

Characteristics of exemplary first-grade literacy instruction

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Foundational Questions

- What does exemplary 1st grade literacy instruction look like?
- When observed, what would these teachers do in their classrooms?
- When interviewed what would these teachers say about their beliefs and practices regarding 1st grade literacy instruction?
- Who would be chosen if administrators were asked to identify the most outstanding 1st grade educators in their districts?

Theoretical Rationale

- To capture as many dimensions as possible of expert performances.
- To provide insight from experts about concerns of constructivists, explicit, and balanced instructional approaches.
- To study exemplary teachers' practices and beliefs regarding constructivist models, explicit instructional approaches, and balanced perspectives that would meaningfully enhance the reading community's understanding of these issues.

Criteria for Selection

- Successful in educating large proportions of their students to be readers and writers
- Achievement records, test performances, reading levels, and writing abilities
- Teaching philosophy matched practices in classroom
- Student enthusiasm and engagement regarding reading and writing
- Referred to with positive comments from others

Teacher/Student Background

- 6 teachers from 3 school districts, in New Jersey
- Teachers had 9 to 25 years of experience and all had master's degrees
- Students were from middle to lower-middle income families
- School populations 50% Caucasian, 20% African American, 10% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 10% other

Procedures

- Visit each classroom eight times during the language arts block and twice for a full day during the academic school year
- Recorded information about literacy instruction
- Teachers interviewed concerning their philosophies and practices

Teacher Philosophies

- Integration of content Core
- Designed programs around literacy themes
- Small group instruction
- Positive atmosphere
- Home-school connections

Classroom Environment

- **Literacy rich**
- **Social interactions – desks grouped**
- **Learning centers**
- **Group area with teacher chair**
- **Guided area**
- **Student materials in plastic bags**
- **Materials were visually and physically accessible to students**

Reading Experiences

- **Morning meeting**
- **Partner reading**
- **Guiding reading groups**
- **Independent reading- literacy centers**

***The organizational system provided easy access for individual and collaborative reading in school.**

Writing Experiences

- **Journaling**
- **Mini lessons**
- **Use of writing process**
- **Writing integrated into content areas**
- **Writing incorporated into guided reading groups**

How Skills Were Taught

- Guided Reading Lessons
- Individualized instruction and evaluation
- Home-school connection
- Created their own materials

* Interviewers were impressed with the knowledge these teachers had about the teaching of reading skills.

Classroom Management

- Physical design of the classroom
- Self-directed learners
- Mastery of rules and routines
- Teacher could see all students
- High level of *with-it-ness*
- Good planning of interesting activities
- Respectful atmosphere

Summary

- Happy, productive, classroom communities
- Rich with materials
- Varied grouped experiences
- Developmentally appropriate practices with emphasis on skill development
- Consistent management techniques
- Engaging activities
- Variety of reading/writing implementations

“The instruction in early literacy that we observed involved explicit skill development taught in the context of authentic literature and integrated with writing and content area connections.”

The End

