

How Does Literacy Collaborative Emphasize the Five Essential Elements of Reading Instruction?

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In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) of the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) issued a report that identified five areas that were critical for effective reading instruction: *phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension*. The Literacy Collaborative instructional model includes, and has always included, components and activities that address these five essential elements of reading instruction, and also emphasizes these elements in its writing instruction. For a copy of the NRP report or other material from the NRP, see <http://www.nationalreadingpanel.org/>.

Essential Element #1: Phonemic Awareness Instruction

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the discrete sounds in spoken words. Phonemic awareness training involves helping children recognize, isolate, and manipulate phonemes, sometimes in connection with letters.

Daily lessons in Literacy Collaborative classrooms include explicit teaching of phonemic awareness. Children do activities and play games that involve connecting, sorting, and manipulating sounds and rhymes and learn to associate discrete sounds with letters. Students practice listening to poems, rhymes, and stories with repetitive refrains, rhymes, and language patterns. When writing, students learn to say words slowly to hear discrete sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words.

In the Literacy Collaborative language and literacy framework, schools are provided with an extensive curriculum description for Kindergarten through grade 3 that provides the specific understandings and the grade level appropriateness in all areas of letter and word learning. Phonemic awareness is directly taught during lessons on principles of phonemic awareness, application of the principles, reading aloud to students, and during language and word play activities. Some of the activities within this curriculum that specifically address phonemic awareness are: saying rhymes, identifying the onset and rime in spoken words and syllables, hearing and isolating individual sounds in words, connecting words that sound alike and words that sound different, blending and segmenting words, making new words by deleting or substituting phonemes, and attending to sounds of words in stories, songs, poems, and rhymes. In a phonemic awareness lesson, the teacher provides a brief, explicit lesson on an auditory discrimination, phonemic awareness, or phonological awareness principle. The lessons are logically selected based on student need and an organized continuum of concepts.

Essential Element #2: Phonics Instruction

Phonics instruction involves teaching children the relationships between letters and individual sounds (phonemes), and teaching them that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words.

Phonics is taught in Literacy Collaborative classrooms explicitly with sounds, letters, and words in isolation, and through the use of meaningful text. The alphabet is considered to be a basic tool of the reader and writer, and many children have incomplete knowledge of letter-sound correspondences. The teacher first assesses the letter-sound correspondences the children do know, and works to increase their knowledge. The teacher starts with simple words and letter-sound associations familiar to the children, and progresses to less predictable sound patterns and their spelling. Through explicit lessons, the children learn to identify letters, to associate phonemes with letters, and to use phonics principles when reading and writing. Children do exercises with individual words, which they sort by sounds and letters. They create personalized alphabet books, write letters on a variety of surfaces, and work extensively with magnetic letters, which children enjoy manipulating. The teacher keeps careful records of the children's progress to determine the sequence of instruction. Before, during, and after reading selected texts, the teacher brings children's attention to sound-spelling patterns using magnetic letters or white erase boards. Teachers demonstrate phonics principles when teaching the children how to spell words. The children use their phonics knowledge when reading aloud and when writing words, sentences, and longer texts.

Essential Element #3: Fluency Instruction

Fluency is the ability to read a text quickly and accurately. Fluent readers recognize words automatically and group words as they read. Fluent oral reading sounds effortless and expressive. Researchers studying reading have begun to realize how important fluency is in the reading process, and how many children have comprehension difficulties because they read slowly and halting. Automaticity develops with practice: children become more fluent readers the more they read.

In Literacy Collaborative classrooms, fluency is taught both at the word level and at the text level. Students practice reading a core of high frequency words to increase rapid word recognition. Students learn to use phonics principles to decode new words quickly, and to use their knowledge of the meaning of word parts to rapidly decipher new words. The students repeatedly read familiar books, which helps them develop fluency, phrasing, and rapid word recognition. The teacher demonstrates fluent reading and the use of intonation when reading aloud to the students. When the children read aloud the teacher prompts them to read fluently and with intonation. Children are provided opportunities everyday for independent reading, which helps them becoming faster at silent reading.

Essential Element #4: Vocabulary

Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively, and applies to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor of reading comprehension ability. Vocabulary instruction refers to both the indirect and direct teaching of words and word meanings.

Working with words in isolation, in sentences, or in meaningful text, students in Literacy Collaborative classrooms learn the meanings of words, sort words by meaning, and learn about homonyms, synonyms, and antonyms. They learn the meanings of parts of words, such as "un" or "dis" or "bi," and learn to use this knowledge to decipher meanings of new words. Before the teacher introduces a new book to the children, he or she familiarizes the children with new and difficult words that will appear in the book. The children also learn how to use context to figure out word meanings while reading. Children are encouraged to use new

vocabulary in their writing to make it more precise and descriptive. Through independent reading and being read to by the teacher, children acquire a large reading and writing vocabulary of words rarely used in speech.

Essential Element #5: Comprehension Instruction

Comprehension refers to the ability to understand what one is reading—to relate a text to what one already knows while also constructing new knowledge and understanding. There are many different types of and aspects of comprehension—comprehending literal meaning, comprehending figurative or symbolic meaning, appreciating, evaluating, or responding emotionally to a text, understanding the significance of a text, or understanding how one text relates to another. Reading for comprehension can be contrasted with “decoding”—reading words aloud without knowing what they mean.

Comprehending written text, in all its dimensions, is one of the primary instructional goals in Literacy Collaborative classrooms. The goal is for children to learn to read and to find reading useful, enjoyable, and meaningful. Students are explicitly taught comprehension strategies in isolation and while reading, listening to, and writing texts. Strategies include making predictions, asking questions and forming opinions while reading, and connecting text meaning with background knowledge and personal experience. Before a child or the teacher reads a text, the teacher introduces key ideas in the text in order to increase the child’s ability to comprehend. During and after reading the teacher leads a discussion with the children, expanding the children’s understanding of the text. Children are asked to think actively about what they have read and to increase their understanding through writing and drawing activities. The teacher reads a wide variety of books interesting to the students to increase their background knowledge, to expose them to grammatical structures found in books, and to increase the children’s knowledge of word meanings. The teacher uses texts from a variety of genres (fiction, non-fiction, fantasy, memoirs). Attention is paid as much to expository texts (books that explain something such as science or social studies books) as narrative texts (stories). Students have the opportunity to write about meaningful topics in a variety of genres, such as fictional stories, explanatory texts, poems, or autobiographies.

Through the methods and activities described above, working explicitly with words in isolation and working with meaningful, connected text, Literacy Collaborative teachers emphasize the five essential elements of literacy instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.