Interview with a 4th Grade Teacher

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As a student teacher candidate this year, I have been placed in a classroom with a wonderfully skilled 4th grade teacher. Although I have had many chances to participate in field experiences involved with assisting students with reading; learning from others gives me the opportunity to reflect on the best teaching strategies in corrective reading. By interviewing this 4th grade teacher it has enabled me to develop new professional goals and has given much insight into what I can do to best help students in my classroom form better reading skills.

During the interview, I made a point to ask background information about the teacher. She has a total teaching experience of sixteen years, thirteen of which has been in a 1st grade classroom. Her current placement is in 4th grade and she commented that she “Enjoys every minute of it.” When asked what her role in the reading process is, her answer was inspiring, “I [the teacher] think that the most important role of a teacher is to instill a love for reading in children. I want to push them to read not only what interests them, but to push themselves to read more challenging information so they may increase vocabulary.” This comment will be a starting point for me as I begin teaching because I feel that a love of reading is so critical to the learning process. I myself love to read and want my students to participate in the joy reading brings. Feeling confident that I can instill a passion for reading, I was not as certain of exactly how to manage a reading program.

This 4th grade teacher tracks students reading and pulls information about each reader through Lexile, NWEA, and benchmarking scores. After all this information is collected on index cards, she places them in order from highest to lowest and forms groups based on this. Sometimes the lower readers are placed in a group, and sometimes a high and low reader may be
placed in a group. Questioning, I asked what the reason was for this and the response I received was intelligent. The teacher explained that by always changing reading groups and mixing high and low readers, they could help each other out. High readers can model for low readers and in return the low readers help the high readers practice skills by building the partner up. By walking around the room and listening to out loud reading in groups, teachers can subtly check for reading strengths and weaknesses. This teacher deals with underachievement in a strategic way. Lower scoring readers meet with the teacher three times per week to read out loud and test comprehension. The strong readers meet one time per week to monitor progress and make sure they are reading challenging material for their level. All students receive quizzes to test knowledge and are often asked to complete graphic organizers to show the teacher if reading is being understood. Reflecting back on this conversation during the interview, I wondered if I would be able to manage all of this with twenty-some students and got a bit nervous. I discussed briefly this conflict and was comforted by her explanation of planning and practice to get everything done for the week. She responded with “Teachers always need more time to get everything done, but somehow we always manage to accomplish our tasks!” After the interview I realize time management needs to be one of my individual goals for student teaching because I want each student to have an equal opportunity to succeed.

As the interview came to a close I questioned the best reading assessment, in this 4th grade teacher’s point of view. Her opinion surprised me because I was expecting her to say a written test. In reality, her response was brilliant. The teacher feels that reading out loud in a private setting is most beneficial because the teacher can gain much information from this style of assessment. “You can tell if the child is fluent, uses expression, and are able to ask questions about what the child read to see if comprehension has taken place,” she added.
By completing this interview it allows me to see that the corrective reading course is necessary to properly learn the various forms of assessment and reading strategies that will be used in my teaching experiences. Following this interview and reflecting upon it, I have set important professional goals such as time management and have uncovered some of my strengths and possible weaknesses related with teaching reading. This interview has been beneficial both to me and my future students!