

TEACHING READING

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Abstract: teaching a student to read is arguably one of the most important functions of the teaching profession. The ability to read, and read for comprehension, opens up an entire world of possibilities and opportunities for children to discover new worlds and learn new concepts. And while teaching reading is such a high priority, some teachers who aren't specially trained in the practice find themselves seeking additional help.

Key words: teaching process, reading, profession, teachers.

The good news is that there are many instructional strategies to teach reading that nearly any educator can implement. Here are 10 of the most popular and some quick reference reading resources to add to your repertoire.

Before you can effectively teach reading, it's vital that you understand the primary components of reading instruction. When broken down into the five major elements, reading instruction is a much more approachable and easily understood skill. The five elements of reading instruction are: Phonics: the relationship between letters and the different sounds they make. This can be in relation to single letters or groupings of letters.

Phonemic awareness: an understanding of how consonant or vowel sounds can be arranged to make words. Examples of phonemic awareness include being able to identify words that rhyme, recognizing alliteration, segmenting a sentence into words, identifying the syllables in a word, and blending and segmenting onset-rimes.

Vocabulary: the range of words a student is able to understand and use in context.

Fluency: the ability to read and understand words with accuracy, speed and comprehension.

Comprehension: complete understanding of information being delivered by a text.

While there are many instructional strategies for teaching reading, here are 10 of the most trusted amongst educators and reading specialists.

1. Assess Student Ability First. Begin the school year by getting a baseline reading of each student's current reading level. This will help you to A: Understand the abilities(s) that you are working with and how to group students (which is another effective instructional strategy) and B: Determine what reading strategies and tools will work best for each student's individual needs.

2. Choral Reading/Partner Reading. Choral reading is an exercise where the teacher and class read a text aloud together in unison. This allows struggling readers to still participate in the practice of reading without embarrassment, and it has been shown to improve fluency and confidence. Partner reading is a small version of choral reading, where students are grouped together to read a text aloud with a partner, alternating sentences or paragraphs.

3. Use Visual Aids. This practice is aimed at improving students' reading comprehension more than their actual reading ability, but comprehension is a key element in overall reading skill. Many educators find that using visual tools like graphic organizers to help students break down the text they are reading helps make it more digestible and easily understood. These can be completed individually or in a group brainstorm session, which helps readers see different perspectives and deepen their comprehension.

4. Assign Reading Buddies Across Ages & Grades. Think of this like a mentorship program, where older students with demonstrable reading abilities are paired up with younger, new readers to help them improve. Younger readers get to see high-level reading modeled by the older student,

and the older students learn the valuable skills of mentorship, patience and how to give direction. What's more, if there are older students who are struggling with reading at their grade level, a reading buddy program would allow them to be exposed to more approachable reading materials with the younger student, only helping to build their confidence and ability.

5. Implement Audiobooks. Using audiobooks while reading — also known as ear reading — is a great way to assist struggling readers. While this shouldn't be your primary practice, using audiobooks in conjunction with focused phonics instruction has been proven to help students improve their reading accuracy. And that benefit applies to students across all abilities and skill levels.

6. Teach Academic English. To teach academic English means teaching general and domain-specific vocabulary in accordance with a subject or unit. While vocabulary is sometimes thought of as separate from reading instruction, it is actually an integral part in improving reading abilities. This has been a proven tactic especially for English language learners, but these practices help readers of all levels and backgrounds.

7. Have Students Summarize What They Read. As a quick comprehension check, try asking students to write a brief paragraph summary of what they just read, immediately after they complete the reading task. Writing summaries helps them to break down large concepts, focus on the most important details and retain what they read. If a whole paragraph is too much for some students, getting a simple who, what, when, where, why and how explanation is an equally effective tactic.

8. Expose Students to Different Discourse Patterns. Most academic reading is in the form of narrative discourse, and it is what most students are familiar and comfortable with. To help expose them to different types of text and diversify their skills, introduce alternative discourse patterns in the form of an article or a personal letter. These are comprehension abilities they will need to have and will support their ability to read and understand narrative writing as well.

9. Let Students Choose the Books They Read. Students are much more likely to be excited to read when they get the opportunity to read about something they're interested in. Curate a short list of options for students and let them pick — this will improve their engagement and create enthusiasm about reading.

10. Have Students Read the Same Content Multiple Times. As they say, practice makes perfect, and that rings true for reading too. Formally, this practice is known as fluency-oriented reading instruction (FORI) and calls for students to read the same text multiple times in different settings — silently, out loud, in pairs, in groups, solo, etc. This helps students improve their pronunciation and comprehension and solidifies the skills they are learning in individualized reading instruction.

Helpful Resources for Reading Teachers. There are a number of resources — both quick guides and professional development options — for teachers looking for reading strategies to help struggling readers. Three of the top online options come in the form of both downloadables and webinars, and are available from the following organizations:

American College of Education extensive list of resources

Reading Rockets PD webinars

Teacher Vision resources and free downloadables

For educators looking for more in-depth help, consider a reading instruction course from the University of San Diego Division of Professional and Continuing Education. This completely online course will help teachers create various activities that can be used to develop key reading skills, and design and organize these activities to fit into their curriculum. When equipped with these strategies, educators from any grade level or background will be able to effectively engage students and foster a lifelong love of reading

Explicit instruction and practice are necessary for improved reading skills. Good teaching includes instructions in skills, such as phoneme segmentation, and strategies, such as making connections with texts. Teachers also should customize their strategies according to students' needs. Students should practice learning words in isolation as well as in the context of meaningful texts.

There are five basic reading skills that instructors need to explicitly teach. These skills are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Reading can be taught using direct instruction, self-directed learning activities, and cooperative learning. Teachers should use a combination of these methods to address the diverse needs of learners.

Educators in the United States are expected to teach content according to learning standards. Schools in some states follow a set of standards called the Common Core Standards, while other states have their own state-specific standards. The learning standards specify the skills and content students should master in each subject area and at each grade level.

When planning a reading lesson, a teacher should first determine which grade-appropriate learning standard the lesson will address. Because the standards represent broad skill sets, a teacher will usually teach multiple lessons addressing each individual standard while pushing students to a deeper and more thorough understanding of the target content. Based on the selected standards, a teacher should clearly state a learning objective to share with the students. The learning objective tells what the student should know or do as a result of the lesson.

After selecting a standard, the teacher should determine what evidence the students will give to prove that they have met the lesson objective. In other words, the teacher needs to define what it looks like to successfully meet the learning objective. Evidence can include a variety of student behaviors. Teachers can consider:

Written evidence: worksheets or exit tickets (brief written answers to a question or prompt about the lesson)

Oral evidence: a presentation or a one-on-one interview with the teacher

Visual evidence: a poster, picture, or completed graphic organizer (a visual representation of a set of information)

Kinesthetic evidence: a game that demonstrates the target skill

Teachers can be creative with the types of evidence they collect. Because students learn in different ways, it is beneficial for students to collect more than one type of evidence for each skill or objective.

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