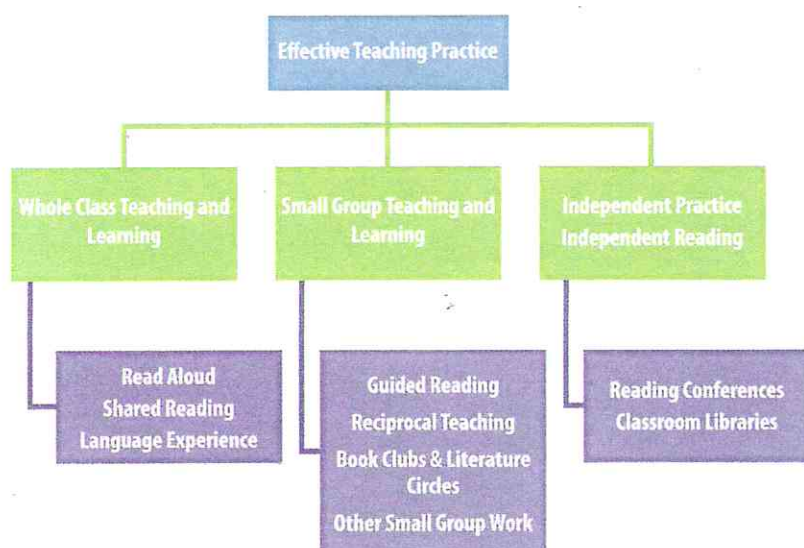


An effective reading program includes a range of experiences in teaching and learning for the whole class, flexible groups and individual students, as the responsibility for independent use of processes and strategies gradually shifts from the teacher to the students. Decisions about the content and purposes of these sessions and the selection of students needing more explicit instruction are based on the teachers' knowledge about reading and authentic assessments of students' reading, particularly during independent reading time. Quality teaching of reading requires planning of appropriate experiences for all students.

Teaching and Learning Experiences in an Effective Reading Program

by Diane Snowball

An overview of this e:update



The nurturing of students who not only CAN read effectively but CHOOSE to read and can comprehend what they are reading are major goals of teachers of literacy. The achievement of these goals is enhanced when you plan rich teaching and learning experiences with texts for the whole class, for flexible small groups and for individual students and plan time for independent reading.

(Acknowledgement: Some of the material in this article is taken from Snowball, Diane et al. (2005). *Teaching Comprehension: An interactive professional development course*. (For Grades K-2, 3-6, 6-9) Distributed in Australia and NZ by Curriculum Corporation (contact sales@curriculum.edu.au for further information). View Diane Snowball's professional development video at www.curriculumpress.edu.au/professional-learning.

Effective teaching practice

To be an effective teacher of reading you need to believe that all of your students can learn to read, provide an environment with a rich range of easily accessible reading resources and support your students to take risks as learners, as depicted in **Figure 1** below. You also need knowledge about:

- reading and reading acquisition
- your students' strengths, needs and reading interests and habits
- instructional strategies.

Effective teachers use these instructional strategies within the teaching and learning contexts of a range of experiences, including:

- Reading Aloud to students (whole class and small groups)
- Shared Reading with students (whole class and small groups)
- Guided Reading with and by students (small groups)

- Independent Reading by students (individual students)
- Reciprocal Teaching and other routines specifically designed to improve students' comprehension (small groups)
- Literature Circles or Book Clubs (small groups)
- Language Experience Activities (whole class, small groups or individual students).

Teachers' knowledge of reading and reading acquisition provides the content of the work in these various contexts and this includes knowledge about:

- concepts of print
- the reading process (purposefully sampling the text, predicting, cross-checking and confirming, self-correcting, using semantic, syntactic and visual and graphophonic information)
- comprehension strategies (predicting using prior knowledge, using text structures and features, visualising and making visual representations, asking questions, summarising, thinking aloud)
- vocabulary learning and its influence on comprehension
- fluency development (rate, expression, phrasing) and its influence on comprehension
- decoding strategies
- text types and genres
- multiliteracies
- critical literacy.



Figure 1: Effective teaching of reading
(Adapted from Cambourne, 2000)

Gradual release of responsibility

The teaching and learning model referred to by Duke and Pearson (2002) and others as the 'gradual release of responsibility' from the teacher to the learner provides the foundational thinking for the planning of whole class, small group and individual work. This model (see **Figure 2** below) includes:

- telling students the purpose of your instruction and your reasons for involving them
- explaining a strategy explicitly and how and when it could be used
- modelling a strategy in authentic reading situations, explaining when and why it is useful
- thinking aloud about strategy use as you read
- using the strategy collaboratively with students and encouraging them to use it with each other
- encouraging your students to explain to each other how they are processing the text
- emphasising that choosing an appropriate comprehension strategy is important and discussing why other strategies are selected in different situations

- guiding students' use of the strategy in small groups, individually and gradually releasing responsibility to them
- involving your students in rich dialogue about their reading and comprehension strategies
- providing many opportunities for students to use the strategy independently.

Regardless of what you are teaching your students about reading make sure that all students realise that the goal is for them to transfer the learning to their own independent reading. Ask questions such as: *How could you use this strategy in your own reading? How could this help you with anything you are reading?*

Also, when listening to and conferring with your students during independent reading time, ask them to explain the strategies they have been using in their reading, and to share this with their



Figure 2: Gradual Release of Responsibility

fellow students. Ask questions such as: *What did you learn today that would help you as a reader and a writer?*

This metacognitive awareness (being able to think about one's own thinking) is an important part of learning. If students are able to articulate how and when to use particular strategies, they can be in control of monitoring their own comprehension. They will know when and how to adjust their own use of strategies to achieve greater understanding.

Whole class teaching and learning

It is important to bring together your whole class to introduce reading strategies and address common learning needs you have identified through ongoing assessment of students' reading.

Whole class learning has advantages: it helps establish a sense of community; it allows you to model what you want them all to do independently; it gives a great opportunity for your students to hear and see what others are thinking; to respond to each other and to the text; and to collaboratively solve problems.

Whole class teaching and learning occurs during Read Aloud and Shared Reading.

Read Aloud

Reading to students is a key component of literacy programs. It is a wonderful opportunity to motivate students to

love reading by introducing the best quality children's literature, new or favourite authors and familiar or unfamiliar genres.

By reading to your students, you provide access to texts that may be more challenging than those they can read for themselves. It is through Read Aloud that you also:

- introduce and model strategies aimed at deepening comprehension
- model fluency
- continue to enrich students' vocabulary
- extend students' knowledge of the world
- provide opportunities for students to hear the language structures and features of a range of fiction and factual genres
- introduce students to new authors and texts to broaden their interests in reading
- demonstrate your enjoyment of reading
- show that you value reading so highly that you set aside time for reading aloud every day.

Your students should be encouraged to make comments and ask questions about what they notice or wonder about and you can guide this by simply asking: *What are you thinking about?*

For many students, the Read Aloud is building on the strong foundation already begun in the home while for others it may be an introduction to the wonder of books and other texts. For these students the Read Aloud at school is essential because they need to develop an understanding of how written language works, particularly for the students coming from cultures with traditions of oral language rather than written language.

Be sure to plan throughout the year to:

- read a variety of both fiction and factual genres
- reread favourites
- introduce students to great authors and books you know students will love even if they are not necessarily cited in lists of popular books. Consult children's literature specialists in libraries and bookshops and refer to websites

and books such as *Reading Under the Covers: Helping Children to Choose Books* (Simpson, ed. 2008)

- make sure material is readily available for students to read again independently
- sometimes use the Read Aloud time to explicitly demonstrate a particular comprehension strategy.

Examples of modelling comprehension strategies during some Read Aloud sessions (for all year levels):

- explain how you are using prior knowledge of the content or text structure to predict
- tell how you are looking for evidence to confirm or not confirm your predictions
- describe how you are visualising the scene and actions
- talk about the questions you are asking yourself as you read
- explain how you are using prior knowledge plus some information in the text to infer
- describe how you are summarising as you read, thinking about the most important information in factual texts and about the main characters, setting, plot and theme in fictional texts.

Explain that the purpose of using these strategies is to help you understand what you are reading.

Shared Reading

Shared Reading is when you and your students read and reread **enlarged** texts together for pleasure and to learn about reading. It is suitable for both whole group and small group instruction but it is essential for all students to gather together to create a supportive community. The text may be a big book, a poem or song on a chart, or enlarged on an interactive whiteboard or an overhead projector.

Holdaway (1979) first researched the importance of Shared Reading, emulating the home reading experience in a school setting. The quality of the literature in the text should be such that it is worth reading many times and be suitable for most students to join in after 2–3 readings.

A Shared Reading session should include reading several favourites, even if some are just short poems or chants. It provides a context for explicit demonstrations of the strategies proficient readers use and for students to take on responsibility for using those strategies collaboratively.

For beginning readers the reading of a shared enlarged text provides the perfect way to learn about concepts of print such as directionality and to learn the language of reading, such as, 'word', 'sentence', 'page' or 'front cover'.

For ESL learners Shared Reading allows them to be part of a community of readers, learning English language as they **see**, **hear** and **read** the text.

Shared Reading also allows you to observe how your students interact with texts. As you learn more about individual students' needs in Guided Reading, Independent Reading and in other small group sessions, you will be able to call on particular students during Shared Reading to participate in work that relates to their goals. For example, if a student's goal is to look for evidence to confirm or not confirm predictions you could ask that student to make predictions when introducing a Shared Reading text and then ask the student to find evidence about the predictions during the reading.

The text must be easily accessible for individuals or small groups to return to in order to attempt to reread independently. This is because Holdaway's research (Holdaway, 1979, pp. 40 and 61) showed that the opportunity to experiment with reading these texts independently is as important as the Shared Reading time.

'It is independent behaviour which does not depend on an audience of any kind and is therefore self-regulated, self-corrected and self-sustaining.'

Note: The definition of Holdaway and others of Shared Reading is when all eyes are on one enlarged text. Although the practice of giving each student a copy of a text to read along with the teacher is sometimes called Shared Reading, that is not the type of reading that Holdaway researched as a way to help students learn to read.

Shared Reading is an opportunity for students to:

- enjoy reading good literature in a range of genres
- think and act like readers
- see demonstrations of how a proficient reader works with text to make meaning
- learn how to use semantic cues (meaning), syntactic cues (language structure) and graphophonic cues in the process of reading
- learn about punctuation and how this affects the reading of a text
- investigate sound-symbol relationships
- learn about comprehension strategies
- talk about texts by commenting and asking questions
- develop vocabulary for talking about texts
- be an active participant in a community of learners
- practise reading with appropriate fluency (rate, phrasing, expression).

Language Experience Activities

Language experience activities occur when you and your students engage in talk about a shared experience and the students' language is recorded and subsequently read. This recording of an experience may be developed with the whole class, a group or an individual. If the text and accompanying illustrations or photographs are produced as an enlarged text, or perhaps as a podcast or CD-ROM which can be shown on an electronic whiteboard, it may be used for Shared Reading otherwise the text would be added to the collection of Independent Reading resources, perhaps just for the student involved in the experience.

Although when recording students' statements it is important to use their wording, if the text is published for others to read then the usual editing would occur. For beginning readers and ESL students, their personal voice is extremely valuable to retain, because they will read the text according to their oral language version. As their oral language develops, their syntax will be more like the language patterns they hear through Read Aloud and Shared Reading sessions. Rereading such material enables students to bring prior knowledge of both content and language to the reading experience.

A great deal of implicit learning about reading and writing occurs during language experience activities and the recorded texts may be used for more explicit instruction about how written language works, particularly for less experienced readers.

Students' experiences may initially be recorded as recounts, but it is also possible to guide the students to think about what they would say if the experience was talked about in the wording of other structures. For example, a cooking or gardening experience could be recorded like the sequence of steps in a procedural text; the experiences when observing the life cycle of a caterpillar could be recorded like an explanation; and the experiences when observing a class pet could be recorded more like a report. Students' language patterns can emulate the structures and features of a range of genres if you choose such a range for Read Aloud and Shared Reading, and if you model such a range in Shared and Interactive Writing.

Small Group teaching and learning

Small Group instruction allows you to cater to the range of learning needs within your class. Based on your observations of students' needs, pull together small instructional and discussion groups for specific teaching purposes.

Small-sized groups are preferable, usually with no more than five or six students. In this way, each of your students is able to fully participate in the group, and you are able to observe and note each student's strengths and instructional needs.

The small groups are flexible and may be used for:

- Guided Reading
- Reciprocal Teaching
- Book Club discussions/Literature Circles
- Small Group: Shared Reading, Read Aloud, Language Experience activities (as per Whole Class experiences)
- Other comprehension routines such as Directed-Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA).

Guided Reading

In Guided Reading, you support readers to practise using the strategies introduced during Read Aloud and Shared Reading. The students have been identified as needing further support in order to use the strategy independently.

Guided Reading is an opportunity for students to:

- successfully read a new text
- enjoy reading
- investigate language features of particular kinds of texts and learn how to use those features to support their independent reading or writing
- develop and practise reading strategies necessary to read independently
- focus on the use of particular comprehension strategies to read more effectively
- learn how to monitor their own reading and to know what to do when meaning is lost.

Guided Reading is successful when:

- you identify small groups of students who have a common learning need
- groupings are not fixed, as students develop at different rates and have different learning needs at a particular point in time
- the text chosen has an appropriate degree of support and challenges so that students will be able to read it independently with little guidance
- the students know the purpose of the session
- the teacher supports and observes students while they explore the text
- after the introduction the students read independently and silently (beginning readers may vocalise even when reading independently)
- the connection is made with the students' independent reading
- the students are able to articulate the process or strategy they are learning and can describe how it will help improve their reading
- the class is managed in such a way as to allow the teacher to take an uninterrupted Guided Reading group session. All other students are engaged in independent purposeful reading or in an activity that will actually help them become more effective readers.

Guided Reading cannot take place unless you know what your students' reading strengths and needs are and can identify what kind of support to provide a student or group of students with the same instructional need. It is also essential for you to choose an appropriate text at an instructional level (see page 10) for the students to read and that will suit the type of instruction required.

For example:

- if the purpose is to support students' use of prior knowledge they must have sufficient prior knowledge of the content
- if the purpose is to support students' use of visualising when reading, the text needs to enable the reader to form pictures about the text
- if the purpose is to support beginning readers to use picture clues to work out the words in the text the content needs to be familiar and it needs to be a book with a strong picture/text match.

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal Teaching is a proven routine for improving reading comprehension, where students work as active members of a cooperative and collaborative group and are taught to comprehend text, Palinscar and Brown (1984), using the strategies of:

- predicting
- questioning
- clarifying
- summarising.

At first the routine and strategies are demonstrated and discussed when working with a group of students and then they take on the role of leader and initiate these strategies to make meaning from a variety of texts. The interaction between students is reciprocal, that is, one student acts in response to another.

Students usually work in small groups of 4 to 6 members, talking their way through a text (suitable for the entire group to read independently) in order to understand it. As a way of self-monitoring understanding, group members stop at intervals to ask questions, make predictions, comment on evidence relating to the predictions, clarify meaning or summarise information. The goal is for your students to use these strategies, along with other comprehension strategies, in their independent reading.

Students do need to learn how to use each of the comprehension strategies effectively so these may be taught separately first or taught with other comprehension strategies before the Reciprocal Teaching routine is introduced.

Book Clubs and Literature Circles

Students meet regularly in small groups to read, think and talk about a common text, which may be selected by the students or from a collection suggested by you. Each student needs to be able to read the text independently. Usually the groups are formed around similar interests in reading or hobbies and may remain together for as long as these interests do not change and they can work cooperatively and collaboratively.

Literature Circles and Book Clubs provide opportunity for students to:

- collaboratively read, question and think about texts
- enjoy reading and discussing texts and authors
- support each other in constructing meaning of texts read
- engage in natural conversations about texts
- develop communication skills through listening, questioning and responding to the ideas of others
- consider a range of perspectives and authentic responses to what they have read.

The group size may range from 2 to 6 (in larger groups individual students have less opportunity to talk). Students assume responsibility for the discussion of the text and determine the direction such discussions take, but this usually requires a great deal of teacher modelling and support when a Book Club begins.

In order for these discussions to be worthwhile and for students to work without supervision the students need to have experienced rich book talk as modelled in many previous classroom sessions and they need to know how to work effectively as a group. Students are more prepared for discussion if they can refer to their written comments, questions and wonderings in a reading journal or on post-it notes in the relevant part of the text.

Other Small Group work to improve comprehension

There are many worthwhile routines to use with students who need assistance to comprehend more effectively. For example, if some students need guidance to predict and/or to find evidence relating to their predictions, use the routine Directed-Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) as described in the following paragraphs.

Select a text the students can read independently. Review it to find suitable points to ask students to stop and find evidence to confirm or not confirm a previous prediction. Ask students to make appropriate predictions about the next part of the text. Demonstrate how to use prior knowledge about the topic, the text type or genre to form predictions and then how to look for evidence to support your predictions or to change your ideas.

Continue this process throughout the text, moving from demonstration to students collaboratively trying this with your support, to students working independently with the process and verbalising their thinking.

To become more effective readers students then need opportunities to practise using this process of predicting and confirming or not confirming while reading a range of genres. Check on these students during Independent Reading time, asking them to demonstrate the process and to verbalise how it is helping them to comprehend what they are reading.

Individual practice: Independent Reading

Your students need time every day to enjoy reading and to independently practise the strategies taught during whole and small group class instruction. This means students need to read 'just right' texts (at least 95% accuracy plus understanding) matched to their reading development and interests across genres and content areas. Students may also select material that interests them even though it is easy reading or challenging, but they should be aware of the difference between those and just right books and the purposes for reading each type.

Times allocated for Independent Reading will vary according to the age group with which you work, but students from grade 2 (approximately 8–9 year olds) onwards should be able to sustain reading independently for at least 30 minutes. Some younger students can read for just as long if they are provided with sufficient numbers of resources. Students will also read independently in all other curriculum areas and at home.

During Independent Reading some teachers also like to read, but this is the best opportunity to monitor student engagement and progress as readers. You can also give support through individual conferences. You should try to meet with each student on a regular basis. A good idea is to have a monthly plan for these meetings and to meet with needier students more frequently.

The following definitions may help when selecting suitable texts for reading in a range of contexts however, students should also learn how to self-select material to suit their interests and purposes.

Independent Reading Level

'the readability ... of material that is easy for a student to read with few word-identification problems and high comprehension.

Note: Although suggested criteria vary, better than 99% word-identification accuracy and better than 90% comprehension are often used as standards in judging if a reader is reading at this level.'

Instructional Level of Text

'the readability ... of material that is challenging, but not frustrating for the student to read successfully with normal classroom instruction and support.

Note: Although suggested criteria vary, better than 95% word-identification accuracy and less than 75% comprehension are often used as standards in judging whether a student is reading at this level.'

Frustration Level of Text

'a readability ... of material that is too difficult to be read successfully by a student, even with normal classroom instruction and support.

Note: Although suggested criteria for determining a student's frustration level vary, less than 90% word-identification accuracy and less than 50% comprehension are often used as standards.'

(Harris and Hodges (Eds), 1995)

Conferring with students

Individual Reading Conferences provide a context for:

- listening to students read aloud to find out about their fluency and about the strategies they use in the process of reading
- observing students applying comprehension strategies
- discussing the text to check students' vocabulary knowledge
- finding out about students' interests in reading (topics, genres, authors)
- engaging in quality talk about texts that deepens comprehension
- helping solve difficulties and clarify meaning
- monitoring students' selection of texts (suitable difficulty, range of genres and text types)
- providing feedback to students about their effectiveness as readers and doing 'on-the-spot' teaching as required
- encouraging students to reflect on their reading
- setting individual goals for the students and recording information to help with the planning of future teaching for groups and the whole class.

It is helpful for each student to have some type of notebook where a record of the conference is kept. This could include Running Records of the student's reading, observations about effective strategies being used, the student's reflections about their reading and agreed-upon goals for the student. A section of the notebook could also be used for the student to keep a log of what they have been reading, for the purpose of reflection about the range of reading.

To remember what you are learning about the students' reading, record the notes from conferences on a chart such as the one on page 11. This will give you a picture about general class strengths and needs and allow you to notice which students could be in a group session to receive instruction/support for like needs.

Reading record

Students	Comprehension					Meta-cognition	Decoding	Fluency	Vocab	Reading Process	Range of Text
	Predicting	Questioning	Use of Text Structure	Visualising	Summarising						

Classroom libraries

Access to resources for Independent Reading is essential, so apart from students borrowing from school and public libraries, classrooms (or suitable areas in secondary schools) should have a well-organised and appealing collection of reading materials: magazines, books, newspapers and digital texts representing a variety of genres, authors

and topics with a range of difficulty levels.

Ideally, each student should have a collection of reading materials so that Independent Reading time is spent with students engaged in reading rather than wandering about looking for something to read.

Summary

For students at all stages of literacy development you need to provide the following:

- Time for reading and learning in whole class, small group and individual settings
- A rich range of texts for students to read in these settings
- Appropriate instruction in strategies, including demonstration and supportive scaffolding when students learn to apply the strategies independently
- Interaction with other readers
- Quality teaching, which is dependent upon your knowledge about the reading process, about comprehension, fluency, vocabulary and decoding, and your knowledge about your students' strengths and needs as effective readers.

The knowledge you gain about your students will inform your planning for appropriate and relevant student work. The knowledge you have about the content of the reading curriculum will guide you to know what to find out about your students and to know what to teach in the most effective context for the learners and what to review of your own program.