

The Importance of Small Group Reading Instruction

The saying goes that “children learn to read in grades k-2 and read to learn in Grades 3 and up.” However, teachers in grades 3 through 6 are discovering this conventional wisdom is wrong; their students have to deal with an increasingly sophisticated range of texts that require additional reading skills. Upper-elementary teachers face the difficult task of trying to offer appropriate reading instruction just as many of their students have their first experiences with textbooks, high stakes exams, and complex reading in new genres. Therefore, students need daily “direct explicit instruction” at the intermediate level because every child deserves the right to learn how to read. It is not just the responsibility of primary teachers.

Research has shown that many children who read at the third grade level in grade Three will not automatically become proficient comprehenders in later grades. The tasks that students encounter in these upper grades are also more challenging. Students are expected to answer higher-level questions, respond both critically and personally, find evidence to support their answers, make inferences about complex ideas, and connect ideas across multiple texts and contexts. Students need stamina and motivation to stick with much longer and more complex tasks.

The challenge for students at the intermediate level is that they need reading practice in level-appropriate text in order to apply new skills and strategies. This is essential to help develop reading strategies. At the same time, they need age-appropriate text and conversation. They need ample opportunities to stretch their thinking.

Small group reading instruction provides meaningful literacy experiences. It begins where learners are, by addressing individual needs. Small group reading instruction includes rich tasks which promote deep understanding; allows us to teach reading *before* and *during* the reading process, (not only *after* the reading process); and allows us to adjust our teaching to meet the needs of all learners. The core of reading is the small group. In small groups everyone is engaged and everyone has a voice. Students can sometimes learn more from each other than they can from the teacher. Don't forget the social context of learning!

Direct Explicit Reading Instruction Includes:

1. Introducing the text – activating prior knowledge
2. Introducing and working with critical vocabulary
3. Reading the text
4. Revisiting and discussing the meaning of the text
5. Teaching for strategies/Teaching point(s)
6. Extending the meaning of the text
7. Working with words (when appropriate)

Essential Elements for Effective Teaching in Guided Reading

1. Bring children with similar reading ability together in small groups for direct explicit instruction.
2. Select chunks of texts at the appropriate reading level that allow children to perform reading tasks independently.
3. Provide introductions that show children how the text “works,” explain difficult words or concepts, and prepare them to read independently (scaffolding).
4. Support independent reading with brief, specific prompts to help children use the strategies you have previously demonstrated.
5. Help children revisit and reflect on the text through dialogue and higher order questioning.
6. Work explicitly on word-solving strategies such as chunking, root words, affixes.
7. Provide reading response experiences which include vocabulary development, sequencing, summarizing events, character analysis, creative thinking, synthesis and evaluation.
8. Employ comprehension strategies including these listed on pages 11 and 12.