

Using Levelled Books

Your Classroom Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction

- Small-Group Reading Instruction Within a Comprehensive Literacy Program 4

Developing Strategic Readers

- Essential Skills and the Reading Process 5
- The Cueing System 6
- Comprehension and Metacognition 6
- The Reading/Writing Connection 9
- Assessment 10

Using Levelled Texts Within Small-Group Reading Lessons

- When Are Students Ready for Small-Group Reading Instruction? 11
- Characteristics of Readers 12
- Grouping Students for Small-Group Instruction 13
- Selecting Texts to Match the Needs of Readers 14
- The Small-Group Reading Lesson Sequence 15
- Scheduling Small-Group Reading Instruction 19
- Scheduling Options for Tier I Small-Group Guided Reading Lessons 20
- What Are the Other Students Doing During Small-Group Instruction? 21
- *Classroom Teacher Fidelity of Implementation Forms* . . 22
- *Glossary of Terms* 29
- *Bibliography* 32

Introduction

Small-Group Reading Instruction Within a Comprehensive Literacy Program

Primary and intermediate school teachers have discovered the powerful effects of comprehensive literacy instruction that includes reading aloud, shared reading, small-group reading, independent reading, word study, writing and ongoing assessment.

While observing and documenting each student's current strategies, the teacher will eventually find groups in which some students are developing at a faster or slower rate than the others, even though they started with similar strengths and needs. When this happens, the teacher should move the students to other groups based on evidence of their literacy learning. This type of dynamic, flexible grouping allows the teacher to individualise instruction rather than having static groups of learners follow the same prescribed paths.

In small-group reading, the emphasis is on practising and extending a variety of competencies. These include:

- learning the academic content vocabulary integral to understanding the topic at hand
- making connections between the text and prior knowledge and experiences
- monitoring comprehension and using appropriate fix-up strategies, such as asking questions, visualising and rereading
- using text features, such as the table of contents, headings, glossary, index, bullets, sidebars and captions, to locate information
- interpreting graphic features, such as diagrams, tables, charts, maps and graphs
- using comprehension strategies, such as comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, and evaluating author's purpose
- decoding a wide array of visual patterns and word parts
- noting the author's grammar and usage, and understanding how they contribute to the reader's comprehension
- summarising the key concepts in the text
- answering text-dependent questions about the text
- practising techniques that improve reading fluency



Developing Strategic Readers

Essential Skills and the Reading Process

Current research identifies phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension as the five essential skills for reading success.

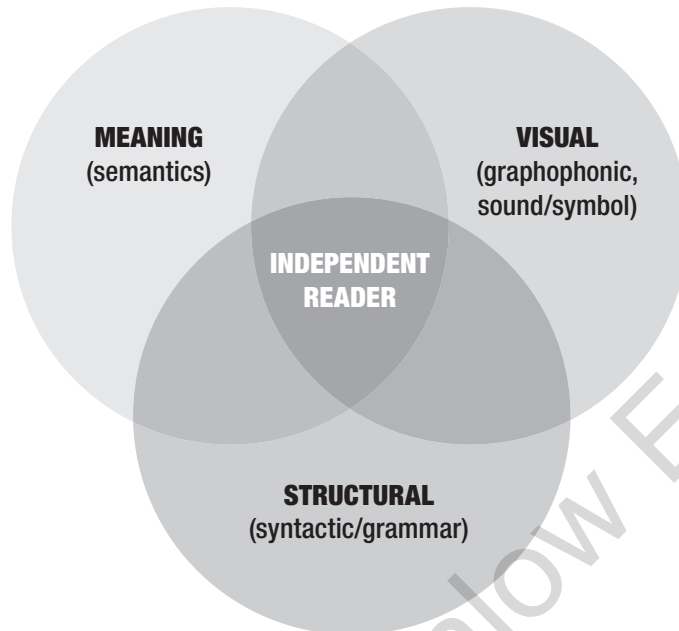
- **Phonemic awareness** is the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes.
- **Phonics** instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language. Children learn to use the relationships to read and write words. Knowing the relationships will help children recognise familiar words accurately and automatically, and decode new words.
- **Fluency** is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly. When fluent readers read silently, they recognise words automatically. They group words quickly to help them gain meaning from what they read. Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are speaking. Fluency is important because it provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Because fluent readers do not have to concentrate on decoding the words, they can focus their attention on what the text means.
- **Vocabulary** refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively. Oral vocabulary refers to words that we use in our speech or recognise while listening to others speak. Reading vocabulary refers to words we recognise or use in print. Vocabulary plays an important part in learning to read. As beginning readers, children use the words they have heard to make sense of the words they see in print. Vocabulary also is very important to reading comprehension. Readers cannot understand what they are reading without knowing what most of the words mean.
- **Comprehension** is the reason for reading. If a student can read the words but does not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading. Good readers have a purpose for reading and think actively as they read. Research has shown that instruction in comprehension can help students understand, remember and communicate with others about what they read.

(From "Put Reading First", based on the 2000 report of the National Reading Panel and published jointly by the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the U.S. Department of Education.)

Each of these skills can be addressed in a small-group setting using levelled texts at the students' instructional level. However, in order for learners to reach high levels of literacy development, teachers must also be knowledgeable about the reading process. They must be able to identify the strengths of their students and use this information to design appropriate literacy experiences that promote problem solving. The main goal of reading instruction is to create proficient readers who have a repertoire of strategies for independent reading. An important characteristic of a good reader is that he or she integrates the cueing system while reading fluently and expressively, focusing primarily on meaning.

The Cueing System

Cues are simply sources of information. A reader constantly builds and integrates these networks of information and uses them to check and confirm his or her responses to a text. The three sources of text information, or cues, are:



- 1. Meaning Cues:** These relate to the author's intended message and purpose. They also involve the reader's background knowledge and identification of particular concepts found in the text. The pictures help the reader gain access to the meaning of the text as well.
- 2. Structural Cues:** These are derived from the reader's oral language and exposure to book talk. Good readers monitor their grammatical substitutions by asking, "Does it sound right this way?"
- 3. Visual Cues:** Graphophonics relates to the letters, words and sounds that are incorporated in a text. These elements of the text require the reader to access the visual information in order to read the text.

Comprehension and Metacognition

Comprehension strategies are mental problem-solving actions initiated by a reader to gain meaning from the text. Metacognition, or "thinking about thinking", takes strategic reading one step further by helping us recognise how we process information. Effective readers use comprehension and metacognitive strategies in conjunction to develop a deeper understanding of a content-area topic, a character's motives, a book's theme and the like. They construct knowledge through a variety of

different venues and identify when they no longer understand and what they can do about it. Although we can't observe these mental behaviours, we see evidence that a student is employing the strategies of an efficient processing system as he or she exhibits some of the following behaviours.

Monitor-Reading Strategies

Good readers use monitor-reading strategies before, during and after reading to monitor their comprehension and help them stay fully engaged in a text. Although good readers perform all these strategies on all types of reading, students will focus on one particular strategy in their daily reading.

Reading instruction begins with the teacher explaining what the strategy is and why it is important for readers to use. Then the teacher models her own use of the strategy by thinking aloud about a section of the text she has read with the students. After the modelling, the teacher guides students as they practise the strategy during further reading of the text. After reading, teacher and students reflect on how they used the strategy and how it helped them as readers. As students become more proficient throughout the week's instruction, they apply the strategy more and more independently. The ultimate goal of instruction is to ensure that students develop strategies they can transfer to new reading experiences.

Monitor-Reading Strategy	Explanation
Ask Questions	Readers often pause during reading to wonder about the text. They ask questions to help them understand and stay involved in what they are reading.
Determine Text Importance	Readers determine text importance when they identify big ideas, themes and specific information when they read. They may also evaluate the author's purpose and point of view.
Make Connections	Readers make connections when they link what they read to something they already know. Readers make three types of connections to texts: text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world.
Retell	Readers retell when they put ideas from a text into their own words. Retelling ensures that readers stop and reflect on the text.
Reread	Good readers reread text to clarify and refine their understanding of it. Even the most accomplished readers get confused from time to time and need to utilise this strategy.
Stop, Think and Write	When monitoring comprehension, readers who use monitor-reading strategies resist the urge to read quickly through a text. They stop and think about what they've read. Students will produce written responses to questions that relate directly to the text. These responses will show evidence that the students understand the content. Writing about what was read allows students to reflect on the text and clarify their thoughts.

Comprehension Strategies

The teacher explains and models the strategy using a real-world example. Next, the teacher models using the strategy in the context of the content-area reading text. The teacher records this strategy information using a graphic organiser.

After the teacher has modelled, students practise using the strategy on another section of the text they have read. With the teacher's help, students add information to the comprehension strategy graphic organiser. Finally, students apply the strategy independently or with a partner by rereading another section of the text to complete the graphic organiser.

Comprehension Strategies	
Analyse Text Structure and Organisation	Determine the text structure to better understand what the author is saying and to use as research when text must be analysed.
Compare and Contrast	Find ways that two things are alike and different.
Draw Conclusions	Determine what the author is suggesting without directly stating it. Conclusions are made during and after reading, and are made from multiple (3+) pieces of information from the text. Students' conclusions will vary, but must be drawn from the evidence in the text and background knowledge.
Identify Cause and Effect	Find things that happened (effect) and why they happened (cause). Text may contain multiple causes and effects.
Identify Main Idea and Supporting Details	Determine what the paragraph, page or chapter is mostly about. Sometimes the main idea is stated and sometimes it is implied. Students must choose details that support the main idea, not "just any detail".
Identify Sequence of Events	Determine order of events for topics such as history, science or biography.
Analyse Character	Use clues about a character to tell what that character is like or what he/she might do.
Make Inferences	Determine what the author is suggesting without directly stating it. Inferences are usually made during reading and are made from one or two pieces of information from the text. Students' inferences will vary but must be made from the evidence in the text and background knowledge.
Make Predictions	Determine what might happen next in a story or nonfiction piece. Predictions are based on information presented in the text.
Summarise Information	Take key ideas from the text and put them together to create a shorter version of the original text. Summaries should have few, if any, details.

The Reading/Writing Connection

The collection and analysis of independent writing samples provides teachers with valuable information about how students process literacy information, and supports teachers' decisions concerning reading instruction. For example, consider how the following goals for beginning writers correspond to goals for beginning readers.

- Generate a complete thought
- Know where to start writing
- Follow directional movement
- Make a one-to-one voice-to-print match
- Understand the concepts of letters, words and punctuation
- Reread to predict and confirm
- Demonstrate knowledge of letter formations
- Articulate slowly and record sounds in words
- Demonstrate knowledge of a growing store of high-frequency words

As students grow as writers and begin to compose longer pieces of text, teachers evaluate and support the following literacy behaviours.

- Composing text using various genres
- Composing text according to purpose and audience
- Conforming to expository text structures in informational writing, such as description, problem/solution, sequential/time order, compare/contrast, cause/effect, procedural and narrative
- Writing independently for self and others
- Incorporating descriptive language
- Gathering information on a topic, sorting it into categories and using categories to write paragraphs
- Using graphic organisers to plan
- Revising for content and clarity
- Editing for spelling and correct use of capitalisation, punctuation and proper nouns
- Editing for standard grammar usage and subject/verb agreement
- Developing a writer's "voice"
- Using resources, such as a dictionary, thesaurus and spell-check
- Applying knowledge of the writer's craft from texts read to original writing



