

BEST PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING READING

INCREASE

- Reading aloud to students
- Time for independent reading
- Student's choice of their own reading materials
- Exposing students to a wide and rich range of literature
- Teacher modeling and discussing his/her own reading processes
- Primary instructional emphasis on comprehension
- Teaching reading as a process:
 - Use strategies that activate prior knowledge
 - Help students make and test predictions
 - Structure help during reading
 - Provide after-reading applications
- Social, collaborative activities with much discussion and interaction
- Grouping by interests or book choices
- Silent reading followed by discussion
- Teaching skills in the context of whole and meaningful literature
- Writing before and after reading
- Encouraging invented spelling in student's early writings
- Use of reading in the content fields (e.g. historical novels in social studies)
- Evaluation that focuses on holistic, higher-order thinking processes
- Measuring success of reading program by students' reading habits, attitudes, and comprehension

DECREASE

- Exclusive emphasis on whole-class or reading-group activities
- Teacher selection of all reading materials for individuals and groups
- Relying on selection in basal reader
- Teacher keeping his/her own reading tastes and habits private
- Primary instructional emphasis on reading subskills such as phonics, word analysis, syllabication
- Teaching reading as a single, one-step act
- Solitary seatwork
- Grouping by reading level
- Round-robin oral reading
- Teaching isolated skills in phonics workbooks or drills
- Little or no chance to write
- Punishing preconventional spelling in students' early writings
- Segregation of reading to reading time
- Evaluation focus on individual, low-level subskills
- Measuring the success of the reading program only by test scores

* Steven Zemelman, Harvey Daniels, Arthur Hyde *Best Practice* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998).

BEST PRACTICE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING WRITING

INCREASE

- Student ownership and responsibility by:
 - Helping students choose their own topics and goals for improvement
 - Using brief teacher-student conferences
 - Teaching students to review their own progress
- Class time spent on writing whole, original pieces through:
 - Establishing real purposes for writing and students' involvement in the task
 - Instruction in and support for all stages of writing process
 - Prewriting, drafting, revising, editing
- Teacher modeling writing – drafting, revising, sharing – as a fellow author and as demonstration of processes
- Learning of grammar and mechanics in context, at the editing stage, and as items are needed
- Writing for real audiences, publishing for the class and for wider communities
- Making the classroom a supportive setting for shared learning, using:
 - Active exchange and valuing of students' ideas
 - Collaborative small-group work
 - Conferences and peer critiquing that give responsibility for improvement to students
- Writing across the curriculum as a tool for learning
- Constructive and efficient evaluation that involves:
 - Brief informal responses as students work
 - Thorough grading of just a few of student-selected, polished pieces
 - Focus on a few errors at a time
 - Cumulative view of growth and self-evaluation
 - Encouragement of risk taking and honest expression

DECREASE

- Teacher control of decision-making by:
 - Teacher deciding on all writing topics
 - Suggestions for improvement dictated by teacher
 - Learning objectives determined by teacher alone
 - Instruction given as whole-class activity
- Time spent on isolated drills on “subskills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, penmanship, etc.
- Writing assignments given briefly, with no context or purpose, completed in one step
- Teacher talks about writing but never writes or shares own work
- Isolated grammar lessons, given in order determined by textbook, before writing is begun
- Assignment read only by teacher
- Devaluation of students' ideas through:
 - Students viewed as lacking knowledge and language abilities
 - Sense of class as competing individuals
 - Work with fellow students viewed as cheating, disruptive
- Writing taught only during “language arts” period – i.e. infrequently
- Evaluation as negative burden for teacher and student by:
 - Marking all papers heavily for all errors, making teacher a bottleneck
 - Teacher editing paper, and only after completed, rather than student making improvements
 - Grading seen as punitive, focused on errors, not growth

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BEST PRACTICE IN SCIENCE*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING SCIENCE

INCREASE

- Hands-on activities that include:
 - Students identifying their own real questions about natural phenomena
 - Observation activity, often designed by students, aimed at real discovery, employing a wide range of process skills
 - Students hypothesizing to explain data
 - Information provided to explain data only after students have engaged in investigation process
 - Students' reflection to realize concepts and processes learned
 - Application, either to social issues or further scientific questions
- Focus on underlying concepts about how natural phenomena are explained
- Questioning, thinking, and problem solving, especially:
 - Being skeptical, willing to question common beliefs
 - Accepting ambiguity when data aren't decisive
 - Willing to modify explanations, open to changing one's opinion
 - Using logic, planning inquiry, hypothesizing, inferring
- Active application of science learning to contemporary technological issues and social choices
- In-depth study of a few important thematic topics
- Curiosity about nature and positive attitudes toward science for all students, including females and members of minority groups
- Integration of reading, writing, and math in science units
- Collaborative small-group work, with training to ensure it is efficient and includes learning for all group members
- Teacher facilitating students' investigative steps
- Evaluation that focuses on scientific concepts, processes, and attitudes

DECREASE

- Instruction based mainly on lecture and information giving
- Dependence on textbooks and lockstep patterns of instruction
- Cookbook labs in which students follow steps without a purpose or question of their own
- Questions, concepts, and answers provided only by the teacher
- Students treated as if they have no prior knowledge or investigative abilities
- Memorizing detailed vocabulary, definitions, and explanations without thorough connection to broader ideas
- Science approached as a set body of knowledge with all answers and information already known
- Attempts to correct student misconceptions by direct instruction
- Isolation of science from the rest of students' lives
- Superficial coverage of many topics according to an abstract scope-and-sequence
- Sense that only a few brilliant "nerds" can enjoy or succeed in science study
- Activity limited to texts, lectures, and multiple choice quizzes
- Students working individually, competitively
- Teacher only as expert in subject matter
- Testing focused only on memorization of detail, ignoring thinking skills, process skills, attitudes

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PRACTICE IN TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES

INCREASE

- In-depth study of topics in each social studies field, in which students make choices about what to study and discover the complexities of human interaction
- Emphasis on activities that engage students in inquiry and problem solving about significant human issues
- Student decision making and participation in wider social, political, and economic affairs, so that they share a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their school and community
- Participation in interactive and cooperative classroom study processes that bring together students of all ability levels
- Integration of social studies with other areas of the curriculum
- Richer content in elementary grades, building on the prior knowledge children bring to social studies topics; this includes study of concepts from psychology, sociology, economics, and political science, as well as history and geography; students of all ages can understand, within their experience, American social institutions, issues for social groups, and problems of everyday living
- Students' valuing and sense of connection with American and global history, the history and culture of diverse social groups, and the environment that surrounds them
- Students' inquiry about the cultural groups they belong to, and others represented in their school and community, to promote students' sense of ownership in the social studies curriculum
- Use of evaluation that involves further learning and that promotes responsible citizenship and open expression of ideas

DECREASE

- Cursory coverage of a lockstep curriculum that includes everything but allows not time for deeper understanding of topics
- Memorization of isolated facts in textbooks
- Isolation from the actual exercise of responsible citizenship; emphasis only on reading about citizenship or future participation in the larger social and political world
- Lecture classes in which students sit passively; classes in which students of lower ability levels are deprived of the knowledge and learning opportunities that other students receive
- Narrowing social studies activity to include only textbook reading and test taking
- Assumption that students are ignorant about or uninterested in issues raised in social studies
- Postponement of significant curriculum until secondary grades
- Use of curriculum restricted to only one dominant cultural heritage
- Use of curriculum that leaves students disconnected from and unexcited about social studies topics
- Assessments only at the end of a unit or grading period; assessments that test only factual knowledge or memorization of textbook information

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BEST PRACTICE IN TEACHING ART*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING ART

INCREASE

- Art making: more doing of art, music, dance, drama
- Student originality, choice, and responsibility in art making
- Stress on the process of creation, the steps and stages of careful craftsmanship
- Art as an element of talent development for all students
- Exploration of the whole array of art forms, from Western and non-Western sources, different time periods, cultures, and ethnic groups
- Support for every student's quest to find and develop personal media, style, and tastes
- Time for art in the school day and curriculum
- Integration of arts across the curriculum
- Using art as a tool of doing, learning, and thinking
- Reasonable classloads and work assignments for arts-specialist teachers
- Artists in schools, both as performers and as partners in interdisciplinary work
- Long-term partnerships with artists and arts organizations
- Teacher, principal, and parent involvement in the arts

DECREASE

- Studying other people's artworks
- Art projects that require students to create identical products or closely mimic a model
- Concern with final products and displays that smothers learning about process
- Art as an arena for competition, screening, awards, and prizes for a few
- Exclusive focus on Western, high-culture, elite art forms disconnected from a wide range of art making
- Cursory dabbling in many art forms, without supporting a drive toward mastery in one
- Once-a-week art classes that lack intensity
- Restricting study to separate arts discipline instruction
- Art as a body of content to be memorized
- Overloading arts specialists with excessive classloads
- Art experiences provided only by school arts specialists
- One-shot, disconnected appearances by artists
- Art-phobic, non-involved school staff members running arts programs for students

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