

*My Teaching Beliefs and Practices Paper***My Incoming Beliefs and Practices**

I am a third year Kindergarten teacher at a Montessori school; so I have been responsible for teaching reading (both early concepts and more advanced) for three years. The students that come in to my classroom in the fall all have very different reading abilities. Some come in without any knowledge of letters or sounds; while other come in reading at 2nd and 3rd grade levels. What is exciting about this is that I get to teach at so many different levels and I learn more about myself as a reading teacher every day.

My definition of reading was the ability to understand that letters consist of sounds put together to form words; then put together to form sentences. Reading consists of being able to put all of these together and orally read and understand what you are reading. The components of reading include sound recognition, letter recognition, beginning sounds, ending sounds, middle sounds, sight word knowledge, blends, digraphs, accessing background knowledge, concepts of print, phonetically sounding out words, fluency, using context clues, and comprehending (or being able to retell) the text. The relationship to one another has always been a confusing part for me. I am still learning the many different aspects of teaching reading and it tends to be a little overwhelming.

My assumptions of what my students know when they begin the school year with me are varied from year to year. I assumed that my students would know what letters are and know the names of most letters; and even the sounds that some letters make. This assumption was not correct and continues to surprise me every year. By the end of the year, I expect my students to know their letter names, letter sounds, how to phonetically sound out at least 30 words, the pre

primer and primer sight word list, and be at the appropriate DRA reading level for entering 1st grade. I focused on letter name and sound recognition, sight word knowledge, along with recognizing CVC words by sounding them out phonetically (ie: dog, cat, pig), concepts of print, blends and digraphs. I taught all of these in a sequential manner. I am a Montessori teacher so everything we teach falls within a sequence. Once the student has mastered a set of letter sounds (strategically broken up into 5/6 letters per group), they move onto beginning sounds, then ending sounds, then middle sounds. Then, we move onto the next set of letters; and so on. After all the letter sounds are mastered, we begin word building. Then, we introduce blends and digraphs. Simultaneously, we work in reading groups to work on sight words and concepts of print. Everything seems to blends together sometimes; which can get confusing.

The main thing I focus on when talking to my students about reading is why it is so important. I make sure to show them that I enjoy reading and teach them what I learn from doing it. I think it is important that students are given the “whys” of reading so they have more of an interest in becoming effective readers. We read aloud a lot in the classroom and focus a lot of our projects around what we are reading. Viewing reading as fun and enjoyable is something that I value very much and try to communicate to my students every day.

My Outgoing Beliefs and Practices

Affirmations

Creating a Literacy-Rich Environment.

One of the main concepts that were affirmed for me during this course was my belief in the importance of creating an environment in which my students are given ample opportunities to experience and investigate many different kinds of texts. It was nice to see that some of the

things that I have been working on in my classroom are affirmed by some of the articles and chapters that we read. It was also nice to hear how my colleagues use similar strategies in their classrooms to attain the goal of a literacy-rich classroom environment. The first aspect that was affirmed for me was the importance of an organized and varied classroom library. This includes a variety of genres with rich vocabulary, including fiction and nonfiction text. Informational books are also something that is very important to include. I have my library very well organized in buckets. All books are labeled with stickers that correspond to the type of book they are. The book baskets have the stickers on them too; to ensure the books get back to their proper home. I also have recently added a “leveled guided reading library” that organizing books based on DRA reading level. This is so the students are reading books at their reading level; which helps to foster positive opinions and self confidence in reading.

The other aspect that was affirmed was the importance of surrounding your students with new and exciting words throughout the classroom. The first way I do this is by labeling my classroom, identifying the clock, the window, a desk, the board, a radio, the bathroom, the water fountain, etc. This not only helps the students become familiar with what the words look like; but it is a great help for your ELL students! In addition to my sight word wall used to introduce new sight words daily, we have our “Wall of Cool Words.” This wall consists of words that the kids hear or see throughout the school day and at home. We post the words up on the wall and talk about what they mean to us. Then, the students can use these new words in their writing.

The main article that affirmed my thoughts on creating a literacy rich environment was “For The Love of Words: Fostering Word Consciousness in Young Readers” by Michael Graves and Susan Watts-Taffe. This article affirmed many things that I currently do in my classroom; including the strategies I described above. It also gave me some new ideas to add to what I

already have implemented. In the article, Graves & Watts-Taffe state that “getting students interested in and excited about words is a crucial component of effective literacy programs.” “When we think of a word-rich classroom, we think of the words that students *see* in the classroom environment, *read* in a variety of texts, *hear* spoken by the teacher and other students, and ultimately *use* in their own speaking and writing.”

Increasing Student Attitudes and Motivation in Reading.

Another aspect of literacy instruction that was affirmed in the reading of this course was the importance of increasing the children’s attitude about reading; getting them excited and engaged in books and the overall purpose of reading: comprehension. This is one aspect of my teaching that I think I do very well with. There were a couple of different readings that affirmed this for me.

McKenna & Stahl devote an entire chapter in their book “Assessment for Reading Instruction” to understanding the importance of “knowing your students” including what they like and dislike, how they feel about reading in general, how their family feels about reading, what’s kinds of experiences they currently have with books, etc. They state that “our attitudes toward reading are shaped by each and every reading experience, our beliefs about what will happen when we open a book, and our beliefs about how those we hold in high regard feel about reading” (p. 204). This is something that I show to my students every day. They see how much I love reading because whenever they are reading, so am I. They see me get excited about new books and new words; which gets them excited about them too. A lot of the points that McKenna and Stahl make about knowing your students are things that I already do in my classroom. One thing I do every year is “interview” my students to find out what kinds of books they like to read

and some things that they would like to read about during the school year. I also send home an interview form for their parents to fill out.

The Motivation PowerPoint that we viewed during Module 4 along with the article by Turner & Paris entitled “How Literacy Tasks Influence Children’s Motivation for Literacy” also helped to affirmed my thoughts on the importance of motivating your students to want to read by knowing about them and what interests them. They also discuss common statistics that help to understand students such as boys versus girls in the aspect of reading motivation. In Turner & Paris’ article, they state that “the most reliable indicator of motivation for literacy learning is not the type of reading program that districts follow, but the actual daily task that teachers provide in their classrooms.” That is such an accurate and powerful statement! Their article also affirmed the importance of using “open tasks” in the classroom because they provide challenge, choice, student control over their own learning, opportunities for collaboration among students, and encouragement of constructing meaning through reading and writing. One way I do this is by making time to work together in pairs or groups and making sure to have materials consistently out that the students can use for projects or activities. We also participate in Reading Buddies with a 1st grade class. This is something that the students absolutely love to participate in! Hearing the 1st graders read to them not only helps them become more interested in certain topics and the overall fun of reading, but it also helps the 1st graders become more confident readers.

I have a classroom library with a wide variety of genres and interest areas that is organized using stickers and book baskets. This is one of the first things that we go over at the beginning of the school year. Every Friday the students get to “shop” for books for the following week and the organization of the library comes in handy. I also have a guided reading library that is leveled so

that students may chose books of their interest that is also at their own particular independent reading level.

Sight Word Knowledge.

Another affirmation I had during this course pertained to the importance of teaching sight word knowledge in my classroom. A sight word is any word that can be pronounced automatically, without analyzing it or sounding it out. A sight word list is different than a high-frequency word list; but I use both in my classroom. First, we have a high-frequency word wall that lists the Dolch words for the Pre-Primer and Kindergarten levels. We begin in October and introduce 1-2 words a day. We practice reciting them, playing games with each of the words, using them in sentences, and encouraging the students to use the daily words in their writing workshop. We also have a sight word wall that includes familiar words to them including their first and last names and words such as can, but, of, if, etc.

There are a couple of different sight word/high-frequency word lists that you can use for sight word instruction in your classroom. The two main ones are Dolch and Fry. Our school uses the Dolch Sight Word List. First, you have to chose the list that you are going to use, then assess the students on their word knowledge. We test the students at the beginning of the year to see what their word knowledge is upon entry of Kindergarten. Most have a very limited knowledge of these words as most are still learning letter names and sounds.

One of the aspects affirmed in the reading was in Chapter 5 of McKenna and Stahl's "Assessment for Reading Instruction." They talk about using group assessments to help with the assessment of sight word knowledge of your students. This is something that we do in my classroom. In this technique, the children are instructed to circle the word that is spoken by the

teacher. This saves a lot of time but can also lower accuracy, which is why we assess at least three times during the school year to note progress or lack there of.

Another aspect that was affirmed by McKenna and Stahl was the notion that if a student takes more than a second to say the word correctly or sounds it out, it cannot be considered mastery of the word. This has been a big of an argument among the teachers at my school so it is nice to be able to have something to show them that backs up what I have previously learned about the assessment of sight words.

Questions

Fluency in Reading.

One aspect of my literacy instruction that was called into question throughout this course was my instruction and assessment of reading fluency with my students. As a Kindergarten teacher, prior to this course, I would think that fluency really isn't a part of what we should be teaching because the students are such new readers. I not only learned that some of the things I currently do IS considered fluency instruction, I learned a lot more about what I need to be doing in my classroom to support this very important aspect of reading. I definitely wonder whether or not my focus in this area is as strong as it could be.

In speaking with my Talkin' Shop group, I was able to hear about different fluency assessments, such as DIBELS. I had heard the name before; but was not familiar with it at all. In my school, the only fluency assessment we use is through our DRA reading program, and the

fluency aspect of it doesn't come until you reach a level 20 book. Only a few of my students reach this level and it typically isn't until the end of the school year.

In Worthy & Broaddus' article "Fluency beyond the primary grades: From group performance to silent, independent reading," they state that "fluency is integral to comprehension and is a critical component of successful reading." This article gave me so many wonderful ideas to use to help the reading fluency of my students including modeling fluency through read alouds, unrehearsed oral reading, repeated reading, independent silent reading, shared reading, poetry, speeches, books on audiotape, mini-lessons on reading with expression, Readers' theatre, buddy reading, and series books.

In Chapter 6 of "Assessment for Reading Instruction," McKenna and Stahl also gave me so insight into the importance of fluency instruction. I learned that fluency has three components including accuracy (95%), automacity (ability to read words without conscious effort), and prosody (inflection). This chapter also provided me with some techniques to use in my classroom such as echo reading, tape reading, partner reading, choral reading, plays, oral recitation, paired reading, and closed-captioned television. There are so many ways to increase reading fluency and it definitely made me think about what I plan to change for this upcoming school year. This chapter also gave me some great fluency assessment tools to look into using this year.

Vocabulary Instruction.

I thought a lot about adding this literacy component as a question when "creating a literacy rich environment in the classroom" was an affirmation. I decided that although the concept of providing the students with a word rich environment is something that I do well, there were many aspects of my vocabulary instruction practices that were also called into question

through the reading and conversation with other classmates. Is it really enough to just have the words surrounding the students? Through the readings I have concluded that you must also provide the students with ways in which to use this vocabulary in their everyday lives.

In Graves & Watts-Taffe's article, "For the Love of Words: Fostering Consciousness in Young Readers," they state that "a comprehensive vocabulary program contains several elements, including frequent and varied language experiences, teaching individual words, and teaching word learning strategies, as well as fostering word consciousness" (Graves & Watts-Taffe, p. 186). It's not enough to just post sight words and words up on a word wall; you need to bring the words to life in the classroom. I think I am certainly well on my way with our "wall of cool words" but we certainly have a ways to go.

I really like the idea of having a special place in the classroom that has dictionaries, thesauri, riddle books, and wordplay books. The article discusses that this can also help to lay a strong foundation for the development of word consciousness in your classroom. The article also gives suggestion like using repeated read-alouds and focusing on the discussion of new words. They suggest reading the same book three or four times in a week to give the children the ability to become familiar with the text and its context. I really like their suggestion on how to discuss new words. They say to first explain the meaning of the new word, then extend the meaning by providing examples of the words, and finally engaging the students with the word and help them to make personal connections with it.

The article also had some great suggestions of wordplay games and activities to use in the classroom. I already use some already but was introduced to new ones such as Applause,

Applause, word association activities, idea completion, using idioms and puns, and creating and reading word play books as a class.

The final aspect that stood out from this article was fostering word consciousness and vocabulary through writing. This is something that I know I need to focus more on this year. I want to take the words that we come up with and post on our word walls and use them as much as possible in our writing. I would like to use these when I model journal writing. They gave a great step by step week unit on how to introduce and work with 10 new vocabulary words. Each day included a different activity using the words for the week. The article states that the teachers that used this unit approach noted that students really enjoyed the unit and “made deliberate efforts to incorporate the taught words and other interesting words in other writing they did during the year” (Graves & Watts-Taffe, p. 190).

The other article that inspired me was “The Latin-Greek Connection: Building Vocabulary Through Morphological Study” by Rasinski et al. I never really thought about teaching Latin root words to my kindergarten students but after reading this article, I definitely think it is a good idea and one that I would like to start in my classroom. The article states that “knowledge of Latin and Greek roots increases our ability to understand English words” and it “provides students with the opportunity to maximize their word learning” (Rasinski et al, p. 135).

Small Group Instruction (Inquiry Circles).

I currently work at a Montessori school so small group instruction is part of my everyday teaching. However, after reading the chapters in Harvey & Daniels “Comprehension & Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action” whether I use small group instruction to the best of my ability is something that was called into question.

Harvey and Daniels discuss the many benefits of small group instruction which include being lifelike, generating energy for challenging work, working smarter together, supporting diversity among our students, engaging the students interactively together, differentiating instruction, preparing them for the workforce, and enhancing student achievement. They then go into the importance of collaboration and comprehension and how they both go hand in hand. Harvey and Daniels state that “the best way to understand the world we live in is to be alert to it – to read about it, to listen, to view, and then talk about it” (Harvey & Daniels, p. 12).

The idea of inquiry circles was a bit overwhelming for me at first. My main concern was how to fit this kind of instruction into a school year that is already packed with so many things that need to be taught. Harvey and Daniels really helped to provide ways in which this can be done.

I think it would be best to first begin with mini-inquiries with my students; to get them used to the concept and myself accustomed to staying organized. Mini inquiries are short term small group research projects that help us to search for and find information quickly. These inquiries would start from conversations that take place during the school day mainly including questions, opinions, agreements, disagreements, and curiosity. Harvey and Daniels call these mini inquiries “Quick Finds” because they involve quick researching like looking it up on Google in order to find the answers. Harvey and Daniels state that “starting with small mini-inquiry projects...gives us the opportunity to model important research strategies and gives kids a chance to dip their tow in the inquiry waters” (Harvey & Daniels, p. 164).

After getting the feel for mini-inquiries, implementing curricular inquiries into the classroom seems like something that would be extremely beneficial for the students and easiest

to introduce into our current curriculum. What really interested me about this type of inquiry is that it focuses on the material you are already teaching within your curriculum; whether it be science, social studies, or reading and writing. Harvey and Daniels discuss that appropriate small group inquiries consist of including student questions based on curriculum already being introduced; creating projects for the students based on content within your current curriculum. They devote an entire chapter to example of how only teachers have done this; really inspiring me to want to include this in my instruction in the near future.

My Plan of Action

Affirmations

Creating a Literacy-Rich Environment.

My plan is to continue to strive to provide as much of a literacy-rich environment for my students as possible. I want to continue to add to my library of books, creating an extensive variety of books that focus on the interests of my students. One of the things that I would like to do is properly level my classroom library. This is a goal I have for this upcoming school year. I have my guided reading library leveled, but the classroom library is not. I know that this will take quite some time but I would like to find a book leveling website to help me organize my books by level as well as genre. I think that once this is completed, the students will be much more successful at finding their “just right” books for their individual book boxes. I would also like to work with my Kindergarten House to do this collectively. I think it would benefit all of us; and allow us to work together to provide an ample amount of literature resources to our students.

As for surrounding my students with new and exciting words, I would like to implement a “word jar” in our classroom where students can write down new words they hear someone say in school or at home and bring them in to put in our jar. Each day during dismissal, I would like to pull a word or two from the jar, discuss it with the students, make connections with the students by coming up with sentences using the words, and finally adding them to our “Wall of Cool Words.” I think this would be a good way to engage the students in learning new words and encourage them to find as many as they can!

Increasing Student Attitudes and Motivation in Reading.

One major part of my plan for this upcoming school year is to use the Garfield Elementary Reading Attitude Survey on pages 218-222 in McKenna & Stahl’s “Assessment for Reading Instruction.” Even though I already “interview” my students, I think that this survey hits on certain questions that are very important to know about your students before beginning any kind of reading instruction. I think that it is very all encompassing and really helps you get a feel for your students. Because I am teaching Kindergarten, I may need to do this orally with them, or send it home as something to do with their parents. I would also like to show this to my colleagues as part of our Reading professional development this year.

This school year, I would also like to begin an after school “book club.” This would be something that all students could participate in (we are only a K-2 school so this would be realistic). I am still coming up with the specifics but would love to meet once a week to read and discuss popular picture books and possible even chapter books. We could even do author studies in our book club; this is already something I do in my classroom throughout the year. I’d like to

also have certain night where parents can come in and participate in the book club. I think that would really help to connect the excitement of reading to home as well.

During school I would like to invite more parent and guest readers into the classroom. I think this would be exciting for the kids and it would show them that other adults enjoy reading; which would definitely aid in helping the students become more excited about reading.

Sight Word Knowledge.

I would like to try using an alternate sight word/high-frequency word list for this upcoming school year. I have heard so many great things about the Fry Sight Word Inventory and would like to try it with my Kindergarten students this year. I still want to use the words within the Dolch list, but incorporate Fry into my assessment and instruction of sight words. McKenna & Stahl (pgs. 116-122) provide the complete sight word inventory lists along with directions for administration and scoring and interpretation of the sight word inventory. I think that this will help make my instruction of sight words even more comprehensive and will give me the opportunity to differentiate my instruction with my students. In the past, some students have surpassed the Dolch sight word lists and I wasn't sure where to go from there. Fry gives me additional words to introduce and practice with my students.

Another part of my plan is to use the word walls in my classroom a bit more throughout the course of the school year. In Graves & Watts-Taffe's article, "For the Love of Words: fostering Word Consciousness in young Readers," they suggest an activity called "walking the wall" in which two students walk along the word walls quizzing each other on the words and seeing if they can use them in sentences. What a creative way to use the word wall! I would love

to share this with my colleagues as well; possibly during a professional development day at the beginning of the school year.

I also plan to take my experience with Fry back to my colleagues and encourage them to try it with their students. A lot of my colleagues are hesitant to try new things because they have been doing things the same way for so many years. I would like us all to be giving our students equal opportunity to learn and recognize high-frequency and sight words.

Questions

Reading Fluency.

My plan for this upcoming school year is to include as many of these new fluency strategies into my instruction as possible. One thing I really want to focus on is modeling through my read alouds. Worthy & Broaddus talk a lot about the benefits of reading aloud to the students. You are modeling to the students the proper ways to read including inflection, expression and enthusiasm. In addition, they get to see how excited you are about reading; which will most likely get them excited about it too. Taking the time to “talk” about what we are reading and HOW we are reading is something I would really like to do more of as a whole class.

I would also like to use poetry to help with fluency. I have always wanted to use poetry in my classroom but never really knew where to start. As Worthy & Broaddus suggested, I’d like to choose a poem to read each week and write it on our flip chart. Then, each morning during morning meeting, we could recite the poem together. It doesn’t have to be something that take a lot of time; but could be very beneficial to helping my students with their reading fluency.

I really was interested in the suggestion of using reader's theatre in the classroom and would like to try it this school year. I have been researching some popular readers' theatres and have noticed that a lot of them are a bit difficult for my students. I would like to keep looking for ones that would be easier for my students; and would also like to try and write one together with my class. Worthy & Broaddus state that "practicing to perform [gives] students a chance to refine their oral reading and emphasize the importance of phrasing and expression" (Worthy & Broaddus, p. 339).

Another goal of mine is to set up a listening center in my classroom. Again, this is something that I have wanted to do for a while but haven't had the ability to until now. I just ordered a listening center and popular picture books on tape. I made sure to choose books that I also have text copies of. Worthy & Broaddus state it helps students gain access to a variety of books for independent listening. "Audiotaped books encourage less able readers to use the meaning of language to help decode, increase fluency, and comprehend" (Worthy & Broaddus, p. 338). I think these would be great for my class of Kindergarten who are mostly emerging readers. It could help with fluency AND comprehension.

Vocabulary Instruction.

My overall plan for vocabulary instruction this school year is to focus on moving beyond simply adding words to our word walls and writing them down. I want to incorporate much more wordplay, games, activities, projects, class books, etc into the classroom. I definitely plan on setting up a literacy corner with dictionaries (both children's and adult), thesauri, riddle and puzzle books (I Spy books were a great suggestion). I would like to use this area in a variety of

different ways throughout the school year. I think allowing the students to look certain words up for themselves would be a great way to encourage independence in reading.

I plan to include repeated reading into my instruction as well. I have never really thought of rereading a book three or four times in a week; nor did I understand the benefits of it. I really want to spend more time during my read alouds to discuss new words and help the students to make connections with the words so when they see it in text, they can recognize it and know what it means. I'd like to come up with a signal system for the students to let me know that they do not understand a particular word. Then, we can stop and talk about the word together and add it to our word wall.

I also would like to implement more games into my vocabulary instruction. I really like "Applause, Applause" in which students clap to vote whether they would like to be described as a certain word (like helpful or angry). I'd like to also implement word association activities in which the students pair words together (like crayon and color). Idea completion is another activity that I plan on doing with my students. In this activity, students have to use their own words to explain the meaning of new words (I could tell the girl was anxious because...). This would be something that probably would be introduced later on in the year but would really help the students learn to make connections between words they know and don't know.

I also plan to add the instruction of Latin and Greek word roots into my curriculum. We already spend a lot of time on word families so I think that it would transition very well together. I plan to start with one or two roots per week (including prefixes and suffixes) and practice them daily. I also plan to use the word spoke chart suggestion from Rasinski et al's article mentioned above. Even though it suggests it for older students, it could be easily adapted to Kindergarten.

I'd love to hang our word spoke charts throughout the classroom to refer back to throughout the school year.

Small Group Instruction (Inquiry Circles).

Of all the action plans I have for my literacy instruction, this aspect will probably take the longest to develop in my classroom; especially due to the young age of my students. I plan to start the implementation process this upcoming school year by incorporating mini-inquiries into the curriculum weekly. I know that I will need to start small and make sure to model every step of the way so that my students understand the process. Then, I can use the "Gradual Release of Responsibility" technique which will help them to be more independent in their inquiries. Being that they are Kindergarteners, I am prepared to play a major role in the inquiry process; relying a lot on whole group investigations and inquiries. My hope is that introducing this concept to them in Kindergarten will prepare them for using this approach later on in their educational career.

With that being said, I have contacted my principal and asked to sit down with her to talk to her about using this type of curriculum school wide. I would like to come up with a professional development seminar together that could explain the process of implementing this into our school wide curriculum. I am aware that this will be a multi-step process but think that it will inevitably benefit our students in a variety of ways; which I mentioned above.

I think once I become familiar with mini and curricular inquiries, it would be full to do an in depth inquiry that last throughout the entire year. This is definitely more of a long term goal but one I am excited about getting to.