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Philosophy of Reading: Grammar, Spelling, Writing,

Vocabulary, and Comprehension

 Effectively teaching language arts in the early elementary years is an extremely important undertaking, because reading forms the foundation for each child’s development and equips each child for lifelong learning. Language arts therefore constitutes a fundamental skill that we use in nearly every aspect of everyday life. Within language arts, students need strong skills in grammar, spelling, writing, vocabulary, and comprehension. Without proper teaching in the early elementary years, students will not develop necessary skills. It is important that every teacher transform each student into a strong reader, writer, thinker, and speaker. Accordingly, I believe that teaching and investing significant classroom instruction time on these different aspects is incredibly important to their development for lifelong learning and success. As an early elementary teacher, this paper will outline how I will teach and incorporate grammar, spelling, writing, vocabulary, and comprehension into my classroom teaching in meaningful and engaging ways that will ultimately translate to important language arts skills.

 The first area I will address is spelling. Many adults have awful spelling skills. The blame for this can largely be placed at the feet of elementary school teachers. Weekly spelling tests are simply not effective for students. Students memorize the word for one weekly test and then forget it. Spelling typically is perceived as a very boring thing to learn and teach; therefore we as teachers must come up with fun, interesting, and intriguing ways to teach it. Teachers should provide students with words that relate to their life, and ones they will remember and understand. In addition, spelling should be taught in an individualized, meaningful way. For example, in order to improve the spelling skills of my students, I need to implement effective strategies such as expanding vocabularies, word walls, and opportunities to proofread one another’s writing. One specific strategy I will teach my students is “LSCCC”: look-say-cover-copy-compare. In my classroom not only do I plan to implement all of these things, but I also plan to convince students that spelling is not boring, and create an attitude in which spelling is fun and students want to be superb spellers!

 The second area I will focus on in this paper is grammar. Grammar, like spelling, can be another very dry, boring thing to teach, so we teachers must make it fun, engaging, and interactive. I believe that there are six steps to teaching grammar: motivation of students, systematic teaching, adequate teacher preparation, focus on the content at hand, obvious enthusiasm for the content, and sentence diagramming. I will move through each of these steps with my students, checking along the way for proficient understanding, to improve their grammar skills in a meaningful way. Moreover, much of this grammar instruction will involve my students’ own compositions, as the best way to teach grammar is through their own writing. I will continually go back and do mini-lessons later on the areas of grammar that require reinforcement and improvement. Additionally, I will teach my students many strategies they can use including: proof reading and dictation, word rings, word walls, word rule games, and peer testing. Improving my students’ grammar will lead to better writing, speaking, spelling, and reading.

 Next, I will discuss writing. Many students will be natural writers, while others will dread it more than any other subject area taught at school. There are many aspects to become a proficient writer. Not only do students need to acquire actual writing skills for short stories, prompts, and essays, but they also need writing strategies that ultimately lead to good, solid construction of writing pieces. I will implement things such as story pyramids, postcard projects, RAFT, quick writing, and 4-2-1 activities to nurture the development of writing skills. Ultimately when my students write, I will grant them time, ownership (choice), and response. We will regularly talk about what good writing looks like through modeling, and also have many posters around the room detailing rules for writing and reasons to revise. My students will create a journal of writing pieces from each month of the school year, so at the end of the year both I and each student will be able to self analyze just how much their writing has improved.

 I will next focus on vocabulary. If not taught properly, vocabulary (like spelling and grammar) it will be deemed by students as boring, and become hard to teach. Traditionally, vocabulary is taught by memorizing a list of words, and giving students some type of activity to accompany it, which is identical to the way we incorrectly teach spelling as well. Instead, teachers must utilize multiple strategies, read good books, have intentionality when teaching, and above all else, help students fall in love with words. Students can have as much practice as they want with vocabulary, but if they do not have a relationship with the words, it is meaningless. Furthermore, vocabulary is not just an activity, it is a content area, impacting every subject. Within vocabulary, there are tier 1, tier 2, and tier 3 words. A common pedagogical mistake, is picking the wrong kinds of words to teach kids. Tier 1 words are basic everyday words, that generally everyone knows. These do not need much attention. Tier 2 words are the kinds of words used in textbooks, and there are multiple ways to use such words. These are the words teachers should be teaching. Tier 3 words are concepts, generalizations, and ideas that belong to a specific area. For example, the word mitosis only refers to biology. These words do need taught; teachers, however, should not devote all focus on these words because they are generally not used in everyday life. Frayer models are a strong strategy to use in vocabulary, but particularly for tier 3 vocabulary words. An additional strategy that would benefit every learner in my classroom is one that incorporates the definition, part of speech, two sentence examples, and a visual. Vocabulary is a strong indicator of intelligence, makes writing stronger, and overall will make my students better speakers, writers, and readers.

 The final component I will address in this paper is comprehension. Very few teachers teach comprehension in the classroom. As a teacher, this will set me apart because I know the value in teaching comprehension, as I struggled with it myself in elementary school. Comprehension is key to becoming a good reader. It is important to teach students to analyze, infer, deduct, induct, seriate, and clarify. Additional strategies that I will teach my students to use are: did you hear what I heard?, think alouds, important sentences, reciprocal reading, and peer-lead discussions. Think alouds are a particularly important key to comprehension and metacognition. This strategy gets students to think about their own thinking, and furthermore make meaning for themselves. This is also a during reading strategy of “text to self”, that is then followed up by “text to text” and “text to world”, post reading. In addition, I have one particular strategy that will help my students more than anything else in the area of comprehension. Picture questioning gets students to do the “text to self” strategy, and teaches them to pose their own questions to answer during the reading. This strategy is broken down into three categories of questions: literal, inferential, and critical. Literal questions can be answered by simply looking at a picture, or paragraph of words. Inferential questions can be answered with some inferring, and drawing conclusions from the picture or paragraph of words. Critical questions get students to relate the picture or paragraph of words to themselves. This strategy translates particularly well to PSSA and other state testing. It gives students useful tools and resources. I anticipate that comprehension is a particular area of language arts that my students will struggle with, and so I fully intend to give them a surplus of support and strategies.

 In conclusion, early childhood elementary teachers have a huge and critically important task of teaching students to write, read, comprehend, have proper grammar, and correctly spell. Though this seems like a daunting task, many of these concepts overlap. Additionally, all of these areas can be implemented into every curricular area. There are many ways teachers can creatively teach all of these skills and concepts in fun, meaningful, and engaging ways. Accordingly, I will fill my classroom with countless strategies that will help my students flourish into resilient readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers.