

## **Viewpoint: Practice makes perfect for students**

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What do golfing, playing the violin, skating, and reading all have in common? All are skills comprised of a series of sub-skills. Each develops over time, and all require a great deal of practice. Proficiency is the child of rehearsal. In order to do anything well, a number of actions need to be coordinated and applied. Generally, people need multiple exposures and opportunities to practice skills before they can be executed effectively.

Much of the work in school is a blend of learning new skills, while refining and applying known skills. Students vary in the amount of time, exposure, and practice they need to master the different skills for school. Our state requirements include broad standards in all subject areas. Indeed, it seems as if there is always more content to teach. So how do teachers fit practice into the daily schedule?

Classroom routines are central to how teachers provide students with reinforcement and practice. Routines provide a framework with which students are familiar. Because the children know the expectations and structures of routines, they are able to focus on the skills, strategies, or content being revisited. For example, many teachers require students to reread familiar texts daily. The students have the opportunity to rehearse decoding skills, fluency, and increase reading rate. Teachers often incorporate the use of learning centers or workstations into their classroom routines. Students may work at a station to practice a math game, sort words by a specific phonetic principle, study vocabulary, or record science observations. Teachers employ routines and center work in a seemingly limitless number of creative ways.

Some routines actually provide time for children to work independently. Students spend time reading independently, which allows them to consolidate their learning while broadening their understanding of the world around them. All writing opportunities serve as a practice field. Students create, spell, revise, edit, and apply known writing conventions. Reading and writing are extremely complex tasks and require consistent practice.

When parents honor the school's request for their children to read independently daily, they are providing practice support. Reading to and with your children is an effective way to improve listening comprehension. Talking to your children about what they are reading is enriching, too. Children tend to remember more of what they read when they have an opportunity to talk about it or respond to it through writing or drawing. Parents can also develop discrete reading sub-skills with their children. Reviewing sight vocabulary words, practicing spelling words, alphabet games, rhyming games, etc. all have positive effects.

Many children need additional practice to develop math skills. Frequently, the children bring home math review games. The intent of these games is to allow the children to review and apply what they have been learning in school. Array cards are used to introduce multiplication in a meaningful visual manner. Standard flashcards can be used to practice math facts; however, facts are best retained when children understand what the "fact" represents.

Learning to tell analog time in a digital world is challenging for many students. Having and referring to an analog clock can provide time-telling practice. Many children who can read a

standard clock still need work with elapsed time. Posing problems that make your children think about how much time has passed is great practice.

Measurement can be practiced at home too. Cooking or building with your children can spark conversation around measurement and the different tools used for different measurement tasks. Blocks, Lego® Blocks, jigsaw puzzles, and mazes help develop visual spatial skills. Most children are more than willing to partake in that type of practice.

Our children live in a world of debit card transactions. They are not as exposed to the spending of cash and currency as we were as children. There are few items that can be had for less than a dollar, so it makes sense that identifying and counting coins can be hard for some of them. Working with coins will help children identify them, learn their values, and add them. They quickly recognize the relationship between money and subtraction when they are asked to spend their own money.

Regardless of the age or grade, students always benefit from practice. If you and your children have other ideas and strategies you use to rehearse new skills, please share them. I can be reached via e-mail at: [maureenlojko@danvers.org](mailto:maureenlojko@danvers.org).