

My Teaching Beliefs and Practices Paper

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Part 1 – My Incoming Beliefs and Practices

My Incoming Beliefs

I believe that all students can read with comprehension. I believe it is my job to explicitly teach, model, reinforce, coach and monitor strategies that my students can use to read with comprehension. When my students come to me in third grade, most of the class can read with enough fluency and accuracy that reading isn't laborious and is enjoyable. I believe that students need to read with fluency and accuracy in order to comprehend, which is the reason we read. When I teach I try to make it meaningful for my students. Whenever I ask them to do something I reflect on what we do as adults. If it's not something we do as adults, then I'm more critical of the activity because I don't want to waste my students' reading time. For example, I have my students take notes when they're reading nonfiction, but I first show them that I also take notes when I'm reading nonfiction and I'm going to be talking to my peers about it. I want my students to enjoy reading so that they read a lot both at school and at home.

Because I value reading for pleasure, I don't believe in having my students complete a lot of worksheets that they don't enjoy. I do informally assess my students through conferences and assessments so that I can monitor their progress and hold them accountable for their reading, but I struggle in how I can show parents how their child is doing in reading when their child isn't producing a lot of tangible, gradable work.

My own opinion is that I'm doing what I believe in, and that my students are reading and growing as readers. I am part of my district's leadership team for ELA, and we've been working on how the report card should report students' reading progress.

My Incoming Practices

I've been teaching reading in an elementary setting for two years, one year of 4th grade and one year of 3rd grade. I've taught reading using the Reading Workshop model, which I am a huge supporter of. As a Reading Workshop teacher I've hosted teacher and administrator labs for our district and neighboring districts. I begin the year by building lifelong, general, reading habits. I communicate with my students a great deal about my personal reading habits so that they understand that reading isn't something they're just going to be doing at school, as kids. I tell them about how I select just right books, keep a list of books I want to read, talk to my friends about what I'm reading, recommend books to my friends and other various read-for-pleasure things. I do this at the beginning of the year to rally the class for an enjoyable reading year. I round out the beginning of the year by teaching students strategies for self-monitoring and what to do if things don't make sense. This builds a foundation for students so that they will recognize when something doesn't make sense and it gives them a few ideas for what to do if they find that something doesn't make sense besides giving up on the book.

The remainder of the year is organized into genre studies. Within each genre that we focus on I teach skills that help students with fluency and comprehension and all the strategies that help them master those skills. A lot of the skills are modeled

within each genre that we study so that students are reminded of those skills multiple times throughout the year. For example the strategy that readers sometimes need to read ahead if they come across something that doesn't make sense comes up within various genres. The most important part of Reading Workshop, in my opinion, is the conference. I am able to achieve so much within a 6-minute conference. I get to know my student as a reader through a brief interview/assessment, I'm able to affirm something about their reading through a compliment and I'm able to teach, model and monitor a strategy that the student is ready for using the book they're reading and interested in. I feel a strength of Reading Workshop is that students learn to love reading. They feel successful reading because they're doing their learning with books that are at their just right level and are interesting to them. I've found this is especially true with struggling readers and readers who have IEPs. Reading always came naturally to me, so it was hard for me to transition to becoming a teacher of reading because I didn't recognize the strategies I used naturally to read, but I've noticed that when I explicitly teach a struggling reader a strategy that they can use right away in a book that they enjoy they build confidence in themselves which they can take with them for a lifetime.

Part 2 – My Outgoing Beliefs and Practices

Affirmations

I'm benefiting my students when I confer with them during independent reading time.

I'm able to accomplish so much when I meet with each student individually or in small groups. In module 1 we read about effective reading instruction and what makes an effective teacher of reading. Through our discussion posts I was able to glean what my classmates thought was critical to include in an effective reading program. Many of the things that were deemed important are things I am able to do through conferring. Sarah wrote in her discussion post "I think that meeting with the struggling readers everyday is very important. They are the readers that need to have that one on one instruction as often as possible." Through conferring I'm able to have one-on-one time and I'm able to choose who I meet with during that time. Another aspect my classmates found important for effective teaching of reading was assessment. I am able to assess frequently and informally. "Effective teachers of reading expend considerable effort in developing and using ongoing assessment. It is how teachers incorporate this information into their instruction that is vital to the students' reading success." (Blair, Rupley, Nichols, 2001, p. 434) Through conversation and informal assessment I get to know each student very well. I get to know their interests and what they're particularly skilled at, not just in reading.

I'm able to take this information to inform my instruction for that child. I'm then able to differentiate my instruction for that child through conferring by teaching and coaching them strategies that they need. Kamille wrote in her discussion post that the "idea of teachers being 'facilitators on kids' learning' stuck out to me (Harvey & Daniels, 2009, p. 7). Harvey and Daniels explain that these teachers 'Instead of telling, they are showing, modeling, coaching, mentoring, and facilitating' (p. 6)." Through

conferring I feel like I get to coach my students. Whenever I read about reading workshop and conferring I am reminded of coaches and in particular I think about my yoga instructor. She gets us going on a specific series of poses that we are to continue on our own and then she comes around to individuals to position them correctly or to challenge someone else with a harder version of a pose. She doesn't group students into ability groups because where one student might need more of a challenge when it comes to flexibility they might need some intervention, so to speak, when it comes to strength poses. Through conferring I'm able to teach each individual reader to challenge their strengths and encourage them through struggles.

My students are motivated and engaged with reading because I foster a love of reading in my classroom.

In Module 4 we had a discussion about motivation and engagement in reading instruction. I shared, "When I'm planning my reading instruction I consider the things I and other adults do when we read. I think about who I read with, what I read, where I read, when I read, why I read and how I read; and I have my students do the same. At this point I'm sure this sounds very self-involved, but isn't your best teaching the kind you feel with your heart? The kind of teaching you live and breathe?" After sharing a bit about what I do to motivate my students to be readers I received a few responses from my classmates. They were so supportive and kind! Marc wrote, "I think the fact that you haven't had as student who has resisted reading for the entire year is something you should be proud of. Instead of being lucky or only having good students, it sounds as if you have devised a system/program/style of teaching which works and would

probably be useful to other teachers as well who have trouble getting their students to appreciate reading.” Sometimes I do think that I’m lucky with awesome students, and I especially feel this way during reading workshop. On occasion, when reading workshop is going really well, I take a thirty-second break from my conferring marathon during independent reading to shoot my husband a one-word email about my students, “geniuses!” I love the feeling when it seems like my students really ‘get’ reading and why it’s important. I feel affirmed in the routines and reading rituals I’ve incorporated into my classroom community that make my students love reading. I consider these things a part of my classroom community building, and I had just happened to make them literacy-based.

I get a clear picture of my students as readers when I do frequent, varied, formative assessments.

I assess my students several times in several different ways to ensure that I know what they can do, what they can do with assistance, and what they need heavy support with. The only assessments my district requires me to give are Developmental Reading Assessments, which we have to give 2-4 times a year. My school also gives an AIMSWEB fluency screening to all students 3 times a year. I have issues with the DRA, especially in the upper elementary levels, so I do other assessments more frequently, which guide my instruction. I use the Teachers College Fiction Reading Level Assessments between giving the DRAs to make sure my students are choosing books that are at their level. I also do weekly fluency assessments. My conferences with my students serve as another informal measure of their reading, which I can use to inform my instruction.

The Rubin article that we read in Module 2 affirmed to me that my multiple reading assessments are helping my instruction. “Taken together, data from a variety of assessments can help advise a teacher about the text difficulty that students can handle, in addition to pinpointing their specific strengths and weaknesses in reading.” (Rubin, 2011) When I do a reading assessment with a student I take that data, with data from other recent assessments and my observations to help form a goal for that student. I let the student know what range of levels they should be choosing books from and I let them know their strengths. We then form a goal together based on their reading assessments. Sometimes the goal is simple, like to try different genres once and a while or the goal is to read more accurately or more quickly. The student records this goal in their reading binder and we refer to it every few conferences so that we can see how they are progressing on their goal. I think it’s good to keep the child informed about their reading progress so that they aren’t wondering if they’re ‘good’ at reading or not. We’re able to celebrate small successes when the child knows what goal I have for them as a reader and what they can do to reach that goal.

I help my students apply reading strategies by implementing the Gradual Release of Responsibility model.

During my minilessons I often use the Gradual Release of Responsibility model of instruction. I first tell my students what the teaching point is, then I tell them what to look for before I model the strategy, then I model it while thinking aloud, then we do it together then they do it with a partner with me listening in. The students then are released to apply the strategy to their own reading. An example of this is when I taught

a lesson about reading with expression by using the punctuation at the end of the sentence. I made a copy of a page of our read aloud book and had put it in each student's book bin. I read a few sentences aloud and used the exclamation points at the end of the sentences to read with excitement. I had the class and I choral read that same part, so that they practiced the strategy with me. I then had students practice the next few sentences aloud with a partner. The students then were to practice reading this way during their independent reading time.

In module 3 we read about the Gradual Release of Responsibility from Harvey and Daniels (2009) and we talked about it in our live group chat on Facebook. We related our reading to the video of the book clubs in Ms. Namba's classroom. Sherrie had mentioned that she watched the video before reading and felt that the structure of Ms. Namba's book clubs couldn't be achieved with her kindergarteners because of their age but then she thought that she might be able to apply the Gradual Release of Responsibility to teaching how to participate in book clubs. Harvey and Daniels suggest that the modeling phase be "short and sweet" so that the students are engaged in practice as soon as possible. They further suggest that the guided practice phase should be where most of our instructional time should take place so that the kids are actively doing work for a longer period of time. I feel like I'm conscious of this when I'm teaching reading and I strive to include more guided practice. I also incorporate the Gradual Release of Responsibility into other subject areas and I feel it is a successful strategy across the curriculum.

Buddy reading helps my students in practicing oral reading fluency and expression.

My third grade students are 'book buddies' with a kindergarten class. We meet with our book buddies every week. Every other week we go to the kindergarteners room to help the kinder buddies with their reading and then the other weeks the kindergartners come to our room and the third graders read picture books to the kindergarteners. When the kindergarten buddies come to us I have my students choose books that they think their buddy will enjoy. They then spend some time practicing reading that book aloud during a portion of their independent reading time during reading workshop. The struggling readers in my class are able to practice more if necessary so that they are familiar with trickier words, have an understanding of the characters' personalities and orient themselves with other text cues for expression.

In Module 5 we read the Worthy & Broaddus article about fluency instruction. The 'buddy reading' section stuck out to me as being part of my fluency instruction. They write that "reading to a younger child opens up more possibilities for choice in literature, allowing older learners to read easy books designed for young children without losing face. This is especially important time for struggling readers in the upper elementary grades, who have an opportunity to read a practiced text with a supportive audience and to experience the role of expert in helping a younger buddy" (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001, p. 340). One of my struggling readers, 'Peter', was visibly more confident in reading when he was with his book buddy. His book buddy also thought he was the coolest third grader ever. One time I was reading a picture book to all of the book buddies. The kindergartners were on the carpet and the third graders were at their desks. I gave my students the option of sitting by their book buddy if they wanted

to. Peter's book buddy heard my instruction to the third graders and *yelled "Pee-tah! Come sit by me!"* Peter blushed, grinned widely, and sat by his buddy. His mom wrote to me how excited Peter was to go to school on Wednesdays because his book buddy made him feel like a better reader. Less successful or reluctant readers have the chance to practice choosing appropriate texts for their audience, reading in a way that is appropriate to the genre of text, and they can feel like a competent member of our reading community (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001). My third graders don't have to worry about decoding hard words and reading accurately when they're reading shorter, lower level books to the kindergarten book buddies. They are able to focus solely on reading with fluency, expression because they understand easily what the book is about. They can make oral reading choices like character voices or emphasis of particular words when they easily comprehend the text. I think this practice, though a small part of our week is benefitting my students in practicing fluency and expression in an authentic way.

Questions

How can my fluency instruction and assessment be more explicit and meaningful?

I currently teach fluency within my reading workshop time and read aloud time. I teach minilessons about reading fluently and with expression near the beginning of the year. Within the minilesson, of course, I teach the skill and model it. Then the students try it with me, they do it with a partner with my coaching and then they are released to apply it to their own reading. From there I confer with students to reinforce the skill taught and to compliment the skills they are just now approximating. Throughout the

year I'll sprinkle in some fluency minilessons again when needed. For example I noticed a group of students who were reading as fast as they could without any phrasing or expression I reminded students of what good fluency looks like. Later in the year during humorous book clubs I teach more minilessons about fluency and expression. I like using humorous books for that because a lot of times students will miss the humor if they're not reading with expression, especially with dialog. Students learn that when they read expressively they gain comprehension. They also learn that they need comprehension in order to read with expression, or else they won't know what type of voice to give each character and other clues for expression choices. After typing this, I actually feel pretty good about my fluency instruction, however I know in the moment I don't feel fulfilled about how I'm teaching fluency. My school also has students do a lot of fluency drills through weekly cold and hot reads of a leveled passage and quarterly fluency reads with the AIMSWEB progress monitoring system.

I think this is where a lot of my uneasiness comes from. Each week the students read a leveled passage as a timed cold read for a minute. They are given the passage to practice at home and then they read it again aloud on Friday for a minute. The expectation is that they increase in oral reading speed. They're also expected to gain about a word each week in their cold reads. I think this is good practice for the students who are practicing at home and are working on their oral reading expression, however, I don't really have any control over that time at home. The Worthy and Broaddus article in Module 5 taught me "Repeated reading with attention to text comprehension has been shown to be effective in experimental studies, as determined by a meta-analysis

conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000).” (p.336) Currently, my fluency assessment is missing the attention to text comprehension piece. Comprehension and fluency are clearly related, however I’ve been separating them in my current practice. In the Allington video, he suggested that a good fluency program within strong literacy instruction should have appropriate texts available, opportunities to practice reading and non-interruptive reading time. I notice that I interrupt struggling readers more than strong readers. I give feedback to strong readers after they have read, and I give verbal cues to the struggling readers thinking it was encouragement. Allington also stated that conferences about fluency should be specific to that child and the particular text they are currently reading. I do informally assess students on the texts they’re reading and give them feedback on that, but I definitely could make this a more substantial part of my conferring time with students who struggle with fluency.

How can I make my read aloud time more meaningful for my students?

I currently read aloud to my students in two different settings. In my minilessons for reading workshop I usually have a book that we read parts of and I model strategies with it during the minilesson. The other time I read aloud consistently is for about 15-20 minutes right after lunch. This is the time that I don’t think I’m really using to its potential. I currently just read for the entire time, modeling good fluency and expression. Occasionally we’ll talk about the book a bit afterward, but nothing formal or with any purposeful intention. My district calls ‘read aloud with accountable talk’ a part of our literacy instruction, but I’m sure that I don’t have accountable talk in my instruction currently.

Throughout this course, reading aloud has been mentioned in various contexts. Teachers can model quality fluency through read aloud; the Allington showed us that. Some students, especially ELLs don't hear any quality examples of fluent oral reading until they come to school. If the teacher doesn't read aloud to them, then they might not hear any fluent, accurate oral reading. However, hearing a book read aloud can't be the only extent that read aloud time reaches. The NCEE recommends that teachers should "guide students through focused, high-quality discussion on the meaning of text." (National Reading Panel, 2010, p.23) Read aloud time needs to have some teacher direction and student work integrated within. Teachers can think aloud during some parts to model how readers comprehend. Students can have class discussions after reading to build ideas off of one another and to practice some comprehension strategies taught in earlier lessons. I need to include more accountable talk in my read aloud time.

How can I directly teach vocabulary?

As I read the National Reading Panel's report on teaching children to read, I found myself reflecting on my own teaching of each of the important areas of reading instruction. The Vocabulary Instruction section of the text and video struck me the most because I realized that I kind of neglect that area of comprehension in my instruction. I probably do most of my vocabulary instruction within my conferences with individuals and small groups of students. I teach minilessons to the whole class about what to do if you come across an unfamiliar word while reading, but not really anything beyond that.

I'm thinking that I'm probably not doing enough to teach my students new vocabulary and strategies to learn new vocabulary on their own.

The article states the importance of varied vocabulary instruction, both direct and indirect. I believe that comprehension is the heart of reading, and of course vocabulary is a large part of that. The National Reading Panel's report said, "There are two types of vocabulary – oral and print. A reader who encounters a strange word in print can decode the word to speech. If it is in the reader's oral vocabulary, the reader will be able to understand it." (National Reading Panel, 2010, p.13) I'd like to improve my instruction of oral vocabulary so that my students who can decode words easily will be able to understand what they're reading. Further, I've learned that students who know Latin and Greek word parts are able to figure out the meaning of more words when they're reading. "We feel that a Latin-Greek emphasis should be an integral part of the core elementary vocabulary program. The intentional selection and instruction of Latin-Greek roots and affixes can provide students with opportunities to maximize their word learning, and the semantic nature of Latin-Greek roots provides a natural connection between English words that we expect students to learn." (Rasinski et al., 2001, p.135) I feel like I'm missing an intentional vocabulary building piece of my literacy instruction where I teach students words and their meanings and ways they can apply those words or meanings to other words.

Part 3 – My Plan of Action

Affirmations

I'm benefiting my students when I confer with them during independent reading time.

Conferring will always be an important part of my instruction. I'm able to model and coach strategies with individuals who need work on specific skills. I'm able to individualize instruction in this way and give each kid what he or she need to become a better reader. I host reading and writing workshop teacher labs in my classroom so I'm able to model conferring with students with fellow teachers observing. A reason some teachers don't confer during independent reading time is because of management, or because it's a lot of work to confer with as many kids as possible during reading time. I hope to demonstrate that it's manageable to do and that it's a valuable time for both the student I'm conferring with and me. I hope to extend this with strategy group conferences next year where I group students based on a need, for example a group of students who all need a bit of work on oral fluency and using punctuation to guide how they phrase what they're reading. I will meet with strategy groups as needed and not for an extended period of time. My research for my focus project has given me an example of a three-day period where I implement the Gradual Release of Responsibility method of instruction. The first day of meeting I model for the strategy group what the desired reading looks like when using the strategy. The second day the students in the strategy group and I practice the strategy together. The third day the students practice the strategy in front of me and I coach them as needed. (Serravallo, 2010) Each meeting time is about the length of a regular conference, so it doesn't take up much of my conferring time. The group could extend to a fourth day if needed for more support. I plan to have our district's literacy consultant work with me to help me implement strategy groups into my conferring time.

My students are motivated and engaged with reading because I foster a love of reading in my classroom.

I plan to continue some of the reading rituals I've come to love in my classroom. I'll continue having students bring in their favorite book at the beginning of the year, rainy day reading, reading partnerships, and informal book talks. I'll continue allowing my students to choose the books they want to read at their just right level so that they are engaged in the texts they practice new skills and strategies with. A new student-driven activity I want to incorporate is a student-created word wall in which students add words from their reading and from the world to our word wall. I will introduce this early in the year during our first reading unit. I'll model adding words to the word wall from our read aloud. I'll want students to include a definition or a picture of the word and possibly how the word was used in a sentence. I'll have students do this on note cards or pieces of paper that they can color to make their word stand out. I could even incorporate some new vocabulary activities with the word wall words to strengthen my vocabulary instruction in a motivating way. My hope is that my students learn to love new words in the same way I've gotten my students to love reading.

I get a clear picture of my students as readers when I do frequent, varied, formative assessments.

I'd like to record my reading data in a more visual way as described in the Rubin, 2011 article. By attributing a value to the level of difficulty a child had to a particular assessment and then averaging the values I could have an easier time seeing the 'big picture' of each child's reading abilities as well as groupings of students in my class. This

class profile and the averaging of scores from different assessments is good for the big picture, but much of what I currently do informs the little things I do for my students, like forming strategy groups. I'll want to continue the formative assessments that I do with my students during conferences so that my short-term lesson planning is guided by those assessments. The synthesis of more formal data, like the Rubin chart will guide my long term planning and whole class lessons.

I help my students apply reading strategies by implementing the Gradual Release of Responsibility model.

I tend to teach in this way, as it is how I've always practiced teaching, but I don't do it with as much intention as I'd like. This year I'll purposely incorporate the steps of the gradual release of responsibility into my minilessons in reading as well as my conferences. I know that sometimes I have just taught a child a strategy in a conference, modeled it for them and then left without practicing it with them and having them demonstrate it for me. I sometimes remember that I did that later and then feel really bad about it, so I want to make sure I remember to do that. I'm thinking that I'll add a small reminder in my conference notes that I need to 'GRR' when I teach a new strategy. That way as I'm with the student and writing down my conference notes with them I'll remember to use Gradual Release of Responsibility so that the student is using the skill with a coach by their side and not attempting to try the skill for the first time by themselves.

Buddy reading helps my students in practicing oral reading fluency and expression.

I will definitely continue having my students be book buddies with kindergarteners next year. Something I would like to do more of, to support my struggling readers is have those students practice the book they're going to read earlier in the day. I've had my students practice a couple times before book buddy time, but then it was the whole class and it was right before we read to the younger kids. I'd like to have my struggling readers preread the book they've selected to read for the younger kid during cool down time in reading workshop. That way they know the plot, if they didn't already, as well as the characters and the other story elements that may cue their fluency and expression. I have a feeling those struggling readers will be more confident and engaged in book buddy time when they have already read the book to themselves once. This also gives those students the opportunity to stumble on words without an audience and ask for help on certain words in private if needed. I'm glad to know that book buddy time is beneficial to all of my students and I'm looking forward to helping my lower readers a bit more with this activity.

Questions

How can my fluency instruction and assessment be more explicit and meaningful?

My weekly fluency drills need to include a comprehension piece to it. Students need to comprehend the piece they're reading in order to read it fluently. I need to explicitly model the type of fluent and attentive reading I expect from my students. I plan to meet with my struggling readers in a conference more often about fluency, like once a week. This weekly check in about fluency would allow me to monitor their progress in fluency in books that they're choosing at their level and I'll be able to

monitor their comprehension. While they are reading aloud I won't interrupt or give cues about their reading. The feedback I give them will be more meaningful because it's about books that they are choosing. When I give them a tip for reading more fluently I can exercise the Gradual Release of Responsibility method of modeling the desired reading behavior and thinking aloud and then having the student and I read fluently together, then the student can read with the skill while I coach and then they can continue practicing the skill on their own. This weekly fluency check-in won't be formal or labeled as anything so the student won't feel picked on or discouraged. I'll just make the conscious effort to have fluency conferences with specific students who need more coaching with fluency.

How can I make my read aloud time more meaningful for my students?

The NCEE's recommendation suggests that there are steps to take to have high-quality discussion about the meaning of text. The steps are "1. Structure the discussion to complement the text, the instructional purpose, and the readers' ability and grade level. 2. Develop discussion questions that require students to think deeply about text. 3. Ask follow-up questions to encourage and facilitate discussion. 4. Have students lead structured small-group discussions." (National Reading Panel, 2010, p.24-27) I feel I could apply these discussion techniques to the discussions I lead about my read aloud books. I plan to implement whole class discussions after read aloud time at least three times a week. Variations to this would be if I ask questions before or during the read aloud time for various questions that would more appropriately be asked at that time.

I will choose texts that I think will serve discussion well. For example, a book with a social issue like cheating on a test or leaving out a friend would spark students to have an opinion and take a stance and then defend it. I would ask questions about the text that causes students to talk, rather than just answer a question. I would also ask follow up questions like, "Why do you say that?" that encourages students to defend their talk with the text.

How can I directly teach vocabulary?

My plan is to make vocabulary a more prominent part of my literacy instruction. One way I plan to do this by implementing a student-led vocabulary word wall. I find that my best lessons are ones where my students are engaged and motivated to do well. I want my students to have the power over what gets put on the word wall so that the words are meaningful to them and they will want to know more about the words their friends and classmates are interested in.

Further I will implement a vocabulary piece in my reading instruction. I'm thinking it could fit into my spelling instruction. We'll be using Words Their Way this year which I'm only a little bit familiar with, but I think will help students hear and spell word parts and understand their meaning. During word sorts I could have students perhaps sort words by meanings, think of new words out of the spelling pattern and even create new words based on spelling patterns put together. With this exercise students will understand that parts of words help shape the word's meaning. This, with the student-led word wall will enhance my vocabulary instruction a great deal.

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