

(1) My Incoming Beliefs and Practices

At the start of this course, I have been teaching reading for two years, plus a year during my student teaching. My definition of reading is being able to read fluently, decode, and comprehend any given text. The components of reading are phonics, phonemic awareness, and word study. I also believe that having fluency and comprehension are valuable components to reading. I believe that to be able to get to the stages of fluency, comprehension, and word study, readers have to understand that each letter makes a sound and that letters put together in a sequence make sounds. Without the valuable first stages of reading, students will not be able to read fluently or comprehend a text they are reading.

At the start of fourth grade, I assumed that my students would be able to have a level of fluency, and that they would be able to decode words. I believed that going into the year, I would be focusing on teaching comprehension techniques and increasing student fluency, along with teaching literary components, such as character, setting and plot.

At the end of fourth grade, one expectation I have for my students is to have an understanding of how to question text while they are reading. I expected this because I modeled it throughout the year along with having whole group and small group discussions. I expected my students to also have increased their fluency. Students had opportunities to read individually, in buddies, and to me throughout the year to help increase their words per minute.

A fourth grade level standard that needed to be covered in reading is to identify the author's purpose for writing a text. This concept was taught by showing examples and modeling my thinking and analyzing of features in a text. We had multiple occasions where students would work together in small groups to discuss and come up with justifications about why they believed a text was a specific author's purpose.

I believe that it is extremely important that in my classroom, students gain a love for reading. Reading is never a punishment. I try to pick books for my book study that students can relate to. I want them to be excited about reading every day, and I believe that having read alouds and opportunities everyday for students to read something they are interested in encourages a love for reading. I also want students to leave my classroom with knowledge about reading features. Instead of doing a worksheet or exercise involving setting, I would rather have my students see it in a book we are reading. By modeling every aspect of reading, from comprehension to text connections to the change in my voice while reading aloud, I believe that I am pushing my above grade level students and supporting my below grade level students to make gains.

(2) My Outgoing Teaching Beliefs and Practices

Affirmations

One area of my teaching that this course has affirmed is the way I coach my students, and not just teach them. I have strived to create an environment where students feel like they have the opportunity to share ideas, questions, and comments they have. By creating this culture, I lead the discussion, but I am not just speaking to the students, but rather discussing with the students. I think that the video we watched involving a 3rd

grade classroom really affirmed this concept for me, because the teacher was letting the students lead their discussion groups, and was there for support. She made sure that the students were on task, and that they were all participating.

Another area of teaching that was affirmed for me in this course was how important modeling in the classroom is. I discussed how successful I felt my past students have been with observing me model things, and this course reiterated this fact. The Duke article reinforced this with me, while discussing the gradual release method. In my past experiences and after reading this article, I found that students all along the spectrum are supported. It pushes the above grade level students, while supporting the below grade level students because they see how “good readers” think about books while reading, not just read the words without thinking about them.

In my own experience and while talking with colleagues during “Talking Shop,” I found that we all have noticed that by using the gradual release method, students begin to really begin to show the thinking that you have been modeling without as much support as the year goes on. I think this was most gratifying, because students were stopping me during our whole group discussions to mention a prediction they have, or justifying their thoughts from context clues they picked up on.

Finally, meeting with individual students was affirmed by this course. I think that although I was meeting with individual students for fluency assessments and comprehension assessments, I was also meeting with them throughout the year just to have a conversation. When discussing motivation and watching the PowerPoint slides, I really took into account how important it was just to get to know your students, so as a teacher you understand what motivates them. I think that at times, I found it difficult to

meet with each student, but again, the readings showed me that I can get information during small group work and listening to conversations students are having with each other. I found this extremely affirming because I got down about not always having the same amount of time to meet with each student. I think that this information provided in this course supported my thinking and I felt reassured knowing there are multiple ways you can get to know your students.

Questions

One aspect of my teaching that was drawn into question was how I teach vocabulary in my classroom. I think that although I felt like I was covering it, I realize now that I was only working superficially with new vocabulary words. During reading instruction, we would discuss problem words as we came across them in reading. In science and social studies instruction, I found that I was having students look up words in the glossary or completing matching activities. Although I knew these activities weren't meaningful, I didn't know of any other ways to cover the vocabulary that was expected to be covered.

One article that brought this question to the front of my mind was important when Stahl specifically discussed having a multiple choice or fill in the blank assessment. While reading I was thinking to myself that these are the ways I assess vocabulary. I think that because these assessments are often times found in the book as ways to assess, it seems like if students score well on these then they know the new vocabulary. But, is this new vocabulary really learned in a meaningful and authentic way? I think the Stahl article really got me thinking about my vocabulary instruction.

Another aspect of my teaching that was called into question was my use of fluency assessment. This past year, I found that my fluency assessment happened often, but it was only focusing on words per minute. I found that I was putting this information into a file, and using this information as part of my small group planning, but I never connected it completely with the fact that fluency is directly correlated to comprehension. I was only focusing on their score, and not on what the students understood when they were reading. Talking about this during “Talking Shop” really reinforced this because other teachers were having the same problem when testing for fluency. They found that, like I had, the students were focused on the final number instead of on comprehending what they were reading.

Finally, my focus on reading motivation was called into question while reading the slides on the PowerPoint presentation. I found that while reading these slides, I was focusing on extrinsic motivation, and I wasn’t putting very much into motivating students. I thought about my past class, and how great they were at picking up books and had the motivation to read. But, then I began thinking about the rest of my students who didn’t have a desire to read during free time. I was having students answer questions about books they were reading every week, but I realized this was not an authentic activity. It really opened my eyes to ways that I can assist students who are not very motivated to read on their own.

(3) My Plan of Action

Affirmations

Having classroom discussions is a very important teaching strategy to me. I think that I can really assist other newer teachers in my grade level because I think that at

times, we have all been overwhelmed with covering standards. I think that if I talk to them about what I have had success with, and what I have learned from other teachers in this course, it will help their teaching. We have the opportunity to observe other teachers throughout the year, so I might suggest coming into my classroom to view a classroom discussion.

To continue with modeling in my classroom, I will discuss with other teachers how they model instruction. I find that as a grade level, we do lots of folds and projects as a supplement to instruction. When I create a new fold, I implicitly tell my colleagues how I taught it, emphasizing the modeling aspect, and really have a conversation about what worked and what didn't work. I think having a group of teachers that you can talk to openly is important, as well as having teachers that share with one another.

A final affirmation was meeting with individual students. Although I feel like what I have been doing is great, I still enjoy discussing how other teachers meet with their students to gain information. I like hearing about other interactions so that I can build or modify the behavior to fit my teaching. I think that overall, my actions for the future involving all of my affirmations really center around talking to other teachers, and really having a conversation about what has worked best in the past. I believe that open communication is essential, especially for a newer teacher.

Questions

To address my question about vocabulary, I plan on changing my instruction so that it is centered on meaningful activities. I will not use matching activities or fill in the blank, but rather focus on assessing students by listening to conversations where key vocabulary is involved. I think that if students are understanding vocabulary, it becomes

a part of their everyday language. This assessment not only shows me where the students are at, but it ties into the importance of conversation and discussion in my classroom.

Another way that I plan on addressing vocabulary in the classroom will be to use a scale, where students score themselves on their knowledge of new vocabulary. With this scale, students have the opportunity to use the word in a sentence, give synonyms for the word, or say they have no idea what the word means at all. This activity is important because it causes less stress for students who are not keen to speaking during discussions. I will still be able to assess what they know in a way that they are comfortable with.

To address my issues with fluency assessments, one plan I have is to listen to my students read aloud. At times, the minute assessment is beneficial, but I can still gain valuable information about their fluency level just by listening to students read and taking notes. By setting up fluency assessments in this way, I can ask students comprehension questions and model my thinking. Also, by not timing students, they won't be as interested in their "scores," and more focused on what they are reading.

Finally, to motivate students to read, I really want to focus on students feeling successful. To create success for every student, I will meet individually to assist in setting up a plan for students to meet a goal they have to finish reading a book. We will meet periodically to discuss their progress, and we will discuss the ways that they have felt success after they finished the book. I want to move away from extrinsic motivation completely, and really try to instill a sense of pride and success in meeting a goal and finishing a book. I plan on continuing this throughout the year, to really support the students who don't start off the year with a lot of motivation to pick up a book and read.