

TECHNIQUES REFLECTING BEST PRACTICES IN READING FOR USE IN CLASSROOMS WITH STRUGGLING READERS

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ASCD National Conference 2005

Both teachers and students long to be successful in reading. Each of us has found some success and we long for more to help students and ourselves in our professional commitment to teaching. These techniques and ideas that I will be presenting I learned from Sr. Grace Pilon, SBS, and her WORKSHOP WAY® approach and from teachers in various grade levels who have implemented her ideas. The ideas are aligned with the latest National Reading Panel research report and with brain research findings and are teacher and student friendly. National Reading Panel's conclusions were that five areas of reading bring about effective readers—Phonemic awareness and Phonics Instruction, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension. This presentation will address these areas: First fluency and fluency instruction; then an effective technique for basic comprehension instruction; followed by techniques for phonemic awareness and phonics instruction; and lastly, some techniques for vocabulary. These ideas are also aligned with findings of brain research which suggest that students learn best when they are free from fear, when they learn with patterns and rhythm, and when there is an element of “relaxed alertness”. The ideas to be presented here can be implemented in ordinary practice in the day-to-day classroom during large group instruction, with teachers working with a small group of students, and during organized student independent work in the language arts workshop.

What even more so caught my eye about each of these ideas was their sensitivity in the classroom to the diverse knowledge levels of students. How can students feel intelligent, important, and that they “belong” and can manage their lives when they know they are struggling readers who are not yet mastering reading and other content. Grace challenged herself to discover techniques while interacting with students about the content in a way in which no one feels inferior and no one feels superior! Quite a challenge! I will explain and demonstrate the techniques and use the teacher-student-content interactions which evolved over many years.

FLUENCY

The National Reading Panel research highlights fluency as a neglected skill not practiced enough within the instructional process in classrooms. Fluency is described as “the ability to read a text accurately and quickly in thought units for meaning and pausing that makes sense”. This skill greatly affects comprehension. Fluency reflects the need for speed, accuracy, and expression while reading. The research reminds us that Individual sight word recognition is not enough. Students need instruction in fluency and practice to overcome the difficulty and unfamiliarity with words, Students need experiences opposite of reading in a choppy manner or with incorrect pauses.

Ways to teach fluency suggested by NRP are by repeated oral reading, even to four times. Grace Pilon's way is through oral reading using phrases in flashcards and on directed practice in sheets and use of text itself, and oral reading techniques. I would like to demonstrate these types of fluency instructional practice to be used daily with students:

- Volunteer plus whole class repeat with power (whole class or small group)

- Directed reading practice using teacher modeling and student repetition or guidance with using phrases from student texts on sheets of paper (Small group)
- Oral reading of stories
Independent, unison reading and turns, partner, reader's theater, audio-tapes

BASIC COMPREHENSION

The findings from the National Reading Research Panel indicate that there are several instructional strategies that are effective. Comprehension includes "Intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interaction between the text and the reader. This particular technique developed by Grace Pilon engages students daily in a teacher-directed primarily small group activity which helps develop the foundational comprehension skill of scanning the text for specific answers within a specific time frame.

Students and teachers need the same text for this technique, such as the students' reading book or a content area book. Teachers have 10 book risks which direct students in the finding of each answer. Students scan their text to find very specific pinpointed answers of one, two, or three words as directed. Teachers tell the page, paragraph or line, and then for students to locate the place, and then give the specific direction once.

The risks include some sure fire success questions to help all students experience success. Risks can include finding basic skills as rhyme words, word meaning, opposites, synonyms, and pinpointing answers from the text, such as, "Find and write the three words that tell where Chris was hiding," In addition, finding instances of specific skills, such as contractions is also used. The daily practice focuses on the scanning of text and risking an answer based upon listening comprehension. The directions limit the scanning. Speed and rhythm on the teacher's part are essential as well as their use of the Once Principle-- "I can only say this one time..." Students write their answers and then show their risk to the teacher who non-judgmentally observes it. Teachers give the answer after each risk to all the students at one and the students self-check answers.

I would like to demonstrate this technique using a group of volunteers-- three or four persons who would help us by portraying the students.

PHONEMIC AWARENESS AND PHONICS RESEARCH

Although the National reading panel research suggests that teaching in small groups has been found to be better than whole class, this approach is designed for a whole class lesson. Five daily but varied activities implement the practice of these skills in a systematic and organized wholistic manner which includes listening skills, risking skills, and language skills. Some 40 letter-sound relationships are used in a manner that helps students "live" what they know. Feeling successful and able to handle the content are important goals for students to experience. This plan is student friendly as students discover they can participate in the activities without fear of humiliation and even experience bits of success. Students are free to be at their particular knowledge level in phonics without teacher judgment of them being inferior. The techniques in the lesson are designed to safeguard students despite their diverse knowledge levels. The daily activities to be demonstrated include the following:

- Using a Phonogram pack, teachers direct students in seeing, saying, and hearing in rhythmic unison and speed all of the phonograms presented to the class from the beginning of the year. The technique to include all is using the unison three times with power.
- Rhyming using the volunteer plus whole class repeat in unison technique.
- Phoneme isolation- isolating by identifying or saying the first or last sounds in a word and
- Manipulating the sounds in content risk exercises orally or written employing listening skills as teachers use the Once Principle: *I can only say this one time*. Teachers pause while students risk. And then the teacher says, "The answer is ..." Check it if you have it. If not, let's try the next one."
- Sound spelling- phonemic blending and segmentation in a routine pattern for five to ten words daily. Checking answers which includes Phoneme segmentation- breaking or segmenting words into separate sounds

The listening skills are used daily as students risk answering *yes* or *no* to the question – *Was this statement given in today's lesson?* Students risk 10 answers and self-check by the teacher's telling the answer with immediate feedback after each risk to the whole class.

A basic language pattern is used daily as teachers give students two sentences to pass to each other in telephone style.

VOCABULARY

Grace Pilon has several ideas for vocabulary instructional practice from very basic. I will demonstrate how each of these work"

WORD IDENTIFICATION AND MEANING

1. Definitions which students write from their workshop task Vocabulary.
 - a. Word cards are for self-study with the word on front; definition on back.
 - b. *I know- I don't know* technique makes not knowing everything today all right.
 - c. Study and Pair-share of these definitions during the routine opening steps of the whole class lesson. This gives students a stable time on the task of learning the definitions.
 - d. Written practice testing on the definitions with teacher immediate feedback
2. Dictionary/glossary skill- finding words fast and reading the definitions in unison.
 - a. Quick drill in the whole class lesson
 - b. Students feel important when they have this skill mastered of finding words fast. The reading reinforces terms already learned.

BRAIN RESEARCH

Alignment with findings from brain research that students learn best when they are free from fear, when they learn with patterns and rhythm, and when there is an element of “relaxed alertness” also seem to align with Grace Pilon’s ideas. Students learn to become freed from fear of making mistakes with the philosophy signs and the teacher’s use teacher-student-content interactions. The teacher becomes creative with the plan’s special use of Cushioning Language. This helps to free students from fear of making mistakes and promotes willingness to risk. Teachers introduce such mini-dialogues as, “Do you have know everything about this today?—Why not?” and, “Would it be O.K. if you make a mistake while learning today?—Why?” Teacher creativity is also activated using Togetherness Language. This introduces truths about human beings and learning which unify the group, such as, “Everyone has a right to his or her own time clock for learning,” and “No one knows how intelligent anyone is,” and, “Let’s give everyone a hand for risking.”

These special teacher-student-content-interactions respect the diverse needs of students during the interactions. A teacher’s use of these techniques is supported by his or her use of high expectations for all learners using the teacher’s facial and body language which shows the belief that all students can and will learn at their own time-clocks.

When they are learning, students need feedback but they do not need grades all the time. Pilon’s dictated risks with immediate feedback are the greatest. 10 risks in which they make decisions and get immediate feedback by their teacher-given to the whole group on the correct answer. Students check their own. These are manageable and frequent challenges. To write an answer that you think is the engagement-the risk. The feedback lets you know if you had it right. But participating in the risk is the crowning success.

Pilon made great use of the knowledge that some have in a way that completely engulfs all the students—with the volunteer plus whole class repeat technique. All can participate by repeating the phrase or content.

The Three times technique again borrows the knowledge of those who know but completely allows all to participate. Symbols and words are read three times with power in unison and rhythm so that all can participate at least by the third time.

Time for retention is built in by using the same phrases or cards for a week at a time or longer.

Grace believed:

1. Children are not born perfect- and that they have behaviors or characteristics that get them into trouble as they disrupt the good order of things— Children need time and a way to grow.

It is the WAY to grow that relates to keeping the shine on human nature.

If you always do what you have always done, you get the same results. As a young returning teacher, Grace was given the advice by Katherine Drexel, friend and mentor- to do what she thinks should be done in the classroom. Katherine herself was a woman of

risks, courage, fearless action. Grace did not start out this way- but she ended that way. Grace says, I closed my door with the noise and stood it!

As I teacher who had quit one time--Grace was not powerless when she returned to the classroom. She had a vision, courage to enact it, faced reality head on, and was very ethical, but different from the totally traditional process. She was constantly energized by what she saw when teachers operate in a way that changes things for students. Like the time at Danneel school in New Orleans when a new student came, and tried to start a fight on the stairwell. While there had been many fights at the school during September, October, November, and December, this was in February and a change had taken place. Students had found that school was a place that cared about them. One of the students intervened on the stairway and said, "We don't do that here—and the fighting attempt stopped." Or the student in St. Paul Minnesota who yelled out to his third grade teacher impulsively- "I hate you. I hate you.."—Then stopped. "No, I don't; No, I don't."

She was encouraged to press on when the attendance rates went way up at Danneel- even to 95% in the junior high grades.

Over the years Grace found that if you do the same things over and over again you will get the same results. –What she learned was that students who were troubled needed daily interactions that were about content and were positive- with no reference to previous bad behavior.

She really believed in resurrecting or restoring human dignity in the lives of children who never knew they had this.

I saw the birth of inner order!

Adopting a positive attitude towards pupils and their learning goes a long way.

When we ask a student a question, have that look that you expect the right answer, not the look that says- of course you won't know this.

Students need to feel themselves thinking and managing.

Put a dot by what you know....means you don't have to know all right now. Being able to separate what you know from what you don't know and have time to study what you don't is also helpful.

Some choice is a good motivator. If students have a list of words and they can choose to read those they know...it is more helpful and successful than read them all

Students are not labels--apparent slow learners

Students might be seemingly lazy—but there is a deeper reason for their behavior or lack of it

To the informer- I just like to hear good things...

Thinking can be developed outside of reasoning...If students can't read, they can still think....Capitalize on this until they can read.

Success is the only ingredient that can give pupils an abiding love for learning— They must have time to finish assignments and learning. Frustration crushes their spirits.

Students have to feel that they are learning something new each day—have to revisit what they have learned-but must move on...not just drill what they don't know.

Teachers have to learn there is power in waiting. When something clicks, whatever that something is, I wish I knew, they are on the way! Sometimes I wonder if it is awareness of really knowing something well-even as much as one little thing.

Very very important that each child experience success every day. Brain cells come alive!

Working independently gives children a real power because it makes them do the thinking. But if their work is checked too much- doesn't work.

Students need a time when the teacher can reteach, can help

Strategy C groups had such exciting activities all the groups wanted to be in this group...Want students to be aware of their power to work.

As long as the teacher is the dominant personality the student will prevent the pupils from becoming aware of their power.

Grace looked at them in a certain way of respect, allowed them bits of success and did not accentuate those as inferior and superior. She believed in the quest to try to act so that no one feels superior and no one feels inferior,

Grace was never afraid to face a problem head on. Problems are times to grow. Every problem was taken care of from a human growth standpoint. It was not just the child's problem, but the environment—the teacher making sure that interactions with the student are daily and frequent and positive and stimulating.

It is the little things that make a difference. The little things that pile up day after day and leave a big impression and form attitudes.

She discovered that students do need time and a way to grow. They are not perfect now but can grow into it given the right conditions. Do something to nourish the growth, not punish the learner. She was similar to what they say about Michaelangelo. He could look at a block of stone and see the form inside. He would chip away - getting rid of whatever is in the way of the bringing forth of the form! She knew that students need positive interactions with their teacher at times when they are thinking, learning, and making decisions to feel important, intelligent, and their power to manage. Twice a day the teacher meets with these students in the small group—up close and personal.

2. WW is a system of human growth for education and has a way and timing for growth to unfold at one's own timing and way.

3. Satisfying the intellectual needs of learners is a must- among them--to feel intelligent, important and the power of their own management.

How can a student feel intelligent or important or their power to manage in some of the ways we operate in or classrooms?-When they don't understand the concept and we don't know how to individualize in a big group.

4. Teachers cannot do some of the traditional things to students as there is no way there can still be shine on human nature of some students if they receive some traditional treatment—told their mistakes all the time, gain attention for negative things, be punished, feel unaccepted and shamed.

Increase the positive, life-giving interactions between the teacher and students. Make sure there are small successes that nourish inner motivation. Keep interactions on the content and thinking, rather than on discipline.....Instead of you haven't even begun to write.—Read what you have....Or which umber will you start with? Should I do the first or do you want to?

Grace knew that all students had to learn how to read, they had to learn that they would not be embarrassed, that they felt safe to learn, that they could risk participation by their own thinking and decisions. It was OK to make mistakes while learning; it is OK to take risks, You don't have to know everything today.

Grace has several built in designs to try to keep the shine on the human nature of students who quit at the first obstacle, are negative about learning, seem to be unmotivated to learn, disrupt the learning environment...

She has a whole system that brings students to feeling intelligent, important, and their power of management even while they are still making mistakes. Willingness to be involved and still feel intelligent even though they still make mistakes, willingness to be involved and still feel important even though they still do not know everything, willingness to be involved and still feel their power to manage as they can take risks and make mistakes are the thrusts of WW motivation.

WW teachers bring security and order into the classroom learning environment with the design of the Workshop tasks and the design of the whole class lesson, and the design of the teacher working with a small group.

These techniques and activities are varied and cross levels of learning modes, needs, and opportunities. Students know the routines, know they will not be humiliated, know they will not be made to feel ashamed, know they will be allowed to think at their own timing. WW teachers strive for the artistry of preserving the dignity of learners while they harness the bucking bronco of curriculum using the WW designs. WW teachers provide mental stimulation.

The WW design aligns with a multitude of research-based effective teaching practices.

