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TE 850
A Reader's Creed II

At my school's Welcome Open House this past September, the grandmother of one of my new students approached me. She seemed concerned about her granddaughter, Taylor, and her reading ability. She explained to me how Taylor's reading level was not at grade level and wanted to let me know up front that Taylor would probably struggle with reading this year. The grandmother explained, "Taylor loves books! She could sit all day and read, she just has a hard time understanding them." I smiled and told the grandmother that if Taylor already had the motivation to read, then she would be fine. To me, motivation is an essential part of reading. As John Guthrie (2011) explains, motivation includes the "values, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding reading" (p.177). Without motivation, it is difficult for students to take interest in reading and ultimately, the dedication and confidence to improve reading abilities.

As a lover of books myself, reading has always been something of value to me. I was fortunate to come from a family that saw the importance in reading not only as a means for gaining knowledge but also as a source of pleasure and enjoyment. In addition, I never would have been able to take on more challenging texts had it not been for teachers who placed a wide-variety of texts in front of me strengthen my abilities to comprehend and think critically about what I was reading. Now as a teacher of reading, my purpose and beliefs fueling instruction keep this end goal of motivation in mind. I believe students must first learn how to read in order to possess the desire to be motivated readers. Furthermore, I believe students must also be taught to read to learn to become readers who persist through the challenges of reading.

Before I became a teacher, I worked for a short time as a tutor at Sylvan Learning Center. It was here where I first began to see the importance in teaching students to learn how to

read and how it effects the motivation to improve. I saw students who had struggled in the classroom with reading everyday and were left with little confidence in believing they could learn how to read. Keeping this experience in mind for when it comes to teaching and putting my creed into practice, I find my Language Arts instruction has to allot time for students to read choice books, be exposed to different genres and formats, and have time for collaborating with one another through book discussions and projects (Rasinski & Padak, 2004).

In my classroom, the amount of time for each piece may change each day but something I see a daily need for is differentiating with small group time and working with students on developing their reading strategies and skills. Because each student has individual needs that cannot always be met by whole group instruction, I support the model of differentiated instruction outlined by Gambrell, Malloy and Mazzoni (2011) as a best practice for reading instruction. They argue that, "Differentiating instruction involves assessing and addressing differences among students. It runs counter to the notion of *one-size-fits-all, teach-to-the-middle* instruction, which can result in some students not being challenged while others fall behind" (p. 28-29). By using this model, I have been able to meet the varying needs of readers in my classroom. In my class this year, I have a girl whose reading lags noticeably behind her peers. When the year began, she was discouraged by her abilities in learning to read compared to her classmates. Now through this model of differentiated instruction, I have been able to work with her more closely and see her confidence growing. She is aware she is making progress with my support and guidance and I now see her persisting to read more and more. Slowly, she is beginning to see the importance behind reading as well as the enjoyment that comes with it. With differentiation, students are able to receive feedback from me as to their progress in

learning to read and, I find, they are more motivated to work toward their goal of understanding what they read.

As students progress in learning to read, I believe teachers should also be conscious in teaching students the process of reading to learn. In my own experience, this was something that began at a very young age and has developed continually throughout my schooling. Teachers should expose students to various genres of literature as well as various formats of literature to allow students to gain an understanding of how different texts work. Students may enjoy reading fiction for pleasure, but they should not only be given fiction texts while in the classroom. If students are not exposed to texts in different genres during a time when they can practice reading them, then we are not helping them become a better readers and not helping them be prepared for when they are faced with these texts (Gambrell, Malloy & Mazzoni, 2011). In my teaching experience, I've found students often shy away from non-fiction texts, so I try to work in several examples of these to read and discuss as a class that relate to the fictional texts we read or to topic I know they will enjoy. As informational text serves as a place for student to read to learn new ideas, teaching students to understand the structure of these texts was key to their comprehension.

Furthermore, students should be exposed to many different formats of literature. Last year, I had a boy in my class who was not interested in reading chapter books. He loved the images of video games and action movies, so by introducing him to graphic novels, I found a way he could connect his other interests to a love of reading. As a result, graphic novels caught his interest, yet he also began to gain a skill set of the ways to read a new format of literature. As graphic novels serve as a place for students conquer their struggles with literacy through their engaging nature, they also help students bridge the gap into more traditional texts (Chun, 2009, 146). With

my student, I noticed he began to take pleasure in the process of using the author's words as well as the representation of their ideas within the graphic novels images, which in turn helped him better understand some of the texts we read as a class. When we expand our students' knowledge of text types and genres, we are exposing them to new interests in literature as well as helping them become well-rounded readers. Authors Madda, Griffo, Pearson, and Raphael (2011) take this one step further. They state,

Literacy can no longer be defined simply as the reading and writing of printed text.

Instead, we need to consider the multiple and overlapping forms of literacy, including digital, visual, spoken and printed forms of literacy that require the reader to critically analyze, deconstruct, and reconstruct meaning across a variety of texts for various purposes (p.48)

In support of this, I believe teachers should consider the new forms of literacy alongside traditional canons used in schools. In addition, teachers should provide tasks that require students to thinking critical when tackling this variety of literature.

When we teach students to read to learn, I believe part of this is teaching them to read texts critically. According to Nodelman and Reimer (2003), "Children in particular can learn to become more perceptive readers of literature- and greatly increase their pleasure in the act of reading as a result" (p. 28). While reading texts critically is certainly an expectation at even the youngest grade levels, as the authors argue I've found that students who read to learn with a critical eye find more value and enjoyment in what they read. Reading critically may create new or change current perspectives of students. Within guidance from teachers, students reading picture books may begin to question the colors, lines and shapes in the images the author and illustrator use. As student reach adolescence, reading with a critical eye might require students to

evaluate the credibility of sources or contrast how authors have responded to similar content (Ogle & Lang, 2011, p. 151). While tasks such as these not only increase a student's ability to learn while reading, they also provide students with applicable skills for real-world settings. I believe when teachers can connect literature and make it relevant to the lives of students, there is even more room for reading to learn. As students grow older, critical literature is especially important in helping students cope with the challenges of their daily lives as it allows them to view characters who encounter experiences similar to their own (Alsup, 2011, p. 159). Whether students are reading critically to learn about new perspectives or sources of comfort and assurance, my belief as a teacher is that students are motivated by pleasures of these texts for the desire to read more.

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