

Teaching strategies, evaluation and other contributions to a language arts classroom

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One of my favourite teaching strategies is the free write. This opportunity for students to write off the top of their heads without worrying about spelling or syntax is a fantastic way for students to explore their ideas. As well, it lends the student a heuristic for doing creative writing and to get a rough draft going for any written assignment. Another strategy which I enjoy implementing is think-pair-share; this is an opportunity for students to engage in a discourse amongst themselves. In the setting of a Language Arts classroom, it is an exceptional method for having students review each other's drafts and provide constructive feedback.

Evaluation of students in Language Arts must be meaningful and engaging. Formative evaluations can be done in the form of written submission (free writes or take home assignments) where students work with a checklist or rubric to ensure they meet the criteria of the assignment. A similar process can be followed for oral presentations or class discussion where students are aware of expectations. I prefer to use checklists for oral formative evaluations. For summative evaluations, rubrics are the best methodology. The best summative evaluations are cross-curricular in nature. For instance, an art project related to readings or media presented in class.

One way to contribute to a Language Arts classroom is by bringing in fantastic books for children to engage with during a lesson. Certainly, any unit should be accompanied by a mini library on the subject being covered so that students can read up on the topic at their leisure. For instance, if a lesson is being done on environmental

awareness then a mini class library of books on the environment and climate change should be made available to students.

Another contribution to a Language Arts classroom is the inclusion of laptops or tablets as ICTs. In this way, much like the subject-specific library, students are given the resource to research and find answers to questions during their learning on an independent basis. The advantage of the tablet in particular is the camera which allows documentation of learning on an ongoing basis. Moreover, the laptops and tablets allow for the including of fun learning programs. For example, one of my favourite computer games when I was in primary school was Mario Teaches Typing. This program facilitates students' development of typing skills (a skill not commonly developed in Language Arts classrooms) in an engaging manner.

No Language Arts classroom is complete without a word wall. As students engage with the instructor and their peers during lessons, they will come across new vocabulary words every day. However, without a public record, these new discoveries can quickly be lost. The advantage of a word wall as a public record is that if one student discovered a new word then the entire class can incorporate it in to their lexicon. As well, it can be graphically appealing by mapping words in links to each other as a visual indicator of synonyms or antonyms. As well, the words can be colour-coded to represent nouns, verbs, adverbs, etcetera.