

Professional Conversations

Course Synthesis Presentation

Meeting #1) Introduction Notes

- Learning is most helpful in a classroom setting surrounded by kids
- Due to covid, small groups are not allowed which makes many things about teaching difficult
 - My mentor teacher specifically has 9 students below grade level for reading
- Start every lesson with a book, this excites students and creates a hook
- Blanche Lemant is very influential
 - Mentoring young writers
 - Show don't tell

Reflection: The first meeting with my mentor teacher was different than I expected but was very informative nonetheless. It was more of an introduction to her and her school. We spoke about how covid-19 is making things very difficult and how we would have all enjoyed being in the classroom. The biggest thing we spoke about is how most of the learning we will get in this degree is from being in a classroom. This is something that relates well to the course because my professors and past mentor teacher have said how important field study is. You can only learn so much through books and lectures, being able to be present and hands-on is the best experience. We spoke about the changes covid-19 have made in the classroom, specifically related to small group work and curriculum. With the new regulations, students are not allowed to leave their desks, or small group work is not possible. This is challenging for my mentor teacher and every teacher because small group work is necessary for learning. It is the main part of education for different levels of students and is a part of differentiation needed in the classroom. Small group work is best for teaching important topics like phonetics and reading groups. Like we talked about in class and our discussion groups, being adaptable is important as a teacher. Both my mentor teacher and I can understand the difficulties that covid-19 is making for educators. We also spoke about how important it is to begin lessons with hooks or reading books. Through our classroom conversations and lesson plans, I was able to connect with her and understand the importance. We spoke about high-quality literature and how it is essential for learning which my mentor teacher also highlighted. She recommends beginning every lesson with a book to engage learners and use this as a type of trailer for the upcoming lesson. This is something I will take

with me to my future schools and will implement as I think it's beneficial. It allows students to be engaged and visually see what they will be learning about. They also can become excited to learn. The first mentor teacher conversation session already proved to be very influential for me and I look forward to getting a chance to talk about a variety of things.

Meeting #2) Quality Children's Literature and Professional Resources Notes

- Library and the librarian helps a lot with finding quality books
- Internet/online resources are great for finding good books
- During lockdown, get epic is a great online resource with hundreds of digital books and free for teachers
- Because of covid there is no carpet, therefore students can not be brought together to read but in normal times my mentor teacher would do this and create a sense of calmness at the carpet when reading
- Using the smartboard to display the book allows every students to see it clearly
- Use lots of picture books for every unit no matter the grade level
- Read books before every lesson, can act as a trailer for upcoming unit/lesson
- Fill the classroom library with new books constantly, putting out books following the unit theme
- Model reading strategies while reading, asking questions, making observations
- Use books as a form of writing prompts
- To encourage reading, each classroom has reading carts with books, prizes and reading logs
- Having reading logs for each student is helpful for evaluations and to monitor progress
- Some of my mentor teachers favourite books for lessons
 - I want an Iguana, The day the crayons quit, Sylvester and the magic pebble, The lorax, Stone Soup, Not a Stick not a Box
- Some of the best books for children to read themselves
 - Robert Munsch, The Berenstain Bears, Animal books
- All subject content is integrated
- Best books for diversity, inclusion etc..
 - Girl with the Orange Socks, Shi-Shi-Etko, Shinsha Canoe, Fatty legs, The Name Jar, Same Same but Different, My Name is Yoon

- Youtube is a great resource for read aloud books

Reflection: This week's mentor teacher conversation was very insightful for me and helped tie together many things we speak about in class. The whole focus of this course is language and literacy so speaking to my mentor teacher about her opinions and advice on this was very helpful. Some of the biggest and most important resources she mentioned were either things I already knew about/use or things my professor, Joy has brought up and taught us about. Either way, they are very helpful and will be great to implement in my future classrooms. For example, youtube is a major one that she uses and that we use in our lectures as well. Thousands of read aloud books on there are super easy to use for both students and teachers. Whether it is a book read-aloud for the whole group or small group work, having a piece of technology like this is very beneficial especially during covid times. Another resource she spoke about and we also talked about in class was a site called "Get Epic" which is an online library. While we were in lockdown this is what many teachers used for their students, and even now to provide them with many book resources across all ages and content matters. These are two great resources I will be implementing in my future classrooms. Another resource we did not speak much about in class but I thought was very obvious is the librarian. My mentor teacher spoke about how great they are for classrooms because they know so much. Creating a good relationship with your librarian is important because they can provide you with the best books for whatever content area you're looking for. In class, we've spoken a lot about types of instruction like whole class or small class and explicit or implicit instruction. These were also topics brought up in this week's mentor teacher conversations. My mentor teacher made a point to encourage us to make reading fun and interesting for students. Having reading logs, prizes and a large selection of books is crucial. Just like Joy, my mentor teacher recommends using picture books at every grade level. Just because there are pictures that do not mean it is not instructional or necessary for units. They are always helpful to visualize and always have good morals and themes. Introducing these books to lessons is a great way to ensure quality literature is being explored and students are receiving learning in a variety of ways. My mentor teacher also listed some great books for us to take note of and implement in our classrooms which I found helpful. I remember talking about some of them in class with my group members like *I want an Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff and *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi. There were many others she provided but it was cool to see how her content intertwined with our lessons and topics. Finally what we spoke about is how all subject

content should be integrated. ELA should be a part of all lessons whether it's math, science or social studies. Being able to properly integrate is something I look forward to exploring more in the upcoming semesters and field study.

Meeting #3) ELA Programming Notes

- Specific outcomes or context should not be taught by itself, always bring the rest of the curriculum to life
- Tie in all class subjects
- Whole language teaching
- Phonics are extremely important
 - Especially with ELL students, learning disability students etc...
- Teach phonics exclusively
 - EX: letter blends, word family, sight words
- The best time for teaching ELA is the morning because their brains are fresh and ready to learn. They tend to be more in a "green zone"
- Word work and writing happens every single day, practice makes perfect
- Incorporate writing into every subject
- Have students read after lunch to calm down again
- Literacy circles are beneficial, each group have different books
- With covid many things changed
 - Everything is online based, because of HUB teachers must follow a specific curriculum plan and not deter from it
 - Scope and Sequence
- Ask yourself as a teacher "what do I want students to learn"
- Best resources are your teaching associates, librarian, principles
- Having tons of choices for students is important
- Best resources are pinterest, youtube, google, internet, teachers pay teachers, colleagues
- Kinesthetic, sounds, nonsense words, word work (EX: how many words can you make out of the sentence "happy halloween"), hangman, centers
- Best way to learn is reading everyday, reading different kinds of books
- Teachers should vary type of instruction outloud, in head, home reading
- Sight words (the, and , I, them, me etc..)

- Having a vocab wall in classrooms is very helpful.

Reflection: This week's mentor teacher conversations focused on ELA programming and curriculum. It was an important topic to speak about because we focused heavily on this in our class lessons and discussions. My mentor teacher's main point was that curriculum points should not be taught alone. They should always be tied together with other content to bring everything to life. I agree with her because through our lesson plans and reading log assignments we had to use the Alberta Program of Outcomes as a resource. This was very helpful to design activities around but also can feel very overwhelming and isolating. In class, we spoke about how to engage learners and make lessons interesting while having students want to learn. I think this all ties together because though there are specific curriculum outcomes that need to be met during the school, you chose to teach it how you want that best fits the needs of your students. We spoke about how important word work and writing is to students learning and how it should be incorporated into lessons and activities daily. This connected to our discussion and lessons we had in class during week 2 and 5 about phonological awareness and teaching reading and writing. We read articles like *Equipped for Reading Success* by David Kilpatrick and *Put Reading First* by The National Institution for Literacy that compiled many techniques and lessons on the importance of phonetics and how to teach them. Many of the things they spoke about from phoneme awareness and when and where to teach it was brought up in our discussion. Like the articles, my mentor teacher emphasizes the importance of teaching phonetics from a young age and continuously in daily work. By doing this students are exposed early on to sounds and will become better readers and writers. Some of the specific word work we talked about were kinesthetic, sounds, nonsense words etc... We also spoke about the restrictions covid-19 has put on schools curriculum wise which was interesting. Because many students are online and there are many online teachers, the curriculum is very specific and must be followed to make sure all students are on the same page. This can be very controlling for teachers and provide little freedom, which from discussing with my group members is necessary. I think experiencing covid during our school year will end up being beneficial for us because we get to see why certain teaching practices are important and why. My mentor teacher also mentioned how she feels the best time to teach any writing or word work is in the morning when their brains are fresh and they are in a "green" zone. They are less tired and wired after recess or lunch which allows them to focus more. This is a tip I will be using in my future classrooms to keep everyone

engaged and make sure they are understanding. Especially from personal experiences, reading or writing in the morning is calming and you are more energized to learn important things. Overall this week was very reflective for me and I was able to connect many things we spoke about to our in-class lectures and readings.

Meeting #4) Assessment and Differentiation Notes

- Formative assessment, Fountas and Pinnell, reading assessment, sight word testing
 - At the beginning, middle and end of school year
- My mentor teacher makes a sheet grid every year with a spot for each students name and copies it for each lesson or activity and constantly fills it in to be organized and always on top of things
- Report cards are easier with constant assessment
- Have big writing assignments with learning intentions for students (What I want them to learn/know)
- Create success criteria for students, like a mini checklist
- Be specific but not too overwhelming, do not surprise the students
- EX: 2 stars and a wish
 - 2 things they did well and one thing you wish for them to do differently to work on next time
- Create a writers conference where teacher can have mini meetings going over assignments with students and directly explain their comments/critiques rather than writing them and not knowing if students actually read them, oral feedback
- Creating tiered centers is great, phonics, making words, other enrichment
- Grouping is important
 - Depending on activities some groups may have all same level students while sometimes there may be one advanced student who is more of a “boss” to lead
- Scaffold with technology
- You must know your learners
- To interact with parents my mentor teacher blogs everyday
- Has a “bigger” assignment about once every 2 weeks
- Small groups are very beneficial but due to times can not happen
- In great circumstances, EA will pull out students to help the teacher
- In regards to reading, be intentional in what you let them read and have interesting books

- Make sure students are engaged in what they're reading, give them choices
 - EX: give them 5 book options at their reading level
 - Could be graphic novels, sports theme, chapter books
- For ELL learners it depends on what level they are (LP 1, LP 2)
- Teach more basic words, closed sentences, tons of visuals
- Direct vocabulary teaching, check in for understanding always
- Act many things out, make it interesting
- Other students will naturally help them with speaking, give them ideas, words, conversational topics etc..

Reflection: Going into this week's mentor teacher conversations, I was very excited to hear her views and way of teaching assessment and differentiation. We spoke about many things that we learned in class through our slides or pre-class readings like Fountas and Pinnell assessment and reading and formative assessment. In our text *This Is Balanced Literacy, Grades K-6*, they explain that small group instruction is designed to differentiate learning based on students' current needs which is something my mentor teacher also mentioned. She thinks it is the best solution to accommodate everyone's needs and being able to pair students up based on their cumulative needs works best in small groups. (Fisher et al., 2019, p.114). Like my discussion group talked about, she believes in continuous assessment across all content matters. She recommends assessing reading and writing at the beginning, middle and end of the school year to see their progress. As a way to stay on top of her grading my mentor teacher uses a grid sheet with all student's names and lists the different activities she is assessing them on. It is easy for her to stay organized and collect lots of feedback. This is also something my group liked the idea of and discussed after lesson plan feedback. We feel it would be very beneficial not only for organizational purposes but they save time and help to be prepared for things like report cards. She also said it is important to have some big assessments throughout the year for reading and writing that focus on specific criteria that we as teachers want to know from our students. A great resource that my mentor teacher uses that I will be implementing into my future classrooms is mini checklists for assignments. It is a way for students to know what they have to include and for them to learn about reviewing work. This is something that I would have used in my lesson plan and added it to my assessment part rather than just the rubric. Another idea she said based on assessment is a "2 stars and a wish" system. She will meet with students and go over two

things they did well and something they can improve on. This is a positive feedback manner and allows them to be directly involved in the process. These ideas all connect to our week 10 learning about reading assessment and my in-class discussions with my group members. We all liked the ideas and plan to use them in our future studies. My mentor teacher also talks highly about centers and small groups for assessment and differentiation. In week 7 we talked a lot about small group learning and watched many videos about how to use it for learning and ways of differentiation. This allowed me to connect many things to what my mentor teacher was talking about and allowed me to see it from a different perspective. She likes tiered centers for word work, phonics, reading and more. These are all examples my group spoke about for how we would use small groups. They also are great for accommodating students with different needs. You can focus time with those who are lower level in reading or writing or on the flip side those who are more advanced in those. We also spoke specifically about ELL students too and how to assist them. It depends on what L level they are but working specifically with words and visuals is important. Direct vocabulary teaching is important and constantly checking in on assessment is very beneficial. She also mentions something that we spoke about in class about how a lot of their learning will come from their peers in natural conversation or activities. Through small group work and one-on-one help, they will receive the best education possible. This week's conversation was really helpful in connecting in-class learnings to actual classroom practice and I learned about many things I will be implementing in my future classrooms.

Meeting #5) Challenges and Growth Notes

- Some of the challenges this year are COVID-19 and having over 9 low readers in the class
- Difficult to balance time with everyone
- Teachers are “only one person”
- Report cards indicators can be difficult and too generic/broad
 - For ELA there are only 2 sections
 - Writing and reading are graded only by fluency and comprehension
- For online using google meet is helpful
- Having good/strict ground rules is necessary
 - EX: no toys around you, bathroom breaks at a certain time etc...
- Get epic and youtube are great online resources

- Must be adaptable
- TP&G: Teachers Professional Growth Plan) done every year
- Growth is done through colleagues, students, partner work, teachers naturally try and get better
 - They will never teach something the same way twice
- Students development plan on writing
 - 3 years, guest speakers (Blanche Lemant, PD days, professional learning communities)
- You learn SO much from colleagues
- You have to want to be a teacher, be true to yourself, always strive to be better, be attentive and have fun

Reflection: Our last mentor teacher conversation surrounded her personal experiences and challenges and growths she has had throughout her teaching career and more specifically through this past year. Most of the challenges we spoke about were the effects that covid-19 has had for teachers and life in the classroom. When we were discussing challenges, my mentor teacher brought up the fact that sometimes report cards can be very restrictive for teachers. Especially for the ELA category, it is too generic and not specific enough to truthfully answer. This was particularly interesting to me because I have never seen a report card from the teacher's perspective but once she explained it made sense. In class, we talk about how important it is to provide specific feedback and specific outcomes to students and what the report card does that is too generic. In my future classrooms, I would hope that elements like this have changed for the better and teachers are allowed to be more specific when assessing content areas. In regards to online teaching because of the times we're in, my mentor teacher says having a good set of ground rules is necessary which I think we can all relate to, especially professors. Students are used to structure and schedules so having them at home where many distractions can be harmful to their learning. Just like in our classes before lectures we speak about classroom etiquette, actually hearing it from another teacher makes it even more important. My mentor teacher talked about a TP&G which is something I had not heard of before and we had not talked about in class. It is a teacher professional growth plan that they have every year and complete with principles about their year, goals, strengths and weaknesses which is a great teacher assessment idea. They can get feedback from many professional colleagues that are very beneficial for their teaching. As my mentor teacher said, every teacher always strives for better. No teacher will teach the

same lesson twice, they are constantly evolving and improving their teaching. This is something very motivational for me that I want to express in my future classrooms. Learning from mistakes and growing is a part of life and teaching is a career that allows you room to do that. She ended our conversations on her personal philosophy that I think can be shared by most teachers and professors. She said you have to want to be a teacher. Like we spoke about in class, being true to yourself and being authentic is what being a teacher truly is. Things can get overwhelming fast but finding a good set of colleagues and people to surround yourself with can really help. To finish, she ended on a point I really love and will definitely use as a saying to refer back to in my future studies or classrooms which is simply “have fun”.

Main Ideas

- 1) Differentiating
- 2) Classroom Assessment
- 3) Classroom Management
- 4) Phonological Awareness



References

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