

I believe that to be an effective teacher I must get to know the students as individual learners and create a warm interactive environment where students have a wonderful support system to help them reach their greatest potential.

Students deserve to be immersed in a literature rich environment with a great teacher to guide them along the way. I agree with Vygotsky's learning theory, he believed that students succeed when they are learning from a more expert other. This is where scaffolding comes in. I believe it is important to implement a gradual release of responsibility. While their learning is occurring, I would gradually release my support until the student can do it on their own. As a part of my instruction, I would also focus on the student's zone of proximal development. Much like Vygotsky, I believe that I need to find the range in between where a student is and where I want them to be. By working in that zone, optimal learning will occur (Tomkins, 2006, p. 14).

Vygotsky also believed that children's prior knowledge and past experiences help them make sense of new situations. I believe that this directly relates to their comprehension of what they are reading. It is important that they can make connections to what they know and what they are learning; this will help them grow in their literacy development (Tomkins, 2006, p. 14). According to Vygotsky, language and social interaction are key to student learning. Quoting Vygotsky, Tomkins said that "language helps to organize thought, and children use language to learn as well as to communicate and share experiences with others." I want the students to share their ideas and experiences. This will expand the students thinking and also help them to learn from each other.

I would also like to expand using Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding by using his idea of: "I do, you watch," where I the teacher would do demonstration in such case as a read aloud: "I do, you help," where the students show participation, for example in a shared reading; "you do, I help," where the students practice the literacy tasks and an example of this would be in the guided reading; "you do, I watch," where the students perform and become the demonstrator, which would be an example of independent reading. I believe Vygotsky's theory is great for a gradual release of responsibility. This is not always a linear model, so using assessment would be very beneficial to allow me to see what works for each student.

In addition to Vygotsky's theory, I will also incorporate Piaget's theory of Constructivism; while keeping a balance of these according to the students needs. In this theory, the students are at the center. They work as active learners by linking prior knowledge to new information. I believe this theory heightens student's inquiry. KWL charts would be a great way to help incorporate Piaget's ideas. A Constructivist theory allows the students to relate directly to what they are learning. They are able to make connections to the world and the things they are reading. Being able to pick their own books and own topics for writing will keep them engaged in their learning. With these theories in place, the students will be able to reach their full potential. I believe engagement is a key aspect to student's success. As they are actively involved in their own learning they are taking on that responsibility and acknowledging the process. Learning through practice is so important. When it comes right down to it, we can tell the

student something but they probably will forget, we can show them something and they will remember but if we involve them they will understand (Tomkins, 2006, p. 12).

Reading and Writing Behaviors:

Each age group is at different learning levels. It is very important that I apply a developmentally appropriate curriculum. In a 6-8th grade classroom you will see a growing range of skills and interests. It is my job as the teacher to get to know and understand those different abilities in each of my students. At this age, students are restless and need constant motion. Students at this age already have fine motor capability and prefer new tasks and experiences.

When they write, they write about a broader range of themes such as: the world, cultural history, diversity, environment, and characters of different literature. They may also include a worrisome theme such as death, divorce and world issues. 6-8th graders have the ability to know the proper mechanics of writing. They usually do not have a love for writing. They often write better than they speak, though.

When looking at the different reading and writing behaviors of a 6-8th grader, it is a good idea to assess where they are at the different points of the year. It is important for me to use the reading and writing continuums when using the formal and informal assessments. In 6-8th grade, students are generally around the self-extending and/or advanced levels of the writing continuums. The students are becoming more responsible for their own writing. They are finding resources, drafting, editing, revising, and publishing their work. 6-8th graders are able to expand their topic through more pages of text. They now realize that there are many different purposes to writing, such as

persuasive, informative, expository, etc. Students are going to be at different levels of writing; this is where the continuum can also be useful to help me see where the students are and where I want them to be. With this continuum, I am able to better plan my instruction based on the students needs (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p. 7-8).

I felt that the continuums from Guiding Readers and Writers by Irene C. Fountas and Gay Sue Pinnell were an accurate portrayal of where my fourth grade students might be developmentally. As stated earlier, the developmental levels that I think would be shown most in my classroom would be Self-Extending and Advanced, with some students still in the Transitional stage of their writing development. No two students are the same so I may have several students in all different developmental levels.

Assessments:

There will be constant assessment in my classroom. As I watch and observe the learning taking place, I can adjust accordingly to make our next lesson a success. In my future classroom, I plan on having my expectations work in conjunction with the curriculum of the school district that I will be in. To note the progress of the students, I will keep a file folder for every students work marked by the month. This will help me see the students' progress in their literacy skills each month. Each student will also have their own reading and writing baskets to store their notebooks, folders and books. I will also keep notes on a daily bases to see if the learning is occurring in a shorter period of time. This will help me plan from day to day if I would like to make changes in my instruction.

Constant assessment will help me to see what things we need to work on as a whole class and things that I might want a specific student to work on. While the students work on their own, in a small group or in a large group; I will choose a different group each time to focus my attention on for assessment.

While having reading and writing workshops a few days a week, I will be able to assess what the next step will be for my students learning. I could then take some students aside to work on mini lessons, strategies or running records with individual students. I believe conferencing is very important; it gets the student talking about their thinking and helps me guide them to the next step. The one on one allows me to work specifically on one student's needs and gives them my full attention. This will be another level of scaffolding where the students are doing but I am helping. In conferences they are using their language, their ideas and their work to show me where they are; it is my job to help them focus on the parts to expand on to help them reach their greatest potential as readers and writers.

I would also like to assess using text tapping. This allows students to use their background knowledge to guide them in a writing activity. This writing activity is geared toward different genres and allows the student to write according to the genre. This will help me assess where their understanding is with each genre.

The reader's notebooks and graphic organizers will also be a great assessment tool. This will allow me to see the students thinking and understanding. It helps them to link their prior knowledge to what they are reading now. With these assessments, I can see where their thinking is according to what we are reading and the strategies we are

working on. It also allows me to focus in on the individual student. In a 6-8th grade classroom, students need to become excited to learn and prepare for a challenge. As a teacher I need to move them to higher level thinking and broaden their understanding of different genres. More ways to further assess would be through reading and writing workshops. This would be a time for students to work individually or in a group. To expand their knowledge and help me guide my instruction, I could have the students use graphic organizers as they read and use social cooperation through literature circles. This could also be used as a gradual release of responsibility. As I informally assess their workshops, I can recognize the strategies that I would need to show the students with explicit instruction. This will also help me group my students according to where they are developmentally so we can work on these strategies as a group. In addition, this would be a good time for them to learn from one another. Taking time to have some students share is a great social tool for them and assessment tool for me. These assessments can also show me if more time is needed, as fourth graders tend to want to read and write more. With the students at the center, and constant assessment being done, I believe I would have good directionality of where my instruction should go.

Concepts/Strategies:

As I evaluate the assessments in my classroom, I will apply the literacy concepts and other strategies that I have learned in my experience thus far. With each thing I do in the classroom, I will apply the ideas of Vygotsky's learning theory and Piaget's constructivist theory. If I am introducing a new idea or theme in the classroom, it is a good idea to go over what we already know about the topic. This will get the students

thinking and they are then able to relate to what we are doing, thus making connections to it. During our reading workshops, I will use Vygotsky’s idea of scaffolding to help the students with their reading strategies. I will also have the students use graphic organizers and post-its to help them better understand the details of the stories. When I notice there are certain strategies to work on, I will use explicit instruction until they can understand what to do when they are having trouble with their reading. I will constantly be working on concepts and strategies as we go through the different aspects of a balanced literacy classroom. As I model a good reader and writer, the students can explore and apply the concepts that I have taught them. As these students are becoming more responsible learners, they like to feel like they are an important part of the classroom. They will know their expectations and know what to do when there is a mistake or a problem. While I give them feedback, their classmates will also be helping in that area as well. To construct these ideas, I will use “I” language to show what good readers and writers do. These strategies and theories will be evident throughout my instruction.

Strategies that I will teach for reading and writing:

Reading	Writing
* Questioning * Thinking: “The little voice” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - before - during - after 	* Six traits of writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organization - ideas - conventions - voice

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Predicting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - word choice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Connecting * Inferring * Synthesizing * Analyzing * Critiquing * Monitoring/Cross Checking – comprehension * Solving words * Sharing * Using background knowledge for understanding * Visualizing * Evaluating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Sentence Fluency * Writing process: “little voice” - Before - During - After * Genre Characteristics * Evaluating * KWL Chart

(Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p. 317-318)

Instructional Components:

Balanced literacy is a very important component for the students’ success. When I apply the components, I will make sure to connect with the children and keep them engaged.

Read Aloud: In a read aloud, I do not have to choose content based material. This will give me the freedom to pick a story that is engaging and familiar for the students; also allowing me to show different types of texts. Read alouds will happen often in my classroom because it is a great modeling tool for my students. This will also further enforce that people read for a variety of purposes. As I model good reading strategies, I will also have the students think aloud to engage them and get them thinking on a higher

level. The students will also have post it notes to mark down their thinking and connect their prior knowledge. A read aloud is a good time for me to model the “little voice” of thinking aloud. As I think aloud I am modeling my predictions and comprehension. As I read to the students, I will be modeling reading behaviors as well. While the students are actively engaged in the story that I am reading to them, I will use the stories to introduce new vocabulary and comprehension. This will further introduce how to read different genres. To go along with this, the stories I choose will be small text, with complex plots and rich vocabulary. Looking at the Vygotsky’s learning theory, a read aloud would fall under the “I do, you watch,” aspect. The read alouds will take place in a group reading area that is quiet and comfortable. The books I read aloud to them will be available for them if they’d like to read it again at a later time.

Shared Reading: Shared Reading is a great way to model effective reading strategies. I will pick a text that will correlate with the concepts and curriculum that I am teaching. With the books I choose, I will introduce to my fourth graders new genres and concepts. These books are ones that they are not able to read on their own. This will be an engaging experience as I model strategies that good readers use. The students will follow along in a small text or by watching as I read. These texts will be read several times and the students will read with me the familiar parts. When looking at Vygotsky’s learning theory, this would go under “I do, you watch,” and “I do, you help.” Shared readings are done in a group area where the students feel comfortable.

Shared Writing: In shared writing I, as the teacher, would be doing the writing while the students participate and tell me what to write. This is a way to gradually release

the responsibility onto the students for when they do their own writing. Here we would work on concepts and strategies together. The students would be thinking about how they can apply these strategies. I will use “I” language and further implement the “little voice”. This would be the “I do, you help,” of the Vygotsky theory.

Mini Lessons: This is a great way to focus my explicit instructions on a specific strategy that the students need to work on. I will give explicit instruction by modeling skills and strategies. There are times when we do mini lessons as a whole group and others where I will divide the students in groups according to the strategies I would like them to further develop. The students will then listen and think about how to apply these strategies. This would be understood by Vygotsky’s “I do, you help” portion of his theory.

Guided Reading: In guided reading, I would guide a reading lesson for a small group of students to meet their individual needs. The students will participate and read along with the books that I have provided for them. The books that I pick, the students will be able to read with 90-94% accuracy. The text chosen for each student is appropriate for their developmental learning. They would then demonstrate to me the strategies that they use. This will be done daily in my classroom as I will bring a different small group of students to work with me at the guided reading table. The students will read as a group and individually. Each group will be concentrating on the strategies and concepts specific to their learning needs at that time. They will be using the “little voice” and will discuss and revisit their thinking. This will help me to guide my instruction as I

assess them and help them with their strategies. I will spend time with each student and have them read to me. At this time I will observe and take running records. During guided reading, I will use Vygotsky's gradual release of responsibility to guide their understanding. This would be the "you do, I help" aspect of Vygotsky's theory. Guided reading is a good time to: introduce text, make prompts, provide info and draw their attention to important characters. The guided reading will take place at the horse shoe table during a quiet time.

Guided Writing: In guided writing, I would assist the students in writing along the way. Students are the writers and I help them with the process of writing, types of writing and conventions of writing. As the students come up with their ideas for writing, I assist them with strategies of further developing. This would be the "you do, I help" of the Vygotsky theory.

Independent Reading: This is a time for my students to read on their own and work with a variety of books at their level. I will observe as the children read to themselves. This would be a good example of "you do, I watch." Going along with my philosophy of teaching, I think it is important to have a comfortable classroom for the students to excel in. This is why for the independent reading for example I would have space in the room that is cozy and has bean bag chairs. If students are comfortable reading and I show enthusiasm for reading then they will be more compelled to enjoy it as well. Independent reading will show the students that people read for a variety of purposes. In my classroom, there will be time each day for the students to have independent reading. During Independent Reading, I will observe students reading and

writing behaviors and keep records. Short book talks will also be given. Individual conferences will also be going on explained in my assessment. This is a time for the students to read, and keep a record of their reading and understanding. They will confer with me and reflect on their reading. This would be the “you do, I watch” aspect of Vygotsky’s theory.

Independent Writing: During independent writing, there is no assistance from the teacher and the sole responsibility is on the students. This is a good time to assess their progress. In my classroom, the students will be writing on their own daily. There will be times when the students can write about whatever they like. Other times, I will give them a choice between two things to write about. The students will be writing quietly at their desks. Vygotsky would describe this as “you do, I watch.” As they write, I am able to see where their creativity will take them and how far along they are in their writing. This will help me to prepare my next step in my instruction to meet their learning needs. It is during this time that I will have individual conversations with the students to have them reflect on their writing and show me where they are. I will also have brief “writer’s talks” to touch on the writer’s craft. I can then give the students a direction or strategy to use to further develop their writing. This would also be Vygotsky’s “you do, I watch” theory. I will also incorporate literature circles. These would be book clubs with no more than 6 students. I will find books that I believe they would enjoy and that are high quality literature; then we all read the same book. As the teacher, I will be teaching strategies through these literature circles and will be focusing the students thinking. We will chart and reflect on our thinking and discuss the book. The students will share their

background knowledge and questions they have. They will reflect on the book, make connections and express specific examples. This would be Vygotsky's "you do, I help". I also believe that literature circles are a great way to use social interactions to further their learning.

My reading and writing workshops will last about 60 minutes. The mini lessons and brief talks will happen within the first 5-15 minutes. The middle 35-50 minutes will be for Independent work, guided work and investigations for research. The guided aspect will be broken in to who groups to focus on certain strategies. The concluding 5-10 minutes will be for group sharing, which relates directly to philosophy of social interaction (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001, p.57).

In all parts of the balanced literacy approach, Vygotsky's theory is a beneficial way to heighten the students learning. As I bring out new ideas and concepts that the students may or may not have heard before would be a good time to incorporate Piaget's theory of Constructivism. An appropriate balance of my theories and beliefs in my classroom will help students achieve success. As I get to know my students and what works best for them as individual learners; then I can better apply my theories. As a teacher I will influence my students for a lifetime. It is my privilege to inspire my students and help them strive to their greatest potential.

As I work toward a caring, responsible community in our classroom, I as their teacher have to set those standards from day one. Each student comes into the classroom with their own behaviors and learning levels and it is my responsibility to help them strive for success as a part of our community. We as a classroom will come up with

things we promise to do as a community of learners. They will have their daily responsibilities and a routine schedule which fits where they are developmentally. My classroom will be based around balanced literacy which is very important for a student's success. As I incorporate the reading and writing lessons that I have mentioned earlier, I will also use teachable moments to incorporate literacy.

In conclusion, I believe that children should be immersed in literature. The environment should be engaging and gets their creativity flowing. It is a very important idea to encourage the love of reading and to show that I love it as the teacher as well. In the future, I plan to incorporate Vygotsky's theory and Piaget's Constructivist theory. I believe my philosophy and literacy plan have what it takes to help my students achieve to their highest potential.

Reflection

My own learning at Alverno has prepared me for the classroom on so many levels. I have had the opportunity to work in field placements that have allowed for me to first-hand demonstrate balanced literacy. For instance, I have worked with students on shared writing this past semester in my 8th grade class. Students created a news stories from photos in the Journal Sentinel with partners and in small groups. Groups developed stories that told what happened before, during and after the picture was taken. Students worked collaborate on a shared writing piece that could be either imaginary or newsworthy. This assignment also demonstrates social interaction abilities.

I feel that I fully understand the gradual release of responsibility. I especially understand the concept better now that I have been in a middle school classroom. Students need assistance at the beginning, especially at the beginning of the school year. As the year goes on, they have developed a better understanding of processes like the 6 traits of writing and can work more independently.

One concept that I feel I could further develop in order to be an effective teacher is Assessments. I have learned a lot this semester about assessment in my fourth field, but I have worked mostly with rubric-driven assessments and not many pen and paper assessments. This may be the “Alverno” in me, but I noticed I have not used enough variety in my assessment process and would like to see more variety in my future lessons.

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