

Independent Reading Programs

Session Report by Vicky Radwell

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The NCC working groups report 'English for Ages 5 – 16' concluded that "reading is much more than the decoding of black marks upon the page. It is a quest for meaning, and one which requires the reader to be an active participant. It is the prerequisite to the successful teaching of reading, especially in the early stages, that whatever techniques are taught, or books chosen for children's use, meaning should always be in the background."

There are three ways to encourage and develop reading:

1. Independent reading
2. Guided reading
3. Shared reading

Guided and shared reading develop reading skills which creates enjoyment and deeper understanding which, in its self, encourages independent reading.

"Research has shown that reading ability is positively correlated with the extent to which students read recreationally," according to the Reading and Writing Habits of Students section of The Condition of Education 1997, published by the National Centre for Education Statistics. "Educators are increasingly encouraging their students to read and write on their own..."

That report points to some optimistic statistics that support the need to develop students' independent reading skills, including:

In 1994, 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students who reported reading for fun at least once a week had higher average reading proficiency scores than students who reported never or hardly ever reading for fun.

Independent Reading

There are many ways to encourage reading for pleasure;

- i. Creating a Culture of Reading through:
 - Expectations that pupils must always have a reading book on them
 - Teacher recommendations
 - Reading logs
 - Displays on books
- ii. In school private reading – allocated slots
 - SSR or Sustained Silent Reading is a time set aside for silent, independent reading. Silent reading in this way can serve many purposes;

- SSR offers students the opportunity to read material of their own choice
- During SSR time, students learn that they can use their word attack skills to figure out new words – i.e. use of dictionaries
- SSR can build pupils' confidence in their abilities to work through their reading trouble spots.
- Many studies of whole class groups and of select groups of unmotivated readers show that SSR can result in students wanting to reading more.
- The amount of time that students spend reading independently outside of school often increases as a result of SSR, parents report. Often children ask for books to read at home.
- SSR can be one more element in a reading program aimed at demonstrating the joy that reading can bring and developing lifelong readers and learners.

iii. Reading Home-works
Reading Home work has to be monitored through;
Reading Logs
Test on set chapters in set books

iv. Study Skills Support Centre
Some schools offer centres which provide guided reading

v. Paired reading with older pupils such as 6th formers

vi. Teachers as role models

Whatever the case, whether SSR is a private time activity or a discussion or writing motivator, most experts agree that one thing is essential to its success, that it is crucial that teachers participate in the process as role models.

Hopkins argues that SSR time is not a time for teachers to correct papers or plan the next day's lessons. He says that “teachers should be right there on the floor (or in another comfortable spot) - modelling a lifelong love of reading”. He argues that, if students are expected to fill out a reading log after reading, teachers should do the same. If a weekly "share time" is part of the SSR routine, the teacher can serve as a model by talking about the book he or she is reading. According to Hopkins, “teachers can model the thought processes that accompany reading by talking about how the main character changes through the course of the book, about the author's use of language, and about surprises and disappointments they encounter as they read”.

As much as students need to learn to be good independent readers, they also need to learn how to respond to books and how to share their feelings about books with others. Modelling prepares students to carry on good book conversations. It enables students to carry on good independent book talks when they come together in pairs or small groups for that purpose.

vii. Dialogue Journals

Supporters of Dialogue Journals say that they can help students see the value of writing as a form of back-and-forth communication. Journals provide good handwriting practice too; since teachers will be reading and responding to journal entries, students know they must write legibly! And SSR and journals together show students that reading and writing are part of everyday life.

- viii. Division of the class into small groups who share their thoughts about the books that they are reading. Teachers can provide questions to serve as the focus of the group discussion. The discussion question could support the curriculum, focusing attention on the climax, or the author's point of view.
- ix. Presentations on independently read books
Oral book reports encourage verbal discussion, offer the opportunity for pupils to share recommendations and therefore encourage further reading and also ensures that independent reading is undertaken.

It could be argued that such classroom independent reading is not really independent as the teacher is involved to some extent. However, the use of such techniques as above, encourages a removal of that dependence.

Guided Reading

Guided Reading is an essential part of a literacy program.

1. It is a context in which a teacher supports each reader's development of effective strategies for processing text at increasing levels of difficulty. (Fountas and Pinnell)
2. The goal of Guided Reading is for students to become fluent readers who can problem solve strategically and read independently and silently.

There are many benefits for both the student and teacher in conducting Guided Reading.

- Students develop as individual readers while being involved in a supported activity.
- Individual readers have the opportunity to develop and use reading strategies so they can read progressively difficult texts independently.
- Students experience success in reading for meaning.
- Students learn how to problem solve with new text independently.
- Teachers observe individual students as they problem solve new texts.
- Teachers assess individual students using running records before or after the group.

Adapted from: Fountas & Pinnell (1996) *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/curriculum/english/guided_rdg.html

The principals of guided reading involve the teacher as a support for the children in reading materials they cannot read totally independently. The Guided Reading is to help students learn reading strategies to apply to other reading situations.

- May be done individually or with a small group (no more than six) to support understandings of any aspect of reading.
- The teacher makes Guided Reading decisions based on observations of what the child can or cannot do to construct meaning.
- It is usually done with a text not totally familiar to the child.
- The children in the group need further work on the same type of problem.
- The children learn from and support each other.

Guided Reading provides the necessary opportunity for teachers to explicitly teach reading strategies at the students' individual levels. During this time, teachers reinforce strategies and define behaviours good readers use as they see students use them. Readers must know what they are doing well and what they need to learn in order to mature as readers. The more students can articulate their strengths and their goals, the more proficient they will become at reading. In order for individual student goals to be set, teachers need to observe and confer with the readers. Observations of students incorporating reading strategies during Guided Reading, individual reading conferences and running records help teachers to determine students' strengths and what they need to learn.

Teachers organize Guided Reading groups according to a specific need students have in common and a specific level of text with which students can work toward their individual needs. As students' needs and strengths change, so should the Guided Reading groups change. Continual assessment and observation of readers is necessary to keep the groupings flexible. Children may join or leave groups as necessary.

There are two areas of guided reading:

1. Non fiction
2. Fiction

Critical Reading in Non Fiction

Non-fiction provides opportunity for critical reading. Using the example of a persuasive non-fiction text – the opening sequence of a newspaper article, critical reading can be used to understand the author's viewpoint and how they are trying to persuade (persuasive techniques) which in turn provides the opportunity to analyse and discuss the use of rhetorical text.

A newspaper article is sequenced in such a way as to present the occasion to analyse;

The **1st paragraph** of a newspaper article uses the first person – it is written from personal experience. Aspect of sentence structure are adverbial clause on opening and the class could annotate their own copies of the article.

In the **2nd paragraph** there are changes in the opening sentence, use of inverted commas, inferred meaning and provides evidence within the text of the use of images to create meaning. Pupils could be asked what they think will come next and what

sort of things will be in the paragraph? It is also a chance to ask the pupils to consider the audience the text is aimed at and explore the use of rhetorical devices.

Teaching Persuasive Techniques within a newspaper article

Pupils should work in small groups and others should work individually. They should look at paragraph one together and highlight persuasive techniques. The teacher should give examples of how s/he wants pupils to talk about the text. Next, pupils read the rest of the text individually spotting techniques and their effect on the reader, which would then be discussed as a class. Perhaps a group focus could be made on a particular question set by the teacher such as 'how does he make the reader feel that the parents within this text are bad parents?' This could also be extended to asking the class what else they have read that has been similar and ask them to bring examples in – this creates an expectation that the pupils have read outside the classroom.

It is important to;

- Ask for answers and evidence
- Provide specific techniques to look for
- Encourage extended reading

Critical Reading in Literature

Shared reading of a fiction text demonstrates the process of reading explicitly and also demonstrates the strategies used. Critical reading of fiction creates an association with reading for pleasure, more imaginative thinking and enables better writing. Reading fiction critically also highlights the pace of a text by sentences, punctuation, rhythm and movement, and provides an example of how writing is structured with a beginning and an end.

Guided reading should be done in similar need groups or groups with a specific need. The teacher is therefore there at the moment they need guidance. Guided reading groups studying a fiction text should be able to find evidence within the text to support ideas and viewpoints – pupils discuss and create their own arguments, bringing their own ideas as a reader.

Fiction texts also provide teaching opportunity for Building Clauses – studying effects, tension building, sudden words, sentence structure, imperatives etc. Therefore, reading lessons can be turned into writing lessons.

Taking a group for guided reading can then become independent writing where thoughts and feelings are constructed.