

FOR-PD's Reading Strategy of the Month

Literacy Centers

June 2008



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Rationale:

What is a Literacy Center?

Students in our classrooms vary greatly in their literacy needs and ability levels. As a result, it is necessary to provide multiple opportunities for students to read, write, participate in meaningful experiences, and collaborate with others so that they can develop their ability to read and comprehend text(s). A literacy center is a physical area (or station) designated for specific learning purposes. It is designed to provide appropriate materials to help students work independently or collaboratively (with partners or in small groups) to meet literacy goals. A literacy center can be portable, temporary or permanent. The integration of literacy centers can support improvement in reading comprehension, language, social, and writing development (Fountas & Pinell, 1996; 2000; Morrow, 1997; 2003). Literacy centers facilitate problem-solving because students are able to explore, invent, discover, and create alone or with others at centers (Stone, 1996).

Why Have Literacy Centers?

Effective literacy centers allow for student choice, have explicit and ongoing routines. Literacy centers promote student collaboration, facilitate student motivation, and provide targeted practice for students (Daniels & Bizar, 1998).

How to Organize

Literacy Centers

Literacy centers can be organized and managed in endless ways. Teachers can create literacy centers that support guided reading instruction. As the teacher works with one group of students for guided reading, other groups rotate through the literacy centers in the classroom. Literacy centers can be created by simply setting out literacy activities on a table or they can be located in designated classroom areas. They are also appropriate for integrating technology. Ideally no more than four students should work in a literacy center.

Literacy Centers Sample Ideas for Elementary Grades

- Computer center, ABC center, writing center, listening center, memory card games, word family center, book club center, building/manipulatives center, art center, buddy reading center, poetry center, journal center, math center, science center, social studies center.

Literacy Centers Sample Ideas for Secondary Grades

Literacy centers for secondary grades are not just revamped elementary-school centers (Prevatte, 2007). Activities have to be relevant and purposeful. Literacy centers can be used in a variety of ways, one of which is to motivate students to read and write, provide them with relevant materials, and also stimulate comprehension development. You may design literacy centers to help students with various comprehension skills (e.g., comparison and contrast, problem-solution, main idea, author's purpose, research, and summarizing). Using a variety of literature genres (e.g., fiction, autobiographies, newspaper articles, non-fiction, non-print materials, and anecdotal records) literacy centers can allow students to apply, practice, and reflect on the skills and strategies they need to become proficient readers and writers.

Here are some sample ideas for creating literacy centers in the secondary grades.

- Computer center, writing center, word-making center, map center, problem-solving center, science center, newspaper center, art center, poetry center, math center, social studies center, publishing center.

How to Implement Literacy Centers:

Here are some guidelines for creating effective literacy centers in your classroom:

Guidelines for Developing Literacy Centers

- Start with the student; plan what literacy center to create with the student in mind.
 - What knowledge do students have as readers or writers?
 - Will they be able to work independently and/or collaboratively at the center?
 - Think about ways to make the center engaging and motivating for all students.
 - Think of the materials and the students' reading and writing levels.
 - What will the student's role be?
 - What will your role be?
- Think about the purpose of your literacy center.
- Identify where to create the literacy center.
- Choose a theme, topic, or focus for the center.
- Decide on how you will organize resources and materials (print or non-print) at the literacy center.
- Make a list of directions explaining how students should use the center.
- Teach students how to use the center; monitor their understanding of its use and provide feedback as needed.
- Monitor student participation in the center (develop a system [e.

g., a checklist] for tracking it).

- Create routines for students to use while at the center.
- Develop reading and writing activities for small group or independent work

[*Printable version of above guidelines](#)

Assessment:

Participating in meaningful and purposeful literacy activities on a regular basis could produce positive effects on the entire assessment system. Informal monitoring of student success on specific performance tasks will provide data on student literacy achievement. Use your monitoring system of student participation in the literacy center. In addition, teacher observation of center behaviors can provide important information about student independence and cooperative skills.

Resources:

For more detailed information regarding literacy centers, see the following resources:

Lesley Mandel Morrow (1997). *The Literacy Center*. Stenhouse Publishers. This is a comprehensive presentation on research for the use of literacy centers in the classroom. The book provides information about the organization, management, and assessment of literacy centers, and the instructional techniques that promote cooperative and collaborative learning settings. It is available through Stenhouse Publishers, <http://www.stenhouse.com>

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (1996). *Guided Reading--Good First Teaching for All Children (Grades K-2)*. Heinemann. This book provides detailed descriptions of classroom management techniques for literacy centers. *Guided Reading* is available through Heinemann Publishing, <http://www.heinemann.com>

Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching*

Comprehension, Genre, and Content Literacy. This companion volume to *Guided Reading (K-2)* extends the instruction, assessment, and management of literacy centers to intermediate through middle school grades. It also focuses on teaching comprehension, genre, and content literacy. *Guiding Readers and Writers* is available through Heinemann Publishing, <http://www.heinemann.com>

Examples of Literacy Centers:

The E.L. Cord Foundation Center for Learning and Literacy, University of Nevada, Reno. First Grade Literacy Centers.

<http://www.unr.edu/cll/ci602/first%20grade%20literacy%20centers.htm>

Village Meadows Elementary's Literacy Center Ideas in Phoenix, AZ.

<https://villagemeadows.dvusd.org/staff.html>

Literacy Centers Ideas for Elementary Grades.

http://hill.troy.k12.mi.us/staff/bnewingham/myweb3/literacy_centers%20Final.htm

Literacy Corners: Literacy Snapshots for Elementary Grades.

<http://www.jmeacham.com/centers.htm>

Literacy Centers for Elementary Grades.

<http://www.ourschoolfamily.com/Literacy%20Centers.htm>

References:

Daniels, H., & Bizar, M. (1998). *Methods that matter: Six structures for best practice classrooms*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. (1996). *Guided reading: Good first teaching for all children (grades K-2)*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. (2000). *Guiding readers and writers grades 3-6: Teaching comprehension, genre, and content literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Morrow, L. (1997). *Literacy center: Context for reading and writing*. York, ME: Stenhouse

Morrow, L. (2003). *Organizing and managing the language arts block: A professional development guide*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Prevatte, L. (2007). *Middle school literacy centers*. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House.

Stone, S. J., (1996). *Promoting literacy through centers* {Electronic version}. *Childhood Education*, 72, 240-242.

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