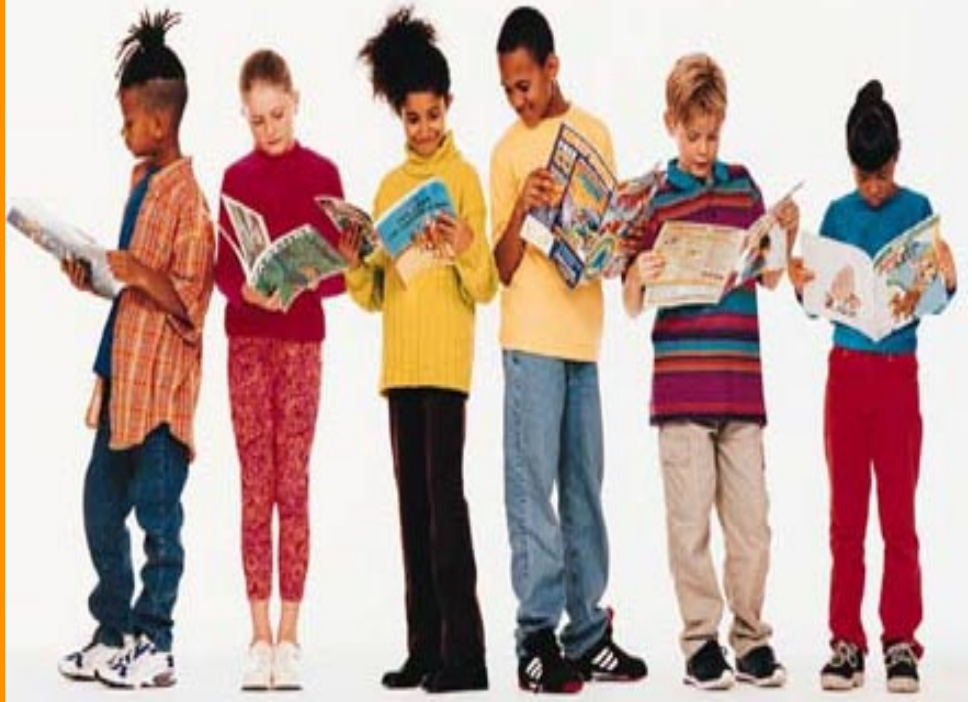




Literate Environment

Research Based Set Up for the Literacy Classroom



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Why is the Literacy Environment Important?

There are a variety of research documents that study the design of the physical environment, social environment, effective routines and grouping practices in a literacy classroom. The environment of a classroom helps students learn to the best of their abilities. It is important for teachers to understand why they are using certain practices in their classroom and how it will help their students. In this newsletter, there is a section designated to the physical and social environment along with a section for the routine and grouping practices that are effective in a literacy classroom. Keep reading to find out what research-based practices are recommended for the upper elementary classrooms, grades 3 to 6.

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Classroom Library

- Ten books per student
- Label bins by genre
- Face books outward and change featured titles often
- Color code books with the reading level
- Rotate books throughout the year

Furniture

- Rolling carts
- Reading carpets
- U-shaped tables
- Designate small group centers

Tips to Improve the Physical Environment of your Classroom

Bulletin Boards

- Wall displays are most effective when students & teachers create them together!
- Alphabet displays
- Lunch menu
- Daily Schedule

Other Tips!

- Model the clean-up process
- Post pictures of students properly engaged in each learning center
- Post instructions/expectations

Effective Social Environment

Research has shown that effective teachers use coaching rather than telling when interacting with students and engage their students in higher-level questioning (Taylor, et al, 2004). As described by Allyn (2011), “ask questions you don’t know the answers to!” Teachers should make learning goals clear, ask questions to monitor student understanding, provide useful feedback to your students, model and explain strategies, and provide opportunities for small-group instruction.

However, purposeful engagement doesn’t happen without planning! Setting up an environment where all students feel comfortable sharing about their reading is essential, whether it’s by encouraging reading at home through the use of “lending book bags” or simply giving students opportunities to talk to the teacher and one another about their reading. Here are some extension activities to consider:

- After students share what they read with a partner, select several students to tell the class what their partners shared with them—add accountability for reading, plus pinpoint listening, summarization, and retelling skills for the partners, as suggested by Hartley (2008).
- Other activities include writing a review of the book on a large sticky-note to leave inside the front cover for the next student, emailing pen pals or parents about the book they’re reading, or choosing four students (one in each corner) to share a short “commercial” for their book (Padak, 2010).

Establishing Effective Routines

Daily reading instruction routines should include reading *to*, *with*, and *by* children (Reutzel and Clark, 2011). Shanahan (2004, quoted in Reutzel and Clark, 2011) recommends that teachers spend a minimum of 120 total minutes of reading instruction in a literacy block, divided into four segments: *word work*, *writing*, *fluency*, and *vocabulary/comprehension strategy instruction*. This can be adjusted depending on the age and needs of your students, but however you plan it, seek to connect reading to students' interests, lives, and the real world.

Silent reading can and should be incorporated into the daily classroom routine. Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006) recommend the R⁵ approach:

- Read and Relax – while reading in a comfortable location (Allyn, 2011), students can be instructed to mark their favorite parts (or interesting words to share with the class) on a sticky-note. They could also look for interesting setting descriptions, powerful language, irony, etc.
- Reflect and Respond – after reading, students can reflect on their reading, respond to brief prompts, or predict what will happen next in a reading log.
- Rap (share or discuss) – students could share with a partner what they read about...then have that partner then share with the class what the other student read about, as suggested by Hartley (2008), as a listening/summarization extension and to add accountability. Other activities include emailing pen pals or parents about the book they're reading, writing a review of the book on a large sticky-note for the next student, or having four students (one in each corner) share a short "commercial" for their book (Padak, 2010).

Literacy centers are another helpful teaching tool—but in addition to teaching your students how to do each activity, be sure they know how to effectively transition to/from each activity! Some ideas suggested by Ankrum and Bean (2008) include buddy-reads, a word building table, a listening center, computer-based skill-and-drill centers, a science researcher's lab, a poetry center, a "book nook" for individual reading, a writing center. The possibilities are only limited by your creativity!

Establishing routines is beyond essential to the success of any classroom. Instructional routines "reflect scientific research on reading instruction and can be integrated easily into any reading program that teaches the five essential components of reading (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension)". Creating structure enhances the likelihood of success for the students. Students at any level thrive on routine, knowing their expectations, and how to achieve those to reach success.

In a reading program, it is important to keep all students and their levels in mind, and in turn differentiate instruction. It is recommended to begin with whole group instruction, and then differentiate instruction through small group work. According to research, "implementing small group differentiated instruction in the classroom leads to an increase in reading achievement" (Lou, Abrami, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, & d'Apollonia, 1996; Mathes & Fuchs, 1994; Moody, Vaughn, & Schumn, 1997). While the teacher leads small group instruction, the other students can partake in reading centers structured throughout the classroom. These are special places organized in the classroom for students to work in small groups, pairs, or individually. This routine creates times for success for the students to practice, demonstrate, and extend literacy learning independently. All in all, it is essential to create a routine that works for each individual class of students. All students have unique needs which need to be reflected in the typical routine in a reading instruction.

How to Group Your Students

There are a variety of grouping practices while teaching literacy. It is important that teachers use more than one type of grouping during students' literacy work. Below are several research-based grouping practices found best for the students to learn to their full potential.

1. Whole Group Instruction and Small Groups
 2. Whole Group Instruction and Individual Work
 3. Whole Group Instruction and Paired Grouping
- (Moody, S.W., Schumm, J.S., and Vaughn, S., 2000)

When working in small groups the question that arises is, should these groups be heterogeneous or homogenous? There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these types of grouping. When placing students in small groups, make sure you follow these tips for heterogeneous and homogenous grouping.

Heterogeneous

1. Assign specific roles for each child to fulfill.
2. When the group needs help, have a rule about asking two or more other classmates before asking the teacher. (There is only one teacher making it difficult to answer every question.)
3. Peers must be willing, suitable partners to be able to work well together.
4. Teach constructive criticism before sending the students off into their groups.

(Elbaum, B., Moody, S.M., and Schumm, J.S.,

Homogenous (Same-Ability Grouping)

1. Only group this way when same ability grouping will enhance learning and is important.
2. This should not be based on I.Q. It should be based on their literacy skill only.
3. This type of grouping should allow easy reassessment and flexibility to move students to different groups.
4. Only a small number of groups should be used in the class so the teacher can plan for easier direct instruction and differentiation of materials.

(Hollifield, J., 1987)

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