resources and educators to meet my ESL students' needs.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) gives the following advice:

1. Attend and participate in community meetings.
2. Document the efforts of a student in your classroom through periodic journals.
3. Form/join a group of colleagues who periodically use inquiry protocols that facilitate looking closely at the work of students.



4. Talk to parents and students to learn about their linguistic and cultural backgrounds and experiences.
5. Invite parents into the classroom to speak to all students on family life and cultural traditions, or to share an area of their

expertise (NCTE, accessed 2010).

Having students, families, and community members bring their diverse experiences into the classroom is enriching for all my students and myself included. The background knowledge that will be acquired is immeasurable and substantial.

The NCTE goes on with this encouragement, “As part of their teacher education, they will need to acknowledge the limits of their personal knowledge as well as experience the privileges afforded them by virtue of their race and class. Part of the curriculum for English educators will involve crossing personal boundaries in order to study, embrace and build understanding of ‘other’” (NCTE, 2010). I know my limitations and realize that in order to effectively instruct students' in their home or second language, I must embrace and grow in my own personal knowledge of the cultures and languages of my students. My goal is to open my classroom door in order to make use of the richly diverse heritages that make up my classroom community.

Authentic Assessment: Using an accurate view of students' abilities to direct my instruction

Assessment is the driving force behind instruction for me now, a teacher of seven years. Writing about the best practices in reading instruction, I felt compelled to write another article on the importance of assessment-driven instruction. In my mind, to begin to teach reading without the plans for ongoing, authentic assessment is comparable to hiking a mountain without boots.

I can say that I always knew the importance of careful assessment and teaching that responds to assessment findings; however, I did not always implement that philosophy in daily practice. When I began teaching, I was consumed with getting through material and keeping my students happy—a thought that still embarrasses me today.

I remember during the middle of second year

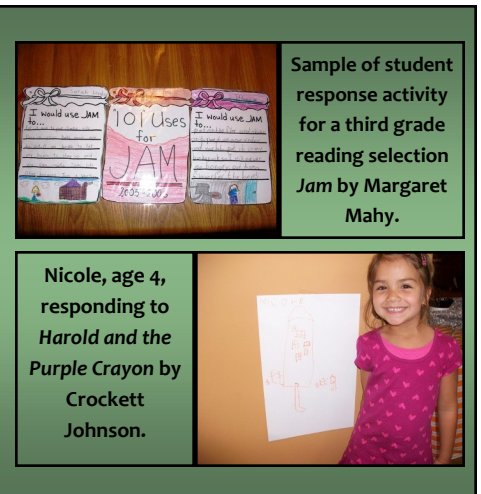
teaching that I was dumbfounded with how many of my students just were not “getting it.” I actually remembered to consult my Teaching Reading notes from my undergrad years. I came across a piece of paper with just one thought in bold type: **“To make sure every child experiences success in reading, assessment must drive instruction.”** I realized then that something major had to shift in my teaching if I could keep to my promise of reaching every student.

I began to spend more time on reviewing assessments and gathering assessment resources than on coming up with one-size-fits-all lesson plans. When I began to pay attention to my students' real responses in reading groups, taking anecdotal and running records, conferring with individuals, and taking student interest surveys, I quickly saw that my previous lessons were ones geared toward...me.



Dona, Tiana, and Billy decided to start journal writing one morning.

The most important practice in reading instruction for me is using assessment to guide, drive, and write my lesson plans. “Responsive teaching and assessment go hand in hand. Based on what we see in students' work, the evidence of their understanding, we design subsequent instruction that is tailored to what they need” (Goudvis & Harvey, 2007).



Sample of student response activity for a third grade reading selection *Jam* by Margaret Mahy.

Nicole, age 4, responding to *Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson.

Choosing Reading Materials: Finding the right supplements to ensure a quality reading program

I began writing this particular article by conducting a little experiment of my own. I “googled” choosing reading programs. The sheer amount of sites dedicated to helping me find the “best” reading program with “guaranteed success” was overwhelming but no surprising. Recalling Richard Allington's text *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*, I knew there would be many publishers pushing their product with “research” backed facts to even further their promotion.

After reading the IRA's cautions for choosing reading programs, I am boldly assuming that serious research and thought must go into finding the right supplements for my reading instruction. I believe my reading materials should be comprised of poems, novels, picture books, journals, news articles, magazines, brochures, internet articles, blogs, song lyrics, students' written work, comic strips, instructional manuals, and plays—and I'm sure there are much more. No one textbook will be the “be all, end all” or quick fix. My job is to

use my knowledge as an educator to provide the highest quality material for my students.

In Allington's book he gives a list of high-quality educational research journals. I would consult these if charged with the task of choosing a reading text series for my students:

- ◆ *Review of Educational Research*
- ◆ *American Educational Research Journal*
- ◆ *Journal of Educational Research*
- ◆ *Journal of Educational Psychology*
- ◆ *Journal of Literacy Research*
- ◆ *Reading Resource Quarterly*



Alexa, age 4, and her favorite letter puzzle.

- ◆ *Elementary School Journal*
- ◆ *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*

*Taken from Allington, R. (2006). *What really matters for struggling readers (2nd edition)*. NY: Addison Wesley Longman.

“No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively.” -IRA, 2010

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