Amanda Lambert

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Final

Five Pillars of Literacy

The five pillars of literacy are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. While each of these is equally important, not all of them are seen in every grade. The first pillar in literacy, phonemic awareness, is the ability to notice, think about, and work with individual sounds in spoken words (). Before a student is able to read, they need to be able to recognize the sounds certain letters and letter combinations make. Children who cannot hear the phonemes of a word are bound to have a hard time reading. The second pillar is phonics. This pillar involves graphophonemic relationships, letter-sound associations, letter-sound correspondances, sound-symbol correspondances, and sound-spellings. These types of learning are for the very beginning readers. Fluency is the third pillar of literacy. Students who are in this pillar are becoming more fluent readers. When text is read aloud, the words flow more easily. Students who do not have fluent reading skills read in choppy and disconnected ways. The fourth pillar of literacy is vocabulary. This is seen throughout most of the elementary classrooms, even with students who have yet to read fluently. There are four different types of vocabulary; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each of these vocabularies are used in their own way in their own time. The last pillar of literacy is text comprehension. This is the hardest and usually the last pillar to be accomplished. There are many ways to see if a student has reached text comprehension. A student in this pillar can summarize a piece of text, generating questions about the text, or even answering questions about the text.

At Milton Elementary in my Kindergarten classroom I saw evidence of mainly two pillars of literacy, phonemic awareness and phonics. Most everyday instruction included the teaching of phonemic awareness. With every word said and every subject taught, students were being shown that words and letters have sounds. I found myself daily mentioning the sound that a particular word would make. The CVC words were commonly used in the classroom setting and were helping to ensure that the students were able to decode simple words. There were different types of phonemic awareness evident in my classroom and even my lesson plans. The most used strategies were isolation, blending, identity, deletion, and segmentation. Each different skill becomes a part of the learning in the classroom and another step toward reading. Each student is at their own level. While some of my kindergarteners were beyond phonemic awareness learning, others were still trying to master it.

Phonics instruction is the other kind evident in a Kindergarten classroom. This pillar helps to connect the sounds they learn in phonemic awareness with the reading they are moving toward. Being able to blend sounds into words and read fluently sends them on their journey through the pillars of literacy. Only individual students in my classroom could fully understand the pillar of phonics. While instruction was given to the whole class in hopes it would come across, at times I felt myself resorting back to phonemic awareness techniques to ensure every student understood before moving on.

It is important that each student be taught in the way that is fitting to them. Some students might come to school already knowing what sounds the letters make and may not need this instruction in the classroom. Other students might not understand the sounds of letters well into the school year and still require additional help. Each student needs to be assessed daily and note needs to be taken as to whether the instruction is being effective.