

Balanced Literacy: Four Principles to Connect Your Classroom to Current Standards

Just as technology and industries change to meet the demands of the consumer and the world we live in, literacy instruction also continues to morph and change. New standards, and global expectations have educators asking: “What can we do with our instructional practices to develop strategic readers, writers, and thinkers for college and careers success in the future?”

No matter where you go in the U.S., you are likely to hear several buzzwords such as “balanced literacy”, “guided reading”, “four-block”, or “reading/writing workshop”. Even though the labels that educators put on things may differ, at the core of balanced literacy instruction is the same basic framework, philosophical belief, and goals. Author Kathy Bumgardner has stated, “A balanced approach to literacy practices is grounded in the belief that ownership of literacy is central to students’ lifelong success.”

If you were to step into any classroom that uses any of these literacy labels, you are likely to see many of the same basic guiding principles for this framework. Read-alouds where the teacher models what good reader do and how they think while reading. Many times teachers will use authentic trade books for this interaction. Next, students work through a shared read. There are many ways to share a text with students: choral reading, partner reading, independent reading. This shared read springboards the teacher into short minilessons to model skills, strategies, and how the text works.

Next, students would break into small groups that rotate around the classroom. Typically, this might include attending a teacher-led table for guided reading. The teacher guides students using developmentally appropriate books, known as leveled readers. These books are written for instruction and utilize various

leveling systems. Some of the most popular systems are Fountas & Pinnel guided reading levels, DRA benchmark levels, or Lexile levels. Other small groups of students would be engaged with word study, independent reading, writing, or cross-curricular study.

The same framework can work for writing instruction. Modeled and Guided Writing includes focused writing trait minilessons and grammar minilessons, followed by daily independent writing. Teachers will conference with students to encourage improving their writing as students progress through the writing process. For all of these guiding principals you will see the connected fiber of the Gradual Release of responsibility throughout whole and small group lessons.

Fortunately for literacy leaders today, new curriculum programs offer a range of rigorous balanced literacy instruction. The [Wonders Balanced Literacy](#) solution from McGraw-Hill Education provides flexible pathways to meet a variety of K-5 classroom needs, together with a wealth of resources to support your units of study.

The demands of 21st century learning have shifted the Literacy landscape and created new imperatives. Students are being asked to work with more complex or “on grade level” texts. More teachers are scaffolding instruction using the gradual release model (I do, We do, They do, You do). And all of this is done with a BALANCE of content, texts, and teacher mediation.

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