

Connecting Skills to Text

Teacher: Charmon Evans

Years Teaching: 9

School: Richard E. Bard Elementary School, Port Hueneme, California

Grade: First

Class Size: 20 students

Lesson Dates: October 23 and 24

“There can be a balance between good literature, an exciting classroom environment, and skills-based learning. We all know that’s important, we’ve got to teach those skills. But skills-based learning can be fun.”
—Charmon Evans

Overview

Video Summary

Learning to read in Charmon Evans's first-grade classroom is skills-oriented but fun—whether students are interacting with a talking puppet or playing the Word Wall Game Show. Ms. Evans carefully balances skill development—phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word identification—with authentic reading and writing tasks and a love of learning. To meet the varying learning needs of her class, she uses whole-class, small-group, and individual groupings. Students revisit poetry charts, read decodable texts in guided reading groups, and write in their journals about a challenging, read-aloud chapter book.

Ms. Evans's literacy lessons demonstrate the following:

- Reinforcement of skills in playful and creative ways
- Authentic experiences that help students develop a love of reading and writing
- Ongoing assessment of students' reading and writing to inform teaching
- Reinforcement and repetition of skills in whole-class, small-group, and independent activities that meet the literacy needs of a range of learners

"You need to take different approaches and use the best from all."

Literacy Teaching Practices

Read-Aloud

Guided Reading

Independent Reading and Writing

Putting It in Context

The Teacher and the Class

Charmon Evans teaches first grade at the Richard E. Bard Elementary School in Port Hueneme, California. A small coastal town, Port Hueneme is home to a naval base with a diverse population. Of Ms. Evans's 20 students, nearly half are Filipino and a quarter are Hispanic.

A veteran teacher of nine years, Ms. Evans has seen the climate around literacy instruction—and her own instruction—change over time. Trained in the “whole-language era,” Ms. Evans has felt “a push toward standards-based instruction” in California. Ms. Evans now takes the “best from all different approaches,” integrating parts of a literature-based and phonics-based approach in her classroom. She explicitly teaches phonics— “[students] need the pieces of the puzzle if they are going to put the puzzle together,” she says—and yet she is committed to reading good literature in her classroom, and to fostering a love of reading in her students.

Ms. Evans plans her phonics instruction based on ongoing assessments of students' reading and writing skills. She uses assessment tools from California Reading Results, a project led by researcher Marlin Adams and involving thousands of teachers throughout California. A participant of the project for five years, Ms. Evans now directs weeklong summer training institutes.

Day at a Glance*

8:00	Arrival
8:10	Morning Meeting (Phonics Drill)
8:35	Word Study Activity
8:45	Guided Reading/ Learning Centers
9:45	Blending Sounds With Puppet
10:00	Word Wall Game Show
10:30	Read-Aloud
11:00	Journal Response
11:15	Sharing Journals

*In the video, you see excerpts from Ms. Evans's class on October 23 and 24. On a typical day, other content areas are also included in the schedule.

Analyzing the Video

Before Viewing

The following activities prepare you to observe this classroom video, whether alone or with a group.

Prepare To Record Your Observations

Make a copy of the Observational Checklist (found in the Appendix) to record your observations, reactions, and further questions that come up throughout your viewing. Copy the KWL Chart (also in the Appendix) and record what you already know and what you would like to learn about word study in the primary grades. Groups can use the KWL chart to generate discussion and questions to consider while viewing.

Consider Key Questions

Consider these questions as you view the video:

- How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?
- How are the diverse needs of learners (language in particular) met in this classroom?
- What forms of assessment are apparent in this classroom, and how does assessment guide instruction?
- How are reading and writing connected in this classroom?

Review Important Terms

Review the definitions of the following Literacy Teaching Practices (page 4): read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, interactive writing, and independent writing.

Review the following definitions of the Essential Components of Literacy Development (page 2): oral language, phonological awareness, word study (vocabulary/concepts and word identification/phonics), comprehension, composition, and fluency and automaticity.

First Impressions

Use the following activities to reflect on the classroom video.

Watch the Video

On your first viewing, use the Observational Checklist to note how Charmon Evans implements the Essential Components of Literacy Development, particularly word study. Note her attention to building whole-word identification skills and phonics knowledge.

Review What You Saw

After watching the video, review the Observational Checklist and reflect on what you saw. How do the practices you just watched compare to your own? Think about your classroom and the needs of your students. How are they different from or similar to what you saw in the video?

Relate the Key Questions to Charmon Evans's Classroom

How are reading and writing connected in this classroom?

Why does Ms. Evans choose more advanced literature than the students read on their own during her read-aloud with the entire class? What do you think about the range of responses to the writing assignment about predicting the events of the book? What is gained by connecting reading and writing in a first-grade classroom in this way?

How does the classroom environment encourage students to gain independence as readers and writers?

Ms. Evans says that she wants all of her students to feel a sense of independence and to take responsibility for their own learning. How does Ms. Evans use the tub activities to build on previous learning and encourage students' choice and independence as readers and writers?

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Looking Closer

Take a second look at Charmon Evans's classroom to deepen your understanding of specific literacy strategies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.

Phonics Mini-Lesson: Video Segment

Find this segment 4 minutes and 20 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 2 minutes and 20 seconds.

In her classroom, Ms. Evans uses student assessment results to create small, homogeneous, guided-reading groups. In this video segment, Ms. Evans works with a guided-reading group to prepare for a new book. Students first review sight words from their vocabulary envelopes, and then begin a group phonics lesson on the "A"-consonant-"E" spelling pattern.



- As you watch, think about what factors Ms. Evans considers when she plans her phonics instruction.
- What steps does Ms. Evans follow in this lesson, and how does she help the students see that the spelling pattern applies to a range of different words? How does she link this focused practice to what students have learned in the past about sound/letter relationships? How does she use this activity to prepare them to read the new book?
- What are the major differences between the explicit phonics approach used by Ms. Evans and a less intensive approach to phonics instruction?
- What other ways can a teacher approach word study to prepare for reading a new book?

Guided Reading: Video Segment

Find this segment 6 minutes and 41 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 3 minutes and 14 seconds.

In this video segment, the guided-reading group begins a new book, *The Race*.

- As you watch, note the steps Ms. Evans uses as the students begin to read the book. What is her rationale for including the picture walk and the whisper reading in the guided-reading lesson?
- How does she manage to meet the individual needs of each child while working with the group? What are some of the differences between students in this group?
- How does Ms. Evans use the guided-reading lesson to work on word study as well as comprehension?



Read-Aloud: Video Segment

Find this segment 19 minutes and 20 seconds after the beginning of the video. Watch for 5 minutes and 35 seconds.

In this video segment, Ms. Evans explains why she uses literature like *The Littles* for the read-aloud to her entire class.

- Why does she consider read-aloud to be such an important part of the literacy curriculum? How does she connect the read-aloud to the students' work in their writing response journals?
- How does Ms. Evans reinforce the reading-writing connection with different types of responses?



Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Ms. Evans's Assessment Tools

In her classroom, Ms. Evans uses ongoing assessment to inform her instruction. Read the following selections from an interview on her approach to assessment and answer the questions below.

Q: What is your approach to formal assessment?

A: My formal assessments consist of a barrage of tests starting with phonemic awareness assessments. I do most of my reading assessments one on one. Also I do a basic phonics skills test and I find out whether [students] know their letters and their sounds, and their vowels and their digraphs. And then they do some reading for me of some short vowel words like *be* or *see*. The basic phonics skills test I give has a sequence of skills so that it has final E words or R-controlled vowel words so I can really pinpoint the gaps. I also do a spelling inventory, which tells me if they are applying the knowledge, because oftentimes reading and spelling are different. And also I use a high-frequency word list at the beginning of the year, so I know where to start. I want to find out what words they know. And we keep working through those 300 high-frequency words during the year, as many as we can get through with each kid. It's very individualized. And then I do a running record, or a miscue analysis reading record. That is really where it all comes together. I see whether they are actually able to apply the phonics skills or the phonemic awareness knowledge for sounding out words, and how well they can read.

Q: What is your approach to informal assessment?

A: Every day I spend time watching kids doing independent work, working in centers. Sometimes I carry a little notepad around with me and make notes to myself. I keep notes of what happens in my guided reading groups. I think that's some of the best time, because it is such a small group that I can really take good notes; for instance, Randy doesn't understand this or Monica did really well on that. And sometimes those notes mean that I can move a child to a different group. Either they are doing better or they are not keeping up with the group. Oftentimes after work with a small group I will hold one child back. And it is a little quick assessment because I have a question about their placement or did they get what we did in the lesson? And I do a check with them. So I do a lot of informal assessment that way. And sometimes just two minutes that I spend with a child gives me a lot of information to know where to go with him the rest of the day.

Q: What standards influence your instruction?

A: In the state of California there are standards in word recognition, in phonics, and in phonemic awareness. And there are standards in comprehension and word study. So I try to intermingle all of those different standards, meeting the needs of the kids. It's hard when differentiating instruction, when the standard is here, and your child is only working at this level. I try to look to the standards, and what is my benchmark for the end of the year. Where is it that I want this child to be? And how do I need to lay the foundation so that she can get there? What is it that I need to do to be able to help them meet those standards? The formative and summative assessments I do help guide me and guide my instruction, to help them reach those standards.

- What specific areas of literacy does Ms. Evans address with these assessment tools? How does she assess students' engagement in authentic reading and writing tasks?
- How does Ms. Evans's assessment approach compare to your own? What kind of assessment tools—and how much assessment—do you think are beneficial?
- Review the First Grade Student Record Sheet used by Ms. Evans and developed by the California Reading and Literature Project (found on the library Web site). What does it assess? How would you use this assessment information to inform your own instruction?

Analyzing the Video, cont'd.

Summing Up

Wrap up your impressions of the video with a final reflection.

Reflecting on Your Viewing Experience

Review your completed Observational Checklist and other notes such as your KWL chart.

- What surprised or interested you?
- What did you find that affirmed what you already knew or had been doing?
- What new approaches or ideas will you try?
- What questions do you have?
- After watching the video, do you think differently about your own practices? About the students you teach? About how young students develop literacy?

Making Connections

Apply and Extend

Here are some opportunities to apply and extend what you've seen.

Read This Article

Compare the following article on teaching phonics with what you observed in Ms. Evans's classroom.

Stahl, S. A. "Saying the 'P' Word: Nine Generalizations for Exemplary Phonics Instruction." *The Reading Teacher*, 45, no. 8 (1992): 618–625.

This reading is available as a downloadable PDF file on the *Teaching Reading* Web site. Go to www.learner.org/channel/libraries/readingk2/.

Watch These Videos

View the other first-grade videos in the *Teaching Reading* library, "Promoting Readers As Leaders" and "Assessment-Driven Instruction," to see how other first-grade teachers incorporate phonics into their teaching routines. Which of these strategies are evident in your classroom? Which might you try using with your own students?

For more information on these videos, see the chapters on "Promoting Readers As Leaders" and "Assessment-Driven Instruction" in this guide.

Take It Back to the Classroom

Identify one element or strategy from Ms. Evans's lesson that you would like to try in your classroom. In particular, what dramatic or playful teaching ideas used by Ms. Evans could you incorporate into your own classroom? List supports or resources that you would need to implement it. Use the Classroom Strategy Planner (found in the Appendix). If you are participating in a study group, share what happened when you tried out the new strategy. Or keep a reflective journal of your experience, focusing on the benefits for you and for your students.

Selected Resources

Resources Used by Ms. Evans

Yopp, H. K., and R. H. Yopp. "Supporting Phonemic Awareness Development in the Classroom." *The Reading Teacher* 54, no. 2 (2000): 130–143.

California Reading and Literature Project: <http://csmpl.ucop.edu/crlp/>

Books for Students in Ms. Evans's Classroom

Ginsburg, Mirra. *Chick and the Duckling*. New York, N.Y.: Simon & Schuster Children's Books, 1988.

Henry, Marguerite, and Joan Nichols. *The Big Race*. A Scholastic Phonics Reader. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic Inc., 1987.

Peterson, John. *The Littles Go Exploring*. New York, N.Y.: Scholastic Book Services, 1978.

Additional Resources

Books and Articles

Armbruster, B. B., F. Lehr, and J. Osborn. *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. Jessup, Md: National Institute for Literacy, 2001. (This article is downloadable for free at: <http://www.nifl.gov>.)

International Reading Association. *Phonemic Awareness and the Teaching of Reading: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1997.

International Reading Association. *The Role of Phonics in Reading Instruction: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association*. Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 1997.

Savage, J. F. *Sound It Out: Phonics in a Balanced Reading Program*. Boston, Mass.: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2001.

For more resources on literacy, see the General Resources section of the Appendix.

Notes
