

Introduction

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Over the years I have seen elementary educators experiencing similar challenges. Educators are tasked to teach literacy skills and content while also tailoring instruction to each student's individual needs. They are challenged to monitor students who are working independently while conducting small group instruction. And they must focus on providing differentiated support with a rather complicated text. No easy feat.

With increased attention to rigor, requirements, and personalized instruction, it can be a challenge to make sure all students are receiving instruction that is just right to improve growth. *Comprehensive Literacy Basics: An Anthology by Capstone Professional* grew out of the need to create a resource for today's elementary English language arts teacher. We contacted Capstone Professional authors, and a few additional contributors, to help us write a book on best practices. Chapters focus on each part of the literacy and language arts block. The quick tips, suggestions, and research base within will reinforce current practices while providing an invaluable go-to reference.

Although a chapter on whole group also focuses on supporting learners in small group settings, the book is naturally sequenced from whole group support to small group support to individualized instruction. A brief description of each chapter follows.

Margaret Mary PolICASTRO sets the stage by discussing the read-aloud. She explains its evolution from past to present and provides suggestions for maximizing instruction with the end goal of improving comprehension. Included are examples from her observations and tips for a collaborative, schoolwide approach to read-alouds.

Shared reading is an enjoyable experience in the elementary classroom. As the teacher sits in front of children with a big book in hand, the children eagerly await the next part of the story. Kathy Brown and Sarah Martino discuss ways to make this whole group experience interactive by providing tips and ideas for connecting shared reading to skills and strategies.

The building blocks in learning to read include phonics and word recognition. Sharon Vaughn provides instructional routines that aid in teaching and learning these foundational skills. She also answers frequently asked questions about instruction, including whether there's a correct sequence for teaching phonics and whether students can apply their knowledge of phonics to multisyllabic words.

Part of the whole group experience is sharing background knowledge, but as author Shari Frost explains, “The playing field is not level” Frost explains why background knowledge is important, gives ideas on ways to assess students’ background knowledge on a given topic, and provides suggestions for activating and building that knowledge during whole group instruction.

Tied to background knowledge is vocabulary. Without an understanding of the vocabulary, the content of a text is lost on students. Charlene Cobb gives tips and strategies for incorporating vocabulary instruction during literacy instruction as well as identifies what this looks like in both the primary and intermediate classrooms. Ideas for promoting vocabulary instruction across the content areas are also shared.

Elaine M. Weber and Barbara Nelson explain how to teach comprehension strategy instruction in order to create active, engaged, reflective, and critical readers with the end goal of independent use of strategies. The authors describe how to incorporate these strategies for analytic reading, close reading, guided highlighted reading, profundity scales, and levels of meaning.

When students are struggling in reading, sometimes the issue is with fluency. Chase Young

and Timothy V. Rasinski define reading fluency and provide several models that can be used in the classroom. Whether students require significant attention or instruction can be conducted during whole group, the tips and strategies provided will help students become more engaged readers.

Students today are writing in response to reading; writing as an exit out the door; or writing an argument, informative/expository, or narrative text. Clearly writing has become an integral component of the language arts program. In this chapter Hillary Wolfe offers best practices based on five key components: building a culture that supports writing, including writing every day, tying writing to reading, modeling and providing strategy instruction, and using assessment practices to support growth.

Students at all levels can manage the rigor of close reading. Nancy Boyles provides step-by-step directions for implementing small group close reading lessons in the classroom with the end goal of students being able to read deeply on their own. The chapter includes ideas for what to teach, how to teach the text, and examples of metacognitive questions.

Michael P. Ford explains what guided reading was like in years past and how it has shifted to become more intentional. He outlines basic elements to include in a guided reading program, such

as the integration of guided reading with other components of the literacy program, selection and use of appropriate texts, planning, decisions for work away from the teacher, and guided reading as an intervention.

Independent reading is helpful and necessary for students' continued growth with reading. This chapter explores the rationale and best practices for implementing independent reading. Authors Michelle J. Kelley and Nicki Clausen-Grace also describe a model that supports a differentiated approach.

How can teachers make sure that the practice away from the teacher is well spent and differentiated? In this chapter on literacy centers, Connie Dierking explains how to set up centers with integrity to the curriculum and differentiation in mind. She also provides suggestions for centers and activities at grades K–2 and 3–5, with a sample model of a mini-lesson with differentiated centers.

Sharing and assessment go hand-in-hand, and the benefits are student engagement and accountability as well as a deepened sense of community within the classroom. But what might this look like in the literacy and language arts classroom? Adele T. Macula explains how to approach sharing and assessment in the classroom along with research-based practices.

The final two chapters focus on the learners in the classroom. Authors Becky McTague and Kristin Lems suggest ways teachers can support English language learners. The chapter begins with an explanation of how learners acquire a second language and identifies some of the characteristics of which to be mindful. The authors also explain five effective classroom practices for English language learners.

Students enter the classroom at various levels and with various needs. In this final chapter, authors Nancy L. Witherell and Mary C. McMackin explain how teachers can meet the needs of all students during the English language arts block. Whether the child requires a challenge or needs intervention, the authors propose modifying content, process, or product to meet intended outcomes. The chapter is rounded out with two model lessons, showing how to provide for differentiation.

All of the components of a comprehensive literacy program are necessary because they have different purposes, scaffolds, and goals. And all build on each other by deepening knowledge, increasing achievement, and building classroom community. It has been an honor and a pleasure to work with the authors on this anthology. I hope you enjoy this resource and return to it throughout your career.