Ten Beliefs on Reading Instruction

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Ten Beliefs on Reading Instruction:

*I believe reading instruction should…*

**1. begin and be continued at home.**

From the time children are born, they should be read to daily. This is an essential step in achieving optimum reading instruction. Parents are children’s first teachers. Children learn concepts of print and the joy and importance of reading through modeling done by their parents. If this is done at home, children will be more successful in the classroom. Phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, reading comprehension and fluency will improve the more children are read to at home (Boyse, 2010).

**2. be multimodal.**

If we aspire to inspire children’s love of reading, we need to make reading instruction fun and engaging. Reading instruction should include a multitude of activities and develop a wide range of skills. There should be variety in daily reading instruction. A repetition of the same tasks repeated daily will begin to become dull over time. While consistency and repetition are necessities, teachers can make lessons interactive by planning hands-on activities to teach literacy concepts instead of always sticking to the same pattern of activities. A great way to do this is by incorporating technology into reading lessons (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). Instead of always having students read traditional books, teachers should incorporate e-books to personalize the students’ reading experience (adjusting text size, voice read aloud, page brightness, etcetera).

**3. be differentiated with flexible groups.**

Differentiation is vital in the classroom today. Students are coming to school with a wide variety of background knowledge, experience and skills. The teacher must plan lessons appropriately challenging for all students. An excellent way to challenge all students to work to their full potential is by having flexible reading groups. When assessing students, it is more beneficial to group them by ability. When working on the same task in groups, however, students can learn a great deal from each other if ability groups are mixed. The higher level students will become experts by assisting lower level students and the lower level students will have an opportunity to ask higher level students for assistance and strive to perform at a higher level (Ford, 2005). Aside from ability, mixing groups is also beneficial because it improves the classroom environment when students have a chance to work with different classmates. Finally, by mixing abilities, the teacher is mixing skills. Different students, whether high or low, present a variety of skills. By working with different students, their talents and skills will shine differently and will improve learning for all students.

**4. be a combination of top down and bottom up approaches.**

As is true with anything in life, too much of a good thing is a bad thing. The best reading instruction incorporates both top down and bottom up approaches because reading is both “theortically interesting and practically important” (Treiman, 2010). Reading instruction without phonics and direct instruction fails to teach students skills needed for decoding and comprehension. However, reading instruction also loses authenticity if it focuses solely on skills and does not allow for learning to occur in more natural and meaningful ways such as reader’s theatre or writing a story together as a class and using these experiences to teach reading, writing and phonics skills.

**5. include authentic projects.**

Reading instruction should include authentic experiences and real-life challenges. Project-based learning is an excellent way to provide students with meaningful learning experiences. By collaborating on projects, students learn more than content. Projects allow students to explore the content in an interactive way while improving their ability to work well with others. Projects in the classroom setting are an excellent way to teach content, improve social skills and strengthen the classroom community by deepening bonds between students. Project based learning also encourages “problem solving and true application of knowledge” (George Lucas Education Foundation, 2014).

**6. be consistent.**

Consistent reading instruction is a necessary component to a successful reading program. Young children’s developing minds need consistency in order to provide adequate time to process new information. Once a reading program, such as the Daily 5 or The Four Blocks, has been established, the teacher should strive to practice this structured program daily. That is not to say that there is not variety within the daily program activities but rather that there is structure during daily reading instruction. The best reading programs seek consistency in planning and implement consistency in practice (Jean, 1997).

**7. include appropriate texts that match students’ interests.**

One of the most important aspects of teaching reading is motivating students to want to read. Students’ motivation to read has been proven to increase if they are allowed to pick out their own books. For certain lessons, the teacher may need to select books for the students to read. This should be done with careful consideration as to what s/he knows his/her students are interested in or typically like to read. As Stenner (n.d.) wrote, “…ordering or leveling text is only half the equation; we must also assess the level of the readers.” If we can find ways to motivate students to want to read, we will be much more successful in achieving the ultimate goal of helping them recognize the importance and enjoyment of reading.

**8. include the Language Experience Approach.**

The Language Experience Approach allows students to explore language with instruction following certain experiences. As Meyerson and Kulesza (2010) wrote, the language experience approach “reinforce(s) the one-to-one correspondence between spoken and written language”.

The learning experience approach is meaningful because it is based on students’ knowledge and experiences. Repetition is stressed in this approach through repeated readings and high-frequency words. The teacher models sentence structure and provides instruction by examining components of language. (Kulesza, Meyerson, 2010).

**9. be modeled by teachers and parents.**

Parents and teachers should be role models for their children and students. They should model the behavior they expect to see exhibited by their young learners. Therefore, parents and teachers should read texts appropriate for their age as well as environmental texts in front of children. This will prove the value their adult role models place on reading and inspire them to do the same. Parents and teachers should also model appropriate reading behaviors by providing direct instruction while reading. Thinking aloud to make predictions, ask questions and reflect on what was read help students set a purpose for reading, make connections in their learning and improve their comprehension (Connor, Farr, 2014). Teachers can also use reading as a time to reinforce concepts such as vocabulary, grammar and curricular content.

**10. inspire a life-long love of reading.**

The ultimate goal in instruction is to inspire students to want to continue learning on their own. If parents and teachers are able to make reading a positive experience for students, they will increase the likeliness of students wanting to continue to learn on their own. Parents and teachers should lead by example to prove the importance of reading in everyday life. Mem Fox once said, “When I say to a parent, ‘read to a child’, I don’t want it to sound like medicine. I want it to sound like chocolate.” At times, students may not always be thrilled about reading certain texts in the classroom but reading at home should be a loving, bonding, pleasurable experience that children look forward to. If parents and teachers can work together to motivate students to read, children will have a greater chance of becoming life-long lovers of reading. Research indicates that children can be motivated to read by having a choice in what they read, having a variety of texts available to read and having time to talk about what they read with others (Gambrell, Marinak, 2009). Parents and teachers have a responsibility to provide their children and students with these motivators in order to prepare them for a life of reading to learn.

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