Best Practices for Displaying Print in My Classroom

“It was a difficult day when I removed all of the commercial print from my classroom. I didn’t want it to look plain or boring. Anchor charts were fairly new to me, and I wasn’t sure how they would work. I am still working on improving my techniques for creating effective anchor charts and incorporating them into daily instruction, but I feel I am off to a good start. The authentic print is definitely meaningful to the children. It has been so exciting to watch them learn to use the anchor charts to develop and extend their literacy practices. A few charts that have been the most successful are sequence words, story elements and spelling patterns, as well as those dealing with procedures and responsibilities.”

-Alison Gordon, Kindergarten, Albert M. Greenfield School

Does the print displayed in your classroom on charts and displays:

- build a sense of individual and group ownership over the classroom?
- model teacher and student handwriting versus store bought commercial print?
- acknowledge and celebrate every child’s effort?
- have a meaningful connection to current learning?
- serve as a teaching tool for students to utilize during their independent work?
- highlight authentic reading and writing tasks and strategies- those that are purposeful and meaningful in real life?
- generate excitement about learning?

Yes? No? Sometimes? Not sure how to accomplish this?

Directions: Check the strategies under the following effective practices that you'd like to implement in your classroom. Plan how and when you will implement these strategies with a colleague or coach.
**WHY?** Students need to see the high frequency words they are being taught. Displaying them alphabetically helps students begin to create categories for these words in their minds. These words are posted to support students in spelling in their independent writing, and reading in their independent reading. Continued exposure to these high frequency words will lead to automatic recognition, increased reading and spelling fluency.

| The high frequency words on the word wall should be written in lower case letters with thick black marker on different colored index cards. |
| The words on the word wall should be words students come across frequently in their reading and frequently misspell or need to spell in their writing. |
| The high frequency word wall should be placed on a board or wall near the large group space (where the message board is located), low enough for students to see and interact with it. |

**LABELS ARE USED FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PRINT AND STATIONS/CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE ROOM**

**WHY?** Labels of environmental print for items around the classroom like doors, lamps, bathrooms, tables, shelves, windows, etc. provide authentic opportunities for students to learn useful terms in a meaningful context. Labels for various classroom spaces, particular centers or stations also allow students to “read the room” and navigate their environment.

| Labels should be written in your handwriting to model correct letter formation and spacing. |
| Labels should be written on large index cards, sentence strips or card stock paper that will hold up. You may consider laminating the label if it won’t change over time. |
| Post the label right beside the area or object. If there is not wall space to post it to, consider making tent cards (folding card stock in half) or inserting the card into a clothes pin and pushing the pin into modeling clay that can be molded to the surface. |
| Labels may need to contain a picture if the visual the words explain is not obvious. (You won’t need a picture of a lamp when the word *lamp* is posted right beside it). |
| When there is limited space to post the label beside the area or object it is explaining, consider hanging it from the ceiling above the area/object. |
| At a center/station, consider adding more information to the label as time goes on, such as guidelines for this space, a menu of activities in this space, a description of this space, etc. |
CLASSROOM IS FILLED WITH AUTHENTIC AND PURPOSEFUL – RATHER THAN DECORATIVE AND COMMERCIAL – PRINT

WHY? Authentic print is written in “real” teacher or student handwriting. The content of what’s written is meaningful to the students. Its purpose is to anchor the students’ learning of strategies, skills and procedures they need to successfully read and write. In contrast, commercial print is developed by a poster company or bought at a teacher supply store. The content is not created with the students, and therefore is not in the context of real reading and writing. By engaging in the process of creating authentic print during lessons, and interacting with it to support the reading and writing students do on their own, students internalize the meaning of print, are invested in using it for support and, as a result, are more likely to apply the content.

___ Collect all the commercially produced posters in your classroom and recreate them with students using authentic print.

___ Eliminate the following things that you may put up from year to year: old alphabet trains, cut-outs from teacher supply stores, posters bought from a catalog, commercial materials hanging from the ceiling, a word wall that’s up too high. These items are old and faded, distracting, too small to see, they add to the clutter, they don’t give the message that this is the students’ classroom, and most importantly, they aren’t used in instruction.

___ Look at all the charts and displays that ARE written in teacher or student handwriting around your room. Have they been created with the students? Are the students using them? Is the content clear about how to use the skill, strategy or procedure in “real” life and for “real” reading and writing?
CHARTS (ALPHABET AND ANCHOR) ARE CREATED WITH, BY AND/OR IN FRONT OF THE STUDENTS AND CONSTANTLY REFERENCED IN INSTRUCTION AND ARE IN CLEAR VIEW OF THE STUDENTS

WHY? Students learn more about the concept on the chart if they are involved in making it, rather than just reading ones bought from the store. Making the chart becomes a part of learning the information. The chart becomes more meaningful, and is therefore more consistently utilized, if the students can clearly see where it is posted and were involved in the process of making it.

“By creating, displaying and referring to anchor charts across subject areas, I believe we can help kids transfer ideas and ‘anchor’ them into long term memory.”

-Debbie Diller, Spaces and Places

___ Have students create their own alphabet chart by assigning each a letter (or two) to label with a picture, a word or a sentence (whatever is developmentally appropriate for the grade level). Because the letter itself should be written in proper handwriting, you should write the letter in big thick black print.

___ Keep the visual field in front of charts clear so the students can see charts from most places in the room.

___ Personalize charts with student names, pictures or quotations.

___ Title charts in simple, student friendly language. Refer to the title of the chart consistently in instruction.

___ Build charts over time by adding a sentence strip of new information learned in each new lesson.

___ Use post-it notes on an anchor chart to represent multiple students’ ideas and contributions.

___ Displayed anchor charts should support your instruction and be placed in areas where they can be accessed during instruction. For example:
  - To support small group instruction, move anchor charts that you’ve used for the whole group to the small group area. Make small versions of the anchor charts for small group work.
  - To support daily independent reading time, charts about how to choose books, discuss books, put back books, etc. are crucial to have around the room wherever independent reading can occur.
  - To support writing workshop, anchor charts on how to choose a topic, edit, publish, etc. should be placed where students independently write and/or where writing materials are stored. Also, writing models (mentor texts, student writing, and teacher writing) should be available throughout the room.

For more detailed information on what anchor charts are, why they are important, how students use them and where they are located, see the 4 W’s of Anchor Charts tool.

Children’s Literacy Initiative
Avoid using grades or stickers or marking up student work. If the teacher does comment on displayed student work, it should reflect the student’s effort and growth, be focused on the work and not the student, and be specific to what the student did well. Instead of writing “Keep up the good work,” try, “Great use of describing words.”

There should be at least one board or wall space that’s devoted to the entire class’ work. For example, consider posting a “My Personal Best Work” board where the students can display their best work that week. It doesn’t need to be all the same work!

The work of individuals or small groups can be displayed in smaller spaces, but should be changed out so that each student’s work is displayed for a set amount of time. This rotation also keeps the students’ interest high.

Consider labeling and framing student work to draw attention to it (for example, try putting it on a piece of construction paper to create a frame or add a simple border).

Create a caption for each writing display that explains the purpose of the writing.

Include your students in the creation of guidelines for displaying work and in choosing what work they want displayed. Together, build an anchor chart about the criteria for choosing work to display that may include: the work shows growth and improvement, we feel proud of it, it is important to us, etc.

Invite a few students to think aloud about why they are choosing certain work to be displayed. The first time student work is chosen to be displayed, ask them to share it with the class first.

Eventually, have students display their own work, and consider having them create their own displays that visually represent the content. To do this, you will need to create a list of qualities that make displays effective. Those qualities may include: the displays should be simple; they should show what is most important in the work; they should fit with the piece of work and show it off; they should be neat, etc.

Teach your students how to look at other student work as a learning tool. For example, your suggestion to “Go check out Max’s memoir and how he did an excellent job ‘showing and not telling,’”—may reflect what you want your students to notice about/learn from the work.

Use plain colors and textures as the background for student work. You are highlighting the student work, not the decoration.

**WHY?** Displays should honor effort and not just provide corrections so that every student, regardless of academic ability, feels valued.
Keep the visual field clear. Students should have unobstructed views of displayed work from anywhere in the room.

Use a student work gallery where each student chooses their best work to display (inside or outside the classroom in hallways).

To display sets of work that don’t need to be seen all at once (for example, a class set of poems), post laminated file folders containing student work for others to view.

Create class books of student work. For example: Room 23 Haikus, Stories about our Field Trip, Memoirs, etc.

Personalize student work with an adjacent label containing his or her name, picture, a mini biography, or a quotation (this could be an important line from the work, a quote about how the student feels about the work or what they think others can learn from the work).
THEME WORDS, VOCABULARY WORDS AND NAMES ARE POSTED SEPARATELY FROM THE HIGH-FREQUENCY WORD WALL

WHY? Highlighting certain words learned in instruction will attach meaning to those words. Students will need and want to access these words in their writing. Seeing them categorized in some way will help them to learn these words.

___ Create charts or displays of any of the following categories:

- Content area words like science words, math words, weather words, geometry words, Spanish words, etc.
- Interesting words that students find in books, learn at home or in another class or try out in their writing
- Vocabulary words from stories
- Theme words from a story, a field trip, a season, a holiday, a recent event, etc.
- Word family words, such as –at family words, words that end with –ed, words with r controlled vowel, etc.

___ Title the charts of these words in a way that will describe the chart and be meaningful to your students. Examples: Juicy Words, Million Dollar Words, Star Words, etc.

___ You may start off listing these words, but consider eventually categorizing them in some way. Putting words into categories creates file folders in students’ minds, organizing the words for easy access and retrieval. For example, group story words by the title of the story (only read alouds that are currently being focused on).

___ Add visuals to these charts that allow students to see what the words represent or how the words relate to one another. You may use a Venn diagram, or draw a picture around the word that represents it (example: a pentagon around the word pentagon).

___ Remember, just like the high frequency word wall, the words on these charts or displays should be taught to the students during lessons, written on cards in front of the students, placed in the chart or displays with the students, and consistently utilized by the students to help them spell and read these words. Mini-lessons on how to use these charts will be necessary.
WHY? This helps students to feel that this is their classroom and that every ounce of wall and board space has been planned and created with and by them, and consistently utilized for instructional purposes. Their work and learning should be represented throughout.

“You may want to take photos of your walls and step back and see the message they are conveying. The biggest advice I can give on walls is to keep them simple. Choose two or three colors, consider framing your charts with simple borders, and think about what your walls tell your students, your parents and all visitors that come to your classroom.”

-Debbie Diller, Spaces and Places

___ Plan enough room for your display spaces, avoiding the “layered look,” which can be distracting.

___ Choose two or three colors. Use these colors to cover all bulletin board spaces so they match. Black works well - it makes print pop out. Use another color to frame each space. Don’t use prints as they are visually distracting.

___ Learning resources and student work are not present on the first day of school, since- they are things created with, by and in front of the students. For that reason, the room is bare! Gradually create displays as you teach with the materials. So at the start of the year, reserve space for student work and displays. Make “coming soon” and “under construction” signs to hold spaces.

___ Create murals/graphic displays representing what you’ve studied. For example use a toolbox for a toolkit of strategies, graphs, a picture of an egg hatching with labels for the life cycle, a puzzle with pieces for each comprehension strategy that contributes to the bigger picture of making meaning.

___ Create displays that invite interaction such as:
   • A question board or box under a chart/display that allows students to add ideas or ask questions about it.
   • Daily/weekly ways for the students to “sign in” to the room or space by answering a question or completing a sentence relevant to learning topics, like “What kind of music do you like?”
   • Ways for students to vote on a favorite book or activity.
   • Community boards for students to list topics they want to discuss as a whole class.

___ Make charts and displays about Classroom Culture permanent fixtures. Board space should be devoted to class responsibilities/charters/promises about ways the class is expected to behave, things they believe, and/or strategies for dealing with conflict. Student self portraits and signatures personalize these displays. These may be revised throughout the year, but should always have a prominent space in the classroom.
Look for wall space in unexpected places, like cabinet doors, windows, hallway space, underneath windows and boards, clotheslines, portable wall space with tri-fold project board, the back of book shelves.

Take the displays your school “requires” you to post and display them in ways that promote student interaction.

Create displays on the boards and walls that are easily accessible and eye level to the students.

Create displays that represent what is currently being taught and useful to the students. Take down and store displays that no longer represent current learning.

CHARTS ARE APPROPRIATELY RETIRED OR STORED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR AS TO ACCURATELY REFLECT WHAT IS CURRENTLY BEING TAUGHT

WHY? Students should count on their room to display current learning that they need to support them in reading and writing as their abilities develop, grow and change over time.

Take things down as you no longer need them to support instruction and independent work. Display only what is immediately useful.

Replace student work every few weeks. You can make this a student(s) job. Survey the class on what writing they want displayed.

Limit putting up anything seasonal unless it will be referenced in instruction. Take it down when the season is over.

Store “old” anchor charts at a center or station where students can look at them and reflect on their growth.

Take pictures of charts before you retire them and file them in plastic sleeves in a binder sorted by topic (like reading strategies, genres, writing processes, materials, etc.).

Retire charts by putting typed versions in labeled pockets on a bulletin board for students to refer to as needed (writing the topic on the outside of the folder).

References:
