

What is Balanced Literacy?

The goal of Balanced Literacy is to help children become readers and writers who enjoy and value literacy.

Balanced Literacy is a framework designed to help all students learn to read and write effectively. The program stands firmly on the premise that all students can learn to read and write. This balance between reading and writing allows students to receive the teaching needed in order to succeed, while allowing students to work at a level that is not frustrating for them.

Teachers implementing Balanced Literacy use an integrated approach to teaching language arts. The Balanced Literacy framework consists of a number of elements that provide massive amounts of reading and writing on a daily basis. These authentic opportunities for reading and writing are arranged on a continuum based on more or less teacher support. Some reading and writing tasks are modeled by the teachers and others are accomplished with the support of the teacher, leading to a few that are done independently by the child.

Balanced Literacy provides many opportunities for real life reading and writing experiences in a child-centered classroom. Children read and write each day independently and in group settings (both large and small). Balanced Literacy classrooms focus on four different types of reading experiences:

Reading aloud to children
Shared reading - whole class
Guided reading - small group
Independent reading



Students also participate in shared and individual writing activities each day.

Additionally, during many daily reading and writing experiences, children are taught about letters, sounds, words and how they work. Listening and speaking are also emphasized in this integrated language approach.

Read Aloud

In Read Aloud teachers verbally interact with students before, during and after reading to help them understand and make a variety of connections with the read-aloud selection. The selection can be a non-fiction or fiction narrative, a poem or picture book.

During a read-aloud the teacher engages in a series of activities, including: pre-viewing the book; asking students to make predictions and connections to prior knowledge; stopping at purposeful moments to emphasize story elements, ask guiding questions or focus questions; and using oral or written responses to bring closure to the selection.

Shared Reading

Shared Reading is a link in helping students become independent readers. It allows the teacher to model and support students using prediction and confirming skills. It allows less confident students the chance to share stories/articles/poetry in a non-threatening situation. It focuses on the meaning, fun, enjoyment, characters and sequence of a story and allows them to relate it back to their own experiences. It promotes discussion, problem-solving and critical thinking by students.

Shared Reading is an interactive reading experience. An integral component of Shared Reading is an enlarged text that all children can see. Children join in the reading of a big book or other enlarged text such as songs, poems, charts, and lists created by the teacher or developed with the class. During the reading the teacher involves the children in reading together by pointing to or sliding below each word in the text. The teacher deliberately draws attention to the print and models early reading behaviours such as moving from left to right and word-by-word matching. Shared reading models the reading process and strategies used by readers.





Guided Reading

Guided reading is an instructional reading strategy during which a teacher works with small groups of children who have similar reading processes and needs. The teacher selects and introduces new books carefully chosen to match the instructional levels of students and supports whole text reading. Readers are carefully prepared when being introduced to a new text and various teaching points are made during and after reading. Guided reading fosters comprehension skills and strategies, develops background knowledge and oral language skills, and provides as much instructional-level reading as possible. During guided reading, students are given exposure to a wide variety of texts and are challenged to select from a growing repertoire of strategies that allow them to tackle new texts more independently. Ongoing observation and assessment help to inform instruction and grouping of students is flexible and may be changed often.



Independent Reading

Independent Reading is a time when students self-select and independently read appropriate books.

Independent Reading provides an opportunity to apply strategies that are introduced and taught during teacher read aloud, shared reading, and guided reading. When materials are appropriate and students can read independently, they become confident, motivated and enthusiastic about their ability to read.

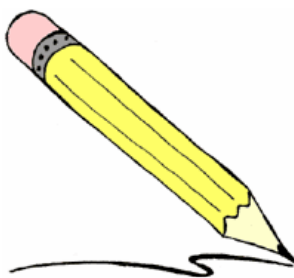
Shared Writing

Shared Writing or Modeled Writing is an approach to writing where the teacher and children work together to compose messages and stories. Children provide the ideas and the teacher supports the process as a scribe. The message is usually related to some individual or group experience. The teacher provides full support, modeling and demonstrating the process of putting children's ideas into written language. The text becomes much richer than children can write themselves and becomes good material for children to read and should be displayed in the room. The children can illustrate the finished text when possible. Children will love to see their work displayed and will feel successful because they can read it.

Working With Words

The field of "word study" provides students an opportunity to manipulate words (and parts of words) in meaningful and enjoyable activities and games. Reading ability can develop dramatically as word study lessons develop experience with:

- Letters and their corresponding sounds.
- Components of words, such as roots, prefixes, and suffixes.
- Patterns of how words are spelled, such as word families.
- How parts of words often will give hints to the meaning of a word, as well as its spelling or pronunciation.



Writer's Workshop

The basic philosophy behind Writer's Workshop is to allow students to daily spend time writing for real purposes about things that interest them. Students can experiment with a variety of genres. Grammar, spelling, handwriting and other mechanics can be taught within writing workshop.

Students learn the craft of writing through practice, conferring, and studying the craft of other authors. The ultimate goal of a writing workshop is always to develop life-long writers.

Within the context of Writer's Workshop, a variety of organizational patterns for instruction are used: a whole class session, a small group mini-lesson, a student-teacher conference, and a sharing of written work. The Writer's Workshop is devoted to supporting student learning in writing. What students need to learn during a Writer's Workshop is based upon their present writing competencies and the language arts expectations for each grade level. For the majority of the time in Writer's Workshop, students will be engaged in actual writing.

Writer's Workshop gives children daily opportunities to develop their unique writing processes and communicate meaning through words and pictures.

