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TE 842, Section 730

July 1, 2010

My Teaching Beliefs & Practices Paper

My Incoming Beliefs and Practices

I have been teaching reading on my own since my internship year at Michigan State. I taught fourth grade in Detroit, while still under the supervision of my cooperating teacher. After getting a full time teaching position in Minneapolis, I taught reading to my fifth grade classroom. The following year, I taught reading to fourth graders. This past year, I taught reading to my first grade class in Atlanta, Georgia.

Before entering this course, my definition of reading was providing a balanced literacy program which included whole class, small group, and individual instruction. I provided guided reading for my students daily, and usually incorporated a mini-lesson on a particular reading comprehension strategy for the whole group. I knew reading had to be practiced daily both in the classroom and at home. I believed the components of reading were comprehension and fluency. Every year, students participated in fluency activities both individually and with partners. In my mind, I knew the importance of connecting fluency with comprehension. I knew that students could not understand what they were reading if they were unable to read fluently. I did not consider vocabulary or phonics/phonemic awareness in my literacy program. Therefore, these components were not connected in my literacy instruction, although vocabulary was discussed at different points in our day. In fourth grade, I also taught extensive grammar where students learned an English grammar rule and practiced it on their own. They were also tested on this material. In my everyday instruction, I modeled strategies fairly consistently.

I assumed that my students knew what to do when they encountered a word they did not know when reading. Especially teaching upper elementary, I did not spend considerable amounts of time on decoding. The school in which I taught was a gifted and talented school, so most guided reading sessions focused on higher level thinking skills. In first grade, I assumed students did not need explicit phonics instruction in the classroom. I expected students to have already mastered these skills in Kindergarten.

By the end of the year, I expected students to be reading at the targeted grade level or beyond (for instance, I expected fourth graders to be reading at least at an end of the year fourth grade level). I also expected students to be able to utilize the comprehension strategies we learned and practiced in their independent reading. I expected that my students grow in their self monitoring skills, and their abilities to think critically about what they read.

Most of my instruction focused on comprehension skills in upper elementary. I concentrated heavily on predicting, inferring, summarizing and retelling. Less focus was devoted to synthesizing, questioning and visual imagery, although these topics were taught and reviewed often. In first grade, much more focus was placed upon fluency. In guided reading, we would begin by reading the title and author and making predictions about the text. Next, I read a page and students would echo. We also practiced choral reading daily, and students usually read a portion of the text “round robin” style. Intermittently, I would ask comprehension questions about the text.

In first grade, I taught phonics and phonemic awareness very sporadically, usually when talking about spelling patterns with our weekly words. We also discussed new vocabulary during this time, and when we read a “phonics reader” on Mondays. During morning work, I would also teach a new vocabulary term occasionally.

This past year, I used “The Daily 5” reading program with my students. Students participated in five centers each day, which included Read to Self, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, Word Work and Work on Writing. Each center was about fifteen minutes long, and this is when I would also pull guided reading groups (so I could meet with every student daily). Students were very independent during these centers and we practiced, modeled and reviewed the rules of each center heavily during the launch phase.

When I taught upper elementary, students participated in three centers; independent reading, guided reading and “Fluency Frenzy”. Fluency Frenzy consisted of students working with a partner to increase their fluency. Each student would read a selection out loud for one minute (partner would time them), student would record the number of words read and chart the number on a bar graph with a blue marker (then students would switch roles). Students would then practice the same selection out loud three times to themselves. Next, students would time each other again for their “hot” read. Students would record the number of words read on the same bar graph (with a red marker).

I communicated to my students the importance of reading and “what readers do” daily. During mini-lessons, I would be sure to review the skill we had just learned and try to build upon that skill. I would also try and talk to students about what and how I read outside of school, and let them know that I am continuing to strive to be a better reader myself. I reminded students that reading is important in so many ways; in every subject and every job.

When testing reading, I valued when students took a particular skill we had been studying or practicing and put it into their independent reading. I appreciated when I saw students using specific reading strategies that I had taught and was sure to praise students when I witnessed this. I also valued fluent reading, and when students thought deeply about their reading and realized that “reading is thinking”.

My Outgoing Beliefs and Practices

Affirmations

Comprehension: One “big” aspect of my teaching that has been affirmed is my comprehension instruction. Snow (1998) explains, “Comprehension also takes practice, which is gained by reading independently, by reading in pairs or groups, and by being read aloud to” (p.6). Within everything that we do, I try to include comprehension questions and instruction. During whole group and small groups, we discuss predictions, inferences, summaries and higher level thinking questions related to the text. Children need to be reminded that “reading is thinking”, and that the purpose of reading is to understand and gain meaning from it. “Teaching Reading Comprehension I” PowerPoint explains, “By keeping the focus on reading comprehension, students learn that ‘good’ reading involves understanding and learning from the text. This also allows them to establish and maintain connections between their schemas, which facilitates their ability to recruit and use what they’ve learned during lessons while independently reading ‘real’ texts.” An effective teacher of comprehension provides multiple opportunities for children to gain meaning from text. This occurs in whole group, guided reading and independent reading activities in my classroom. Students also respond to their texts during writing and partner tasks.

When teaching a new comprehension strategy, I am sure to model my thinking out loud for students so they understand how to use it in their own reading. Pardo (2004) states, “Reading aloud and teacher modeling show students how to activate schema and make connections” (p.1). Most often, I model during whole group read alouds. Neufeld (2005) says, “The phrase thinking aloud means the teacher explains her or his thought processes while demonstrating the strategy. In other words, the teacher shows the students how to use a covert thinking strategy by expressing her or his thoughts aloud as she or he implements the strategy while the students look on. This step is crucial if meaningful learning is to take place” (p.306). Students need consistent modeling of comprehension strategies so they can be successful in their own independent reading, and work towards reading for meaning. It is vital to implement the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model which is highlighted in “Teaching Reading Comprehension II” (Martin). After strategy introduction, modeling occurs, as discussed above. Beyond that, teachers guide students in their thinking and application of the skill. Then, students are prepared to try the strategy independently. My practice was affirmed because this is the model that I use.

One comprehension strategy that I teach on a daily basis is previewing texts during guided reading. Rather than jump into an unfamiliar text, I have students look at the cover, noting the author and illustrator. Duke and Pearson (2002) state, “Good readers typically *look over* the text before they read, noting such things as the *structure* of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.” (p.1). We then discuss the comprehension strategy that we are going to be working on for the particular session. This provides students with a purpose for their reading. Additionally, before we open to the first page, students are also each asked to make predictions by looking at the pictures and thinking about how they relate to the text’s title. Duke

and Pearson (2002) continue, “As they read, good readers frequently *make predictions* about what is to come” (p.2). By making predictions, students are encouraged to find out whether their predictions are correct. Neufeld (2005) explains, “Using answers to questions posed during the overview process in combination with their prior knowledge of a topic, students can learn to make predictions about the text” (Pressley, 2002c) (p.304).

The video “Teaching Reading 3-5 Workshop: Fostering Book Discussions” affirmed how meaningful it can be for students to talk about their own reactions and feelings in response to their reading. This is something I do consistently in the classroom. When we are done reading, or throughout the story, I stop reading and ask students how they feel about what just happened. I might also ask students to write about their thoughts or draw a picture, or perform a “think pair share” and talk with a peer. The teacher in the video explains how having students discuss their reading can be significant for their learning.

Another aspect of my comprehension instruction that was affirmed was discussion of story elements and main idea. Stahl (2004) says, “Guiding retellings and questioning around story structure elements is likely to improve the listening comprehension of emergent readers and listeners.” (p.598). With almost every story we read, students are asked to retell story elements in many ways. Sometimes they retell them orally, and we make a class list, other times students work in pairs to come up with them, or they draw pictures or write about them. Stahl (2004) explains, “Baumann and Bergeron (1993) found that story map instruction influenced the ability of first graders to successfully identify the most important story elements and their ability to respond to story element questions at statistically significant levels” (p.598). I have used graphic organizers, story maps and other visual representations often. I feel it is helpful for students to transfer their knowledge of the story onto paper, in addition to helping them organize and solidify their thoughts, feelings and attitudes about what they read.

Print: Another component of reading instruction that has been affirmed is exposure to a wide variety of print. Snow (1998) explains that effective reading instruction means children, “Use reading to obtain meaning from print, and have frequent and intensive opportunities to read” (p.3). This past year, I labeled almost everything in the classroom with the word and a picture. I felt this was important for all my students, especially my ELL students who were new to the United States. I also made sure my classroom library was equipped with many different levels of books, in addition to many different genres. The video “Creating Contexts for Learning” highlighted the importance of creating a classroom library that was organized and accessible for students. The video explained that if possible, books should be placed so that students can see their covers. The video also discussed how having a vast variety of books at differing levels and topics can foster students’ love for reading, in addition to greater reading achievement. It is evident that emergent readers need exposure to a variety of texts. My classroom library is neat, organized and students know where to go to get a certain kind of book. One specific course text

that highlighted the importance of word learning was “For the Love of Words: Fostering Word Consciousness in Young Readers” by Graves and Watts (2008). They state, “A well-stocked classroom library goes a long way toward promoting interest in words” (p. 186). I felt that the “good” things I was doing in my classroom were affirmed by this article and the video mentioned above.

This year, I also kept my word wall current by putting up words that we are studying and referred to them often. Graves and Watts (2008) explain, “Walls are great places to post words that will boost word consciousness, especially when they are involved in the creation and maintenance of the wall” (p. 187). This is one idea that I will be taking back to my classroom this fall. I want my students to be more involved in the word wall. I believe if they help create it, they will feel more ownership towards it and it may help their development even more. Snow (1998) explains that children need to “Get information about the nature of print through opportunities to learn letters and to recognize the internal structure of spoken words” (p.4).

Through our readings, I have also learned that without great exposure to print in the classroom, students cannot move forward in their reading. Stahl (1992) states, “For a child with little or no exposure, phonics instruction would be an abstract and artificial task until the child has additional meaningful encounters with print” (p.3). For most of my students, English is their second language. Some of my students can speak English very well, and others do not speak it at all. Therefore, I need my classroom to expose my young learners to print in a variety of ways, especially because it might be the only exposure they have. This reading affirmed my stance on providing students with ample opportunities to see and interact with letters, words and books.

Reading Teacher: A third piece of my teaching which has been affirmed is the importance of striving to be the best reading teacher possible. Blair (2007) states in “The Effective Teacher of Reading: Considering the ‘What’ and ‘How’ of Instruction”, “I am convinced that the teacher is more important and has a greater impact than any single, fixed reading program, method, or approach”. I have always known that the teacher is the critical piece to the puzzle. Any teacher can have attended countless reading seminars or taken classes on the effective teaching of reading. Wren (2002) states, “Research has repeatedly indicated that the single most important variable in any reading program is the knowledge and skill of the teacher implementing the program” (p.4). What makes the difference, however, is the desire to want to change your practice to become a better teacher. Wren (2002) comments, “The quality of the teacher plays a very large part in determining the reading success of a student. A high-quality teacher can help every one of her students develop advanced reading skills. A low-quality teacher can have the opposite effect” (p.8). So often, I have seen teachers get comfortable with their practices and never change how they teach, regardless of the diverse needs of her students.

Our course affirmed that it is not only important to take the classes, but also to put the strategies, skills and theories into action. Snow (1998) explains, “Effective teachers are able to craft a special mix of instructional ingredients for every child they work with” (p.3). I believe the best

teacher is the one that never quits, never wants to stop learning, and never gets too set in their ways. Wren (2002) explains, “There are a few programs that, if properly implemented, could help a school move in the right direction, but nothing could ever take the place of a knowledgeable and talented teacher” (p.5). A teacher who strives to present her best teaching can only help her young students get excited about learning too. The teacher in the “Teaching Reading 3-5 Workshop: Building Comprehension” video even explains how teachers can make a huge difference in how students learn to comprehend text. The strategies and the ways she presents her lessons will impact the learners either positively or negatively.

It is also relevant to remember that although countless theories are presented to teachers constantly, that each teacher must do what works for them and their students. The course reading that affirmed this concept was “A Study of Effective First-Grade Literacy Instruction”. Pressley (2001) states, “Teachers combined practices that work well for them without regard to theoretical purity in their teaching, not worrying about whether they were a pure whole language teacher or, for that matter, pure from any instructional perspective” (p.49). A great teacher takes ideas from multiple sources and puts in into action in a meaningful and valuable way.

Questions

Phonics: One “big” aspect of my reading instruction that has been drawn into question is my phonics instruction. Snow (1998) explains that children must have “Sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency with different kinds of texts” (p.4). Being new to the primary grades this year, I never worked heavily on these aspects in my classroom previously. Teaching first grade, I knew the importance of these components, however I was unsure in how to approach them.

The course readings and specifically the lesson video on the *-ar* pattern drew my current teaching into question. Last year, I would touch on phonics here and there, without providing specific and explicit instruction to my students. We completed a phonics reader together weekly and discussed spelling patterns in the weekly spelling words, but that was it. After this course, I feel much more prepared and confident to teach phonics in a meaningful way. Gaskins (1996/1997) states, “Good readers read familiar words accurately and rapidly. They remember spelling patterns shared by known words and use this knowledge in decoding unknown words” (p.312). I felt the instruction provided by the teacher in the *-ar* lesson showed me what an effective phonics lesson could look like. I am a very visual learner, so watching videos is a great way for me to learn effective strategies. I felt that the students gained valuable knowledge about a new spelling pattern that could help them decode in the future. The teacher set up the lesson in a realistic way, first reviewing similar patterns, providing students with multiple examples in words, and then giving students a chance to write words and find them in their reading. This gave me a great outline to follow in my own teaching.

Juel and Minden-Cupp (1998) state, “Part of the unending controversy surrounding phonics instruction may have to do with the fact that it isn’t perfect; there may be better ways—or multiple ways— to help children link letters and sounds.” (p.6). My phonics instruction was called into question because I rarely focused on teaching students how to match letters to sounds in many ways. I would touch on the topic once or twice a week; but never provided explicit instruction. The statement by Juel and Minden-Cupp encouraged instruction that was taught in multiple fashions.

Gaskins (1996/1997) explains, “If we wanted students to have fully represented words in memory, we needed to provide them with a model of how to analyze and talk about the words they were learning, as well as to provide teacher-mediated opportunities for them to stretch out and hear sounds in words and to talk about letter-sound matches” (p.314). This put my practice into question because I do not do enough modeling for students. I realize I need to use the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model with phonics, just like I have been utilizing it in other areas. Students need exposure to phonics instruction and I need to provide that explicitly to them.

“Phonological Awareness Notes” explains that, “A child’s phonological skills in first grade predict how well a child will read in third grade (and beyond)” (Slide 4). This really affected me because it made me realize how crucial phonological awareness is in the classroom. In addition to teaching phonics explicitly, I need to ensure that my students have phonological awareness. I realize that probably many of my ELL students do not. Focusing on separating words into syllables and rhymes can help students develop it. Teaching students more about sound, word and letter relationships is relevant. I also understand that without phonological awareness, my students cannot truly benefit from phonics instruction. The “Phonological Awareness Notes” presentation helped me call my previous instruction into question, in addition to providing me with information about how to move forward.

I realize how crucial phonics instruction is for emergent readers and how it needs to fit in with an overall effective literacy program. It should not be the focus of literacy instruction, but a small piece which is explicitly taught daily in the classroom. Readers need practice in all areas of reading to be able to develop into good readers themselves.

Vocabulary: Another aspect of my teaching which has been drawn into question is my vocabulary instruction. Wren (2002) states, “To understand a language well, children must develop a rich vocabulary and appreciation for semantics, and they must combine that with a wealth of background knowledge about the world” (p.7). I did not teach vocabulary instruction explicitly, but rather included it in text discussions or guided reading. Through reading our course texts, I now understand that not providing this explicit instruction could cause students’ comprehension to suffer. “Teaching Reading 3-5 Workshop: Building Comprehension” states how comprehension and vocabulary are “tightly, tightly linked” and how effective teachers can

teach students vocabulary skills to help build their overall understanding of what they read. If students are not equipped with the skills to figure out new words, they may miss the overall message of their text. Oftentimes I realize I would discuss how to decode words or what to do when they came across an unfamiliar word, however I never gave students the opportunity to do this themselves. Kieffer and Lesaux (2007) state in “Breaking Down Words to Build Meaning”, “Even when teachers provide appropriate scaffolding with respect to decoding these words and reading them aloud, students with limited vocabularies may not be able to access the meaning of the text” (p.134). Through our reading and course documents, I now understand that my previous vocabulary instruction was not enough.

Additionally, through our readings I have discovered I do not ask students what they do when they encounter an unfamiliar word enough. Brabham (2002) explains, “Asking students to think aloud and analyze how they deal with unfamiliar words in their readings highlights strategies set into motion by the students themselves” (p. 266). My beliefs were called into question here because I did not know the importance of talking about word strategies. I never really thought to come out and ask students what they did. Graves and Watts-Taffe (2008) extend this thinking by explaining, “Discussion of new words can significantly improve students’ word knowledge” (p.187).

I am also questioning my vocabulary instruction because I never taught my kids about roots, prefixes and suffixes. Baumann (2007) expresses the importance of teaching students these rules so they can be more successful decoders. When teaching upper elementary, I did several vocabulary lessons on these topics, however I never have done them with my first graders. Baumann taught me that it is acceptable and beneficial to teach these concepts to young learners too.

Overall, this statement in the “Vocabulary Instruction” PowerPoint was alarming; “A lack of vocabulary is a key component underlying failure for many students, especially for those who are economically disadvantaged” (Slide 2). This quote called my whole vocabulary instruction into question because it made me realize that my vocabulary instruction is not sufficient and that I need to alter it immediately, especially considering nearly all of my students are at-risk.

Fluency: A third “big” aspect of my teaching which has been drawn into question by our coursework is my fluency instruction. Previously, most fluency practice was done in guided reading, through choral and echo reading activities. Fluency was not explicitly taught in other activities within the classroom. “Even when classroom contexts and experiences are rich, many students do not develop oral reading fluency on their own (Pinnell et al., 1995) and need explicit instruction and experiences that specifically target fluency” (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001, p.334) However, I now realize I need to imbed fluency within partner activities and throughout our reading block. Students need to be reminded that the reason we practice fluency is because

without automaticity and prosody, we cannot comprehend what we read. Rasinski (2006) states, “ I fear that a single-minded focus on using repeated reading to improve reading rate, without commensurate emphasis on reading for meaning, will not have the desired result of improving comprehension and will eventually return reading fluency to a secondary role in the curriculum” (p.1). My fluency instruction was called into question because I did not teach students, through explicit fluency instruction, that that is the ultimate goal.

My fluency instruction was also called into question because although I was using repeated reading in the classroom, I was not tying this into comprehension. Worthy and Broaddus (2001) state, “Repeated reading with attention to text comprehension has been shown to be effective in experimental studies” (p.336). I also rarely used the same text during guided reading. Usually, I would use a new, different text with each group daily. Using the same text in whole group and small groups can be another effective way to teach fluency.

Participating in the Focus Project also put my fluency instruction into question because to complete the components, I was forced to read and study various fluency texts. I realized through doing this that I did not incorporate all three components of fluency into my instruction. Rasinski (2006) states that each component needs to be taught in different ways. He explains, “Implied in their presentation of fluency instruction methods is the notion that word accuracy and automaticity should be taught separately from prosody reading. Accuracy and automaticity, they suggested, are best taught through methods aimed at improving student reading rate—the way to measure progress in these areas. Prosody in reading is taught through modeling, performance, focus on phrasing, assisted reading techniques, and explicit instruction on appropriate intonation” (p.704). I realized that my prior instruction focused more on accuracy and pacing while reading, and I ignored the other parts of fluency.

One specific component of fluency that I often ignored was prosody. Osborne (2003) explains, “Just as the prosodic features help young children to understand and interpret spoken language – the messages conveyed through raised or lowered voices, emphasized words, and sentences spoken rapidly or slowly – so these features seem to help children get meaning from written language” (p.5). I rarely focused on reading with expression in my classroom. So much more attention was geared towards reading the words accurately. My instruction was called into question because I realized I need to spend time explicitly teaching each element of fluency so my students can be fluent readers in every aspect.

I found the “Fluency Instruction” PowerPoint described my prior fluency instruction. It states, “It’s very easy to fall into the dominant pattern of fluency ‘instruction’ that is evolving in elementary schools today: (1) Model fluent reading, (2) Test students’ fluency, (3) Ask them to practice reading, and (4) Test students’ fluency again” (Slide 8). This is what I was doing in my classroom consistently. This presentation encouraged me to break this pattern and explicitly teach fluency more in both guided reading and in whole group activities.

My Plan of Action

Affirmations

Comprehension: Now, I plan on talking to my fellow teachers about what I have learned. I feel the power of teaching comes from collaboration and the sharing of ideas. After attending a teaching conference or seminar, I always look forward to sharing my new knowledge with others, so they can have the chance to change their practices too. Wren (2002) states, “The importance of providing good professional development to engender a population of highly qualified diagnostic reading teachers is paramount, and every child will benefit from such teachers” (p.8). I may also want to share relevant comprehension lesson plans to other teachers. For instance, the summarization lesson plan by Nicole Martin. The lesson offers a clear objective, and shows teachers how to use the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (“Teaching Reading Comprehension II” PowerPoint). My principal is always looking for teachers to lead PLC meetings, so I may offer to give a short presentation on effective comprehension instruction. I have decided to do this because it will force me to think about my thinking and practices even more. In order to present a cohesive and effective meeting, I will need to provide teachers with specific strategies and methods to teach comprehension. Professionally, this will be an excellent opportunity to develop my speaking and presentation skills. I am usually timid and do not wish to talk in front of the group, but I feel I need to force myself in order to grow as a leader.

Print: To expand my thinking of exposure to print, I want to lead a grade-level meeting about this topic. This area is critical for emergent readers, especially first graders. I also want to lead this discussion so I can learn even more about how other teachers do it effectively in their classrooms. Again, this is an area for me to grow professionally because it requires me to be prepared and equipped with specifics on how to achieve a literature rich classroom. Additionally, by leading a discussion on it, it forces me to “practice what I preach”. I will feel more responsible for making sure my classroom is literature-conscious throughout the year.

Reading Teacher: To further transfer theory into practice, I plan on looking back on all the information given to me at teaching conferences and Professional Development seminars. I have been to several fantastic meetings where I have said, “Wow, I want to try that!” and while sometimes I am able to implement it in my classroom successfully, there have been instances where time has passed and I have forgotten what I have learned. I keep my “teacher” information in a file, and plan to review and take notes of what I can do in my classroom in the future. This will help me professionally because I will be able to not only remember some great ideas, but also try them out in my classroom. If there are specific things that work well, I will also be sure to share them with my first grade team.

Questions

Phonics: I recognize that I need to significantly alter my current phonics instruction to better meet the needs of my first graders. I will focus much more heavily on spelling patterns in print by providing explicit instruction. Gaskins (1996/1997) states, “These words become the known words that are used to decode unknown words” (p.314). I will do this both in guided reading and in whole group instruction.

I also want to highlight stretching out words to hear their sounds. Then, I want to teach students how to determine what letter goes with each sound. I can again see this happening mostly in guided reading, but also during whole group at times as well. Specifically, I want to use the “Talk to Yourself Chart” from “Procedures for Word Learning: Making Discoveries about Words” (1996/1997, p.320). This chart requires students to think about the word, the sounds the word makes, the letters, and the spelling pattern.

Another strategy I want to utilize next year is more wordplay. To do this, I want to use songs and chants for transitions, to encourage students to play with words, and also to memorize sounds and rhyming words. Yopp & Yopp (2000) explain, “Songs, chants, and word-sound games are ideally suited toward developing young children's sensitivity to the sound structure of language. Beck and Juel (1995) posited that time spent on word play, nursery or Dr. Seuss rhymes, and general exposure to storybooks contribute to phonemic awareness” (p.130). I also realize songs can help students’ expand their vocabularies as well. Brabham and Villaume (2002) state, “The silly songs they sing and funny rhymes they chant promote a love of words and spontaneous language play” (p.265).

I have decided to implement these strategies because I know how imperative it is for the development of my emergent readers. Specifically I want to use some of the strategies described in Yopp & Yopp’s article (2000). I want to focus more on children matching sounds, isolate sounds, blend sounds together and segment words into their sounds. I want to teach phonics in a variety of settings, including small group and whole group. I also plan to teach it consistently and have it become an integral part of my overall literacy program. It will challenge me professionally because I have little previous phonics/phonemic awareness experience. I feel more confident to implement this component now that I have learned some specifics of how to teach it.

Vocabulary: I feel the course readings have given me great insight into how to teach vocabulary more effectively. First of all, I was reminded that I need to think critically about how I will approach vocabulary instruction that makes sense for my students. Brabham and Villaume state, “The effectiveness of our reading instruction is often undermined by a rush to procedural concerns without prior thoughtful consideration of what we intend to teach” (p. 264). I need to create a realistic plan that will work effectively for my first grade students.

Next year, the first component of vocabulary instruction that I plan to implement is having students engage in more singing. Not only will this help with learning phonics, but it can also aid in developing and expanding students' vocabularies. I also realize it will be important to replay songs, so students become familiar with them. I have found that first graders love to sing, so I feel adding this component will not only be enjoyable, but also foster language development.

During guided reading this year, I focused heavily on fluency and comprehension and did not incorporate enough valid discussion about words. During guided reading next year, I hope to include strategies that will help students decode unfamiliar words, so that they can be more successful in their independent reading. "The Reading Teacher: Vocabulary Instruction: Concerns and visions" states, "A serious commitment to decreasing gaps in vocabulary and comprehension includes instruction that allows all students to learn and use strategies that will enable them to discover and deepen understandings of words during independent reading" (p. 266). I will ask students questions like, "What do you think that word means? Why?", "How do you know?", "What do you do when you come across a word you don't know?" I will also ask students to locate words they find interesting, so the group can discuss them. I will have a whiteboard available, so I can write words down for students.

During read alouds, I plan on incorporating more books about wordplay. One such book called *In the Tall, Tall Grass* by Denise Fleming was highlighted in "For the Love of Words: Fostering Word Consciousness in Young Readers"(2008). This book includes several examples of onomatopoeia, which we could discuss as a group and students could create their own sound words. I plan to read books that focus on vocabulary, but also need to remember to model my thinking and "think out loud" for students to understand what I do when I encounter an unfamiliar word. It's important that I continue to expose students to the diverse classroom library and encourage students to read a variety of genres. This year, I had a corner bookshelf in my classroom in which I would put "Books of Interest" or books that we had read during read alouds. I found that students loved to reread these books during independent reading time. I will continue to do this next year as well.

Another element in "For the Love of Words" that I will implement next year is a word wall that focuses on what we learning about. I particularly liked the synonym word wall that was described in the article. I will have students write happy words, sad words, moving words, etc (p.2). I think it is important to include students in the creation of the walls of the classroom so they can feel ownership. As Graves and Watts-Taffe describe, "Walls are great places to post words that will boost word consciousness" (p.2).

Next year, I also hope to have a "Word Journal" that students can write interesting or unfamiliar words in, to be discussed during morning calendar. I want to promote the use of dictionaries in my classroom as well. Today, I feel like so many students do not understand how to use a dictionary, so working on this skill could be helpful. I could then have the "Word of the Day", taken from the Word Journal. The class helper could go to the dictionary and look up the word,

and this could lead into a class discussion about words. I feel that more time needs to be devoted to talking about words, and this could be a relatively quick and easy way to accomplish during our normal calendar time. To connect to writing, students will be asked to write a sentence using the newly learned words. Graves (2008) states, "Writing provides an extremely powerful and convenient setting for fostering word consciousness" (p.188). I also want to designate a special place on the word wall for these vocabulary words.

I really liked an idea presented in "Bumping into Spicy, Tasty Words that Catch Your Tongue" which has students using alliteration. It is another great way to promote significant interaction with words that I think could be successful for first graders. I would provide several examples of alliteration sentences for students (like "The Hippopotamus" or "The Eagle") and then have them create their own sentences (Baumann, Ware & Edwards, p.5). They could also draw a picture that accompanied their sentence. I feel that alliteration would be meaningful for young students because it would engage them in word play (Baumann, 2007, p.5). I hope to have students look in books, poems, thesauruses, etc. to find words to use in their alliteration sentences. This would be another way to promote solid vocabulary instruction into the classroom. Including little activities like this next year could help to enrich students' vocabularies.

In the future, I also want students to be more responsible for transferring their vocabulary knowledge into their reading. Baumann (2007) discusses how students were asked to find specific uncommon words in their reading, and try to figure out what each of the new words meant. After this, students discussed their thinking and rationale. What a great way for students to dive into their reading, and also have a purpose for their reading. This is another strategy that I want to explore soon.

Overall, I realize I need to be excited about words and vocabulary and I need to show this excitement to my students daily. This will help to encourage them to love words as well. I also understand how critical it is to expose new words to my underprivileged and ELL students who have limited vocabularies. Kieffer and Lesaux explain in "Breaking Down Words to Build Meaning: Morphology, Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension in the Urban Classroom", "Instruction that provides strategies is crucial for ELLs and for many of their classmates in urban schools who face similar struggles with reading comprehension" (p.2). I feel explicit vocabulary instruction is vital for students because of its connection to reading comprehension. Knowing that vocabulary and comprehension go hand-in-hand, I need to do my best to incorporate language instruction that will help them become more efficient readers. Professionally, incorporating these elements into my classroom will help me become a better reading teacher. It will help me create a plan for providing students with rich vocabulary instruction that is part of an overall successful program.

Fluency: Next year, I plan on incorporating fluency instruction in more areas of the classroom than just guided reading. I want to do much more Readers' Theatre because it promotes fluency in a fun and different way, and gives students an opportunity to practice their social and presentation skills. Rasinski (2006) comments, "Students doing repeated readings with Readers Theatre made twice the gain in reading rate than a comparison group, even though the focus of the repeated reading was on expressive, meaning-filled reading and not on speed. The Readers Theatre students also made substantially greater progress than the comparison group on an informal reading inventory-a measure of reading that includes reading comprehension as well as fluency." (p.705).

I also want to do more reverse echo reading with students, giving them the chance to be the "teacher". I think this would be enjoyable for students, and also a great way to practice their fluency. I also want students to practice fluency in partners, by echo reading short stories. I want to continue to encourage my struggling readers to re-read texts often. Rasinski (2006) explains, "Repeated reading is a key instructional method for developing reading fluency" (p.707). Additionally, I want to use echo and choral reading often through different activities in the classroom.

I believe that each of these components of fluency, in addition to teaching prosody and automaticity, will benefit students' overall reading achievement. Professionally, teaching fluency more explicitly will aid in my development of becoming a more efficient teacher of reading. It will assist me in thinking about the four components of reading and how to create an appropriate program for my students.