

Literacy Vision Statement

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## **Introduction**

Literacy occurs as one becomes proficient in reading and writing skills and strategies. There are many methods to teach literacy in a classroom. First, literacy can be taught according to the vision of the teacher. Second, literacy can be taught through explicit reading and writing instruction. Last, literacy can be taught through comprehensive reading instruction. All three are excellent methods for teachers to learn and apply in their classroom teaching. As teachers learn and apply these methods, students will become literate.

## **My Vision Statement**

As a literacy teacher I believe literacy can be taught using three methods. First, literacy can be taught as the teacher models positive behavior toward reading and writing. Second, literacy can be taught through explicit reading and writing instruction. Third, literacy can be taught based on the needs of students, so they become proficient readers and writers. Last, literacy can be taught as students learn why they need to learn to read and write.

For this reason, my vision statement as a literacy teacher is to help children, in any grade level, to be successful readers and writers by modeling positive behavior toward reading and writing, teaching explicit reading and writing instruction, teaching according to the needs of my students, and most importantly teaching my students why they need to learn how to read and write (i.e., the practical and empowering reasons). To me reading and writing is not just reading and writing words, but understanding what is read and communicating that understanding effectively through writing. When a child understands what is read and how to communicate it through writing, students apply knowledge and are empowered.

### *Teacher Modeling*

In research it is found that teachers can have strong and lasting effects on students' reading and writing attitudes and practices (Duncan, 2010). To use these strong effects to

promote literacy, teachers must first, learn that “literacy learning requires a supportive environment that builds positive feelings about self and literacy activities” (Gambrell, Morrow & Pressley, 2007, p.58). Second, a teacher must build this supportive environment. Last, the teacher must model how a supportive literacy environment looks and sounds, and maintain the environment throughout the school year. As a teacher models a positive attitude toward reading and writing, students will also develop positive attitudes about reading and writing.

### *Explicit Instruction*

According to research, explicit instruction is teaching the what, how, why of reading and writing skills and strategies (Reutzel & Cooter, 2008). Also, Duffy (2009) says, “students develop understandings of the importance of reading and writing if they have opportunities to use reading and writing in important, sensible ways” (p.37). However, the way that students are taught the importance of reading and writing depends on the vision of the teacher because every teacher has a different vision of the what, how, and why of reading and writing skills and strategies. Yet, Duffy (2009) argues that, “Regardless of [a teacher’s] particular visions, [he or she] should talk explicitly about the fact that we read to get an author’s message” (p.37). Thus, each teacher can have a vision for teaching the what, how, why of reading and writing skills and strategies, but when explicitly teaching some strategies, teachers must have a consensus.

### *Student Needs*

According to Gambrell et al. (2007), “children come to school with prior knowledge about reading and writing and that this knowledge is different from one child to the next” (p.58). For this reason, teachers must teach according to the needs of their students in order to help them acquire the needed skills and strategies to become proficient readers and writers. To aid teachers in this endeavor, Duffy (2009) suggests the following:

“It is not easy to provide students with experiences in real reading [and writing]. It requires that we teach skills and strategies inside larger tasks or activities. That is, we first engage students in real reading [and writing] tasks—and then, within those larger tasks, teach the skills and strategies needed to accomplish the goal or complete the task” (p.7).

When teachers use larger tasks to teach strategies and skills, students are engaged because they are reading and writing, but they also acquire skills and strategies they need in the process.

### *The Reasons Why*

When students know why they need to learn how to read and write (i.e., the practical and empowering reasons), they are more motivated to read and write (Duffy, 2009). Teachers can teach the why of reading and writing as they give experiences to their students and provide opportunities for students to use the skills and strategies they have learned (Duffy 2009). When students apply the skills and strategies of reading and writing, they are empowered to change something about themselves and their world.

## **Explicit Instruction**

### *The Process*

The process of giving explicit instruction to students is rigorous. It requires teachers to think about what strategy or skill they are teaching, how they are planning to teach that strategy or skill, and why they are teaching that strategy or skill. Thus, the process is much more than teaching a lesson plan from a textbook.

Within the process, teachers also engage their students in the lesson as they prepare guided practice exercises (i.e., teacher modeling of a strategy or skill) and independent practice exercises (i.e., student implementation of a learned strategy or skill). Plus, teachers plan and carry out lessons according to the needs of their students, which provides differentiation in teaching and learning. Furthermore, teachers give formative assessments to aid in the continued learning of their students.

When teachers go through the process of preparing and giving explicit instruction, their students better understand the strategies and skills taught to them because they are taught the whole picture (i.e., the what, how, and why of a strategy or skill).

*The Value*

There is much value in teaching using explicit instruction. First, teachers find that when they teach explicitly they are teaching something that is important. The reason a teacher feels the subject is important is because he or she knows the what, how, and why of every strategy and skill they teach. Second, when a teacher finds importance in what he or she teaches, a teacher positively changes his or her attitude and behavior toward that academic subject, and especially the subjects of reading and writing. Third, like wildfire this positive attitude and behavior spreads to students. Students who have a positive attitude and behavior toward learning are more motivated to learn, especially new skills and strategies in reading and writing.

*The Importance*

The importance of teaching through explicit instruction is that students can learn practical and empowering skills and strategies that will help them be life-long readers and writers. The practical reasons for learning how to read and write are that a student can contribute to and be successful in society. Every contributable person in a society must know how to read and write. That is how one applies for and sustains a job. However, more importantly, the empowering reasons for students to learn how to read and write are that as they apply what they read and write, they can change something about themselves and their world. Every person who has made a significant mark on the world knew how to read and write. Thus, there is a great importance for a student to understand the what, how, and why of reading and writing.

## **Comprehensive Literacy Instruction**

Comprehensive literacy instruction has seven parts. All seven parts are important in giving explicit reading instruction because they contribute to the value and importance of teaching literacy skills and strategies.

### *Learning Goals*

Learning goals are the purpose and the content goal of the lesson. The purpose of the lesson gives the teacher the reason why he or she is teaching this lesson. For example, if a few students did not understand the difference between narrative and informative text structures, a teacher's purpose could be to teach these students in a small group this difference and help them apply what they have learned.

The content goal is written on the board for the teacher and students to see and is discussed at the beginning of a lesson. The content goal is written using the following formula: "SWBAT: Learning behavior (verb form taxonomy level locator) + content (what you will assess) + strategy (means) + conditions. An example of a content goal using this formula would be: "Students will be able to identify the 5 structures of narrative text as they read a book and fill out a narrative text structure graphic organizer with their small reading group." This formula allows students to use higher-order thinking skills and know the exact expectations of the lesson.

Teachers have learning goals to know the purpose of their teaching and so their students know what is expected of them. Also, learning goals help students use higher-order thinking skills. When students use higher-order thinking skills and know what is expected of them, they can be empowered and feel successful in their own learning.

### *Explicit Reading Strategy Instruction*

Within explicit reading instruction, a teacher models a literacy strategy or skill by teaching explicitly the what, how, and why of teaching. Then the teacher continues to teach

the strategy or skill through guided practice exercises. Guided practice exercises give the teacher the opportunity to teach explicitly how the reading strategy or skill looks and sounds. After the guided practice, students have the opportunity to implement the strategy or skill they learned through independent practice.

When teachers give explicit reading strategy instruction they know the importance of what is taught because they teach the what, how, and why of the reading strategy or skill. When a teacher teaches the what, how, and why of a reading strategy or skill, students understand the whole picture of that strategy or skill. Thus, they are less likely to forget the strategy or skill.

### *Creating Reading Engagement*

There are three types of engagement: 1) Choice, 2) Collaboration, 3) Building concepts. Choice is one of the most important types of reading engagement. With choice, students choose the book to read, activity to do, or with whom they will read or accomplish the activity. For example, in a lesson about narrative text structure, students choose a narrative text and a partner for the independent practice activity. When students are given a choice, they are more likely to be engaged because they planned a part of the lesson.

Collaboration is also important because students are not required to learn and apply strategies or skills on their own. For example, in a reading lesson about narrative text structure, students will read with their reading group and identify the 5 narrative text structures by filling out a graphic organizer. This helps students feel relieved because they can discuss and clarify information with the help of a teacher, a partner, or a small group.

Building concepts is a way for the teacher to teach a skill or strategy and build off that teaching to introduce a new concept. For example, in a reading lesson about narrative text structures, students will apply their knowledge of narrative text structure, as modeled by their teacher, as they read a new book and fill out a graphic organizer as a reading group. This

scaffolding method helps students further understand concepts because the teacher builds on their prior knowledge.

When teachers create opportunities for reading engagement, their students are more likely to listen and learn what is being taught because they are “hooked” to what is being taught. The “hooked” happens through choice (i.e., participation in planning the lesson), collaboration (i.e., discussion and clarification of information), and building concepts (i.e., the teacher’s scaffolding method).

### *Relevant Activities*

Relevant activities are what students produce during the independent practice of a reading skill or strategy lesson. For example, in a lesson on narrative text structure, students are asked to identify 5 narrative text structures and write the example of each narrative text structure on a graphic organizer. Through this activity, students can use their knowledge of narrative text structures with other books they read in the real world.

Teachers teach real-world relevance through relevant activities. Helping students understand real-world relevance in reading is the reason teachers explicitly teach students the what, how, and why of reading strategies or skills. When students can apply the skills and strategies of reading, they are empowered to change something about themselves and their world.

### *Differentiation*

Differentiation occurs when a teacher teaches according to the needs of his or her students. If a teacher has students with different learning levels, each is taught the way he or she learns. Some students learn through simple tasks, while other students need more challenging tasks.

In a lesson, a teacher can simplify an activity or make it more challenging. For example, in a lesson on asking questions a teacher would give a simplified activity and a



challenging activity as follows:

Activity Simplified: Students will answer the questions on “Questionnaire #1.” On this questionnaire the student is only required to write down their “I wonder” question, and answer, and the answers to the provided questions on the questionnaire.

Activity Challenged: Students will answer the questions on “Questionnaire #2.” On this questionnaire, students are required to write down their “I wonder” question, ask and answer 2 more questions, and answer the provided questions on the questionnaire.

When teachers teach with differentiation, all students are taught reading skills or strategies according to their learning levels. Thus, students learn what is taught and are better able to apply that reading strategy or skill with success.

### *Formative Assessment*

A formative assessment serves as a guide for teachers to see their students’ understanding of a recently taught reading skill or strategy. From a formative assessment, teachers can also know what to teach after the lesson to continue student improvement and understanding of a reading skill or strategy. An example of a formative assessment is found in a reading lesson about the comprehension strategy: asking questions.

In the lesson students participate in asking and answering questions in a small reading group as they chorus read a book during guided practice. Then during independent practice, students read another book with a partner and answer a questionnaire that goes with the book. As the students collaborate with the teacher and a partner in guided and independent practice, the teacher can see if the comprehension strategy of asking questions is understood. If the strategy is not understood, she will help students and student-partners during each practice. The teacher’s observation during guided and independent practice, along with the two products (i.e., “Question and Answer Chart” and student questionnaire) will help the teacher determine what students understood about the lesson and what needs to be taught next.

As one can see, when teachers use formative assessments, while teaching reading skills or strategies, they can observe student collaboration and products. With these observations,

teachers understand what students learned. Then teachers can use those observations as guides of what to teach next.

### *Writing and Communicative Practices*

Students write and communicate during lessons as they collaborate with their teacher and fellow students during guided and independent practice. For example, in a lesson about narrative text structures, students communicate in the guided practice exercise by identifying the 5 narrative texts structures as they listen to the teacher read a book and help the teacher fill out a narrative text structure graphic organizer. During the independent practice exercise, students communicate and write with a partner as they read another book and fill out a new narrative text structure graphic organizer.

When teachers provide students with the opportunity to write and communicate during guided and independent practice exercises, students can express their thinking. Then students can better understand and apply what was learned because they can explain it in both written and oral forms. Teachers can also use this information as a formative assessment to further guide student learning.

### **Conclusion**

Literacy occurs as one becomes proficient in reading and writing skills and strategies. There are many methods to teach literacy in a classroom, but the most important are a teacher's vision of reading and writing, explicit reading and writing instruction, and comprehensive reading instruction. Teachers should learn and apply these methods, so their students will become literate.

### References

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