

Our Theory-to-Practice as Reading Teachers

“Our Theory-to-Practice as Reading Teachers” is a document that CTL teachers have been building and revising for a long time. It will never be finished—on purpose—as we continue to read research, observe our students, and reflect on our practice. In just a few pages, in the most straightforward language we can devise, we lay claim to a shared knowledge base for our teaching.

I invite other K–8 faculties to cut to the chase in the same way by defining a pedagogy that matches your theories of reading development and literary appreciation. This can be a challenging exercise for a group of teachers. But it’s also collaborative, affirming, and useful—to teachers as professional colleagues; to students who benefit from their teachers’ shared vision and methods; and to their families, who learn why teachers are teaching as they do.

Because we believe that...

we...

-
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• instruction should be knowledge-based, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• read research, read about pedagogy, observe students, and gather and interpret classroom data. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• learning to read is a difficult, time-intensive process, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• do everything we can to make reading predictable, sensible, easy, meaningful, and enjoyable. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• interest leads to engagement, and engagement leads to achievement, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• invite each student to choose the books he or she reads. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• it takes frequent, sustained practice to learn to read with fluency and accuracy, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• make time in class every day for students to read books they want to read;• ask students to read every night at home for half an hour;• make independent book reading the primary activity of our reading program. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• children comprehend what makes sense to them, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ask students to read books they can understand. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• student readers benefit from support, encouragement, and advice, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• confer with individual readers;• present practical information to the whole group in minilessons. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• students need help finding books they want to read, | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• present bookwalks and booktalks and invite students to give booktalks, too. |

Our Theory-to-Practice as Reading Teachers

Because we believe that...

- independent readers need access to sufficient quantities of intriguing titles that represent a range of fiction and nonfiction genres,
- books that tell stories compel students to read, practice reading, gain experience with prose structures, and learn how to “chunk” meaning,
- the English language is not reliably phonetic (fewer than half of English words are spelled and pronounced the way they sound),
- students need to learn how to take control of their experiences and processes as readers,
- student readers should recognize and celebrate their preferences, accomplishments, and growth,
- growth in reading is individual, gradual, and advances on many fronts (e.g., decoding strategies, stamina, vocabulary, critical abilities),
- parents should be involved in and supportive of their children’s reading,
- children should read at home and year-round,
- children should read to learn as well as learn to read,

we...

- build and maintain enticing, age-appropriate classroom libraries;
- make classroom libraries a budget priority;
- read book reviews, browse bookstore collections, and read children’s and young adult literature.
- eschew textbooks, newspapers and magazines, instructional guides, etc., in favor of narrative genres.
- teach beginning readers multiple approaches to word recognition: graphophonetics as well as syntax, semantics, patterns, word analysis skills, and the cues provided by illustrations.
- discuss different ways to select books; encourage students to abandon books they don’t understand or enjoy; teach students about skimming and skipping.
- ask students to keep simple records: numbers of books, titles and authors, and ratings of quality (1–10) and difficulty (H, JR, C);
- ask students to assess their progress and set goals at the end of each trimester.
- assess students’ growth based on their progress toward individual goals.
- write and distribute a newsletter, “Reading: How Parents Can Help.”
- provide each student in K–4 with an overnight bookbag;
- encourage each student to borrow multiple books to read over the summer and supply summer bookbags, K–8.
- use children’s literature in every subject.

Our Theory-to-Practice as Reading Teachers

Because we believe that...

- people read for many reasons,
- reading is one of the best things about being human and alive,
- “children grow into the intellectual life around them” (Vygotsky),

we...

- teach strategies for different kinds of texts and purposes.
- demonstrate the pleasure we derive from stories, poems, plays, lyrics, and book illustrations.
- create a school-wide reading culture, including such rituals and traditions as
 - daily morning meetings with poems and songs on charts,
 - a school poem and song,
 - K–4 reading buddies/tutorials,
 - poetry-based word work in K,
 - reading and unpacking poems in 1–8,
 - readers’ theater in 1–2,
 - correspondence about books in 3–8,
 - readers’ roundtable discussions in 5–6,
 - birthday-book gifts and bookplates,
 - books-we-love displays, and
 - a common approach to teaching reading, reading workshop, which students can anticipate and rely on, K–8.