

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE GUIDED  
READING INSTRUCTION

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IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE GUIDED  
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## Abstract

I have been teaching elementary students for the past 14 years. I have taught 4K, first grade, and second grade. I have taught all subject areas, but my favorite time of the day has always been my small-group reading instruction time. This is where I really get to know my readers and their strengths and weaknesses. The small-group reading time has changed over the years regarding how many minutes are allotted to teach the students, what is to be taught during these groups, and what constitutes an effective use of time.

The purpose of this research is to study what makes guided reading consistent and effective. I know all guided reading groups look very different from year to year, but I wanted to find methods to enhance targeted instruction for students to help them meet their reading goals. I wanted to become a more effective reading teacher with my small group reading instruction.

The research shows that teachers need to be extremely knowledgeable in both reading content and instruction. There are so many components and layers that go into teaching reading. It is not black and white and every child has different needs and abilities. Guided reading groups help teachers to group students based on like reading abilities and then they can target explicit reading strategies to build each reader into becoming more independent with fluency, accuracy, and comprehension.

## **Chapter I Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

“Guided Reading is small-group differentiated instruction that supports students in developing reading proficiency. The small-group model allows teachers to target specific learning needs, provide appropriate scaffolding, and gradually reduce support to promote independence. Guided reading essentials include small groups, instructional-leveled texts, and targeted teaching” (Richardson, 2016, p. 13). The problem that may exist with guided reading is that teachers can have different perspectives of what guided reading should look like or do not deliver content in a differentiated, yet consistent manner. This research will include finding effective ways to teach guided reading so that all students can grow and develop as readers.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Guided Reading:* Context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. The teacher works with a small group of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support (Guastello & Lenz, 2005, p. 2).

*Basal Readers:* Books that are the central components of commercially developed reading programs. They are often structured as anthologies of grade-leveled texts surrounded by a number of additional supportive materials such as teacher guides and student workbooks (Ford & Opitz, 2001, p.33).

*Running Records:* A tool used to assess a student’s reading as he or she reads orally from any text. The primary purpose of a running record is to understand more about how students are

using what they know to get the message of the text, or in other words, what reading processes they are using (Clay, 2002).

*Small Group Instruction:* An assisted literary experience in which the teacher supports and guides students at their instructional levels, before, during, and after reading. The instructional level of students is assessed through teacher observation and ongoing evaluations such as informal inventories (“Read About Best Practices in Small-Group Reading,” 2019).

*Flexible Grouping:* Classroom groups that allow students to work in differently mixed arrangements depending on the goal of the learning task at hand (Gibeault, 2008, as cited in Opitz, 1998, p.10).

*Daily 5:* Literacy framework that instills behaviors of independence, creates a classroom of highly engaged readers, writers, and learners, and provides teachers with time and structure to meet diverse student needs (“What is Daily 5,” 2019).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Reading is a complex activity for students and can be even more difficult to teach. There are so many components that go into becoming a reader. Students must learn how to decode words quickly, read fluently and accurately, and to then comprehend what they have read. Every year, I have a wide diversity of reading needs and abilities in my classroom. It is my job as a teacher to know exactly where my students are academically and what they need to keep them moving forward.

As I stated previously, I have been teaching reading in the classroom for 14 years. There has always been a time carved out for small-group reading instruction, but what needs to be done

during this time has changed depending on where I have worked, what grade I have taught, and the administration with whom I was working that year. Teachers do the best that they can with what they know, but this can lead to many differences in instruction. There are many practices from which to choose, so what makes guided reading stand out?

“Guided reading is perhaps one of the most common elements of today’s reading programs as most descriptions of comprehensive literacy programs now include guided reading as one of the essential components (Cunningham, Hall, & Cunningham, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, as cited in Ford & Opitz, 2011). Small-group reading instruction practices and expectations have changed over the years. It seems that teachers can differ from room to room based on what they have learned. Some are reteaching the whole-group lesson, some are writing, some are finishing work from class, some meet with different groups of children for different amounts of time, and some groups never seem to change the members of the group. What effect does this have on reading progress for students? Literature and research were reviewed to find effective ways to teach guided reading, so that it is more consistent and beneficial for all students in the classroom.

### **Significance of the Study**

“Based on 40 years of irrefutable research drawing from cognitive science and linguistic principles that inform our understanding of language and literacy development, guided reading supports all readers: striving, advanced, and dual language learners (DLLs)” (Clay, 1975; Richardson, 2009; Richardson & Walther, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2016, as cited in Richardson, 2016, p.8). Therefore, I would expect to see growth in all my students, regardless of needs, if strategic guided reading lessons were taught.



This research will narrow that on which teachers need to focus during guided reading, so that they are consistent and effective with their instruction. The guided reading process will be outlined and the steps to get started will be provided, with a goal of keeping students moving forward with their reading skills and strategies. “The goal of guided reading is not to teach a selected book, but to teach students reading strategies they can apply to all books” (Taylor, 2018).

### **Delimitation of the Research**

The analysis for this literacy review was conducted July 2019 through May 2020. In searching for information about effective guided reading in the classroom, the author primarily used the terms “guided reading,” “small-group instruction,” “differentiated reading instruction,” and “Daily 5” to search educational databases.

### **Methodology**

A review of literature related to effective guided reading strategies and practices was conducted. The works of Irene Fountas and Gay Sue Pinnell, Jan Richardson, and Gail Boushey and Joan Moser were researched extensively, along with several articles that were derived from peer-reviewed writings, accredited professional journals, and websites. These were sourced through the Universities of Wisconsin databases. The information in this literature review was gathered from a diverse group of sources and includes primary and secondary sources using the International Literacy Association, EBSCOHOST, and JSTOR.

## Chapter II Review of Literature

The concept of guided reading was created by Marie Clay and others in New Zealand in the 1960s, and then further adapted and developed in the United States by Irene Fountas and Gay Sue Pinnell (“Guided Reading’s 20th Anniversary”). Guided reading is currently being used across the world. It has become common practice, because teachers are able to specifically model to students how to read and they are able to support each student depending on their reading needs and skills.

Guided reading is just one component of a balanced literacy program. Balanced literacy has several other activities and objectives that cover skills and strategies of reading and writing. It can include read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, shared writing, interactive writing, writing workshop, independent writing, and letter and word study (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Guided reading is the scaffold between modeling and independence. There is a nice bridge between whole-class instruction, guided reading, and then independent practice (Richardson, 2016).

Reading is a complex component of instruction for many educators. There are so many integral parts to teaching reading, that educators can become overwhelmed with deciding what is best practice to teach all levels of readers in his/her class. Teachers often have a wide range of reading abilities within their classrooms each year. In the process of trying to reach each student at his/her level, educators can become frustrated or inconsistent on what should be taught to each student. “Although most agree that guided reading is planned, intentional, focused instruction when the teacher helps students learn more about the reading process, misunderstandings about how to implement guided reading abound” (Burkins & Croft, 2009, p.5).

## **Getting Started with Guided Reading**

“Guided reading is a context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty. The teacher works with a small group of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support.” (Guastello, 2005, p.2). Before a teacher can hold small-groups, he/she must use a meaningful assessment to help group students based on like abilities.

The first step in guided reading is to assess students’ reading abilities. Assessing students is crucial in a guided reading classroom. Teachers need to take into consideration decoding words, self-correcting, monitoring, fluency, accuracy, and comprehension. Running records provide support in determining what students are able to do and they produce feedback to develop individual goals for each student (Ford, 2011).

Running records were developed by Marie Clay to be used as a standard recording and scoring procedure to accurately track what a student does while orally reading a given text. Running records can be taken on any level of text and will help determine what students are doing as they are reading, make informed teaching decisions, observe problem-solving strategies, and observe changes over time as a student progresses. Teachers can use information from a running record to determine if students are: reading fluently or word-by-word, not self-correcting errors, rereading, problem-solving, or resorting to single phonemes to sound out words (Literacy Secretariat, n.d.).

Assessing is an ongoing process to inform decisions on what and how to teach the students in groups and also will determine when goals are met or if groups need to be changed (Ford, 2011). “The most powerful teaching in classrooms takes place when teachers use the

information gained from observations and assessments of children's literacy development to plan their teaching" (Literacy Secretariat, n.d). Most schools require certain formal assessments each year. Teachers should use this information, along with informal assessments to make decisions about small-group instruction (Diller, 2007).

Once data is collected on students, the teacher must place students into manageable groups based on needs. There should be no more than 6 students in a group and each group will meet for 15-20 minutes. Depending on the literacy schedule, the teacher should meet with each group of students about three times a week. Students that have more needs should meet more frequently (Opitz & Ford, 2008).

When teachers have placed students in groups based on similar reading levels and abilities, they can follow a systematic structure of guided reading practice for several levels. Fountas (2012) recommends the following:

1. Selection of a Text: The teachers selects a text that will be just right to support new learning for the group-at the instructional level.
2. Introduction to the Text: The teacher introduces the text to scaffold the reading but leaves some problem-solving for readers to do.
3. Read the Text: Students read the entire text softly or silently. If students are reading orally, the teacher may interact briefly to teach for, prompt, or reinforce strategic actions.
4. Discussion of the Text: The teacher invites students to discuss the text, guiding the discussion and lifting the students' comprehension.
5. Teaching Points: The teacher makes explicit teaching points, grounded in the text, and directed toward expanding the student's systems of strategic actions.
6. Word Work: The teacher provides explicit teaching to help students become flexible and efficient in solving words.
7. Extending Understanding: (Optional) If further work with the meaning is needed, students extend their understanding of the text through writing and/or drawing.

Fluency, accuracy, and comprehension should always be kept in mind when deciding on goals and groupings for each student. Every guided reading lesson is different because each group will have different needs and abilities. Students will also have individual goals within each group. Each goal that the student masters will eventually create a solid base on which to build comprehension skills (Iaquinta, 2006).

### **Accuracy**

Accuracy is an indicator of whether or not students are reading books at an appropriate level. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) explained, “The accuracy rate lets the teacher know whether he/she is selecting the right books. The books should be neither too easy nor too hard” (p.90). Regardless of the grade level, a teacher must match students with books that are at their instructional reading level, so they can be successful with some teacher support.

Guided reading utilizes formative assessments that help teachers decide on an appropriate text to use with students and how to group students (Richardson, 2016). Teachers select slightly challenging texts for each group of students. These books will encourage students to read accurately, while still having to problem solve some components of reading with the support of the teacher (Richardson, 2009).

If students are expected to comprehend what they read, they must accurately identify the majority of words in a text. Misreading critical words or several words in a text or passage will break down comprehension (Deeney, 2010). The goal for readers should be to read the words in texts accurately and automatically. When words in a text are identified automatically, readers are able to focus their energy on the all-important task of reading-text comprehension (Rasinski, 2012).

One of the most effective ways to keep track of students' reading accuracy is through running records. Running records are used to record the behaviors of individual readers as they are reading to the teacher. Teachers are then able to analyze these records and create goals. A teacher should take the following into account to set goals: matches one-to-one, uses picture clues, uses visual information, uses known words, makes multiple attempts on an unknown word, rereads, and self-corrects (Richardson, 2016). Using the information gained from running records, teachers can continually move and guide children into an appropriate level of challenging text to continue with reading goals and strategies. Teachers can also track data and student progress along the way (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Once students become strong in decoding words, self-correcting mistakes, and recognizing words quickly, they will naturally start reading more fluently, while also building up comprehension skills and strategies.

### **Fluency**

“Reading fluency is the ability to read with sufficient ease, accuracy, and expression, providing a bridge between word recognition and comprehension” (Gilfeather, 2018, p.1). Nonfluent readers will tend to read slower, because they are spending most of their time working on decoding words. This also will break down their comprehension, so they will struggle with understanding what they are reading (Faver, 2008). Fluency can benefit all readers. Even a fluent reader may not take the time to figure out challenging words, or they may need to add expression or intonation to their reading (Richardson, 2016).

There are several ways to support and improve reading fluency. Teachers should take time to read aloud daily, to model fluent reading and have a discussion with the class about what fluent reading is. Students will be able to hear tone, prosody, intonation, phrasing, and expression. Children can also benefit from hearing other fluent students read aloud to them

during partner reading during a literacy block. Reading fluency is most commonly assessed by taking the time to listen to each child read aloud.

Teachers need to make sure they preview new vocabulary or tricky words when working with students during guided reading. They will teach the correct pronunciation and meaning of the word, so the students will have that background knowledge before reading the book. A teacher may also choose a book that is a level or two below the reader's abilities, if that child needs to focus on fluency (Gilfeather, 2018).

Some teachers can interpret fluency as reading for speed. "In its fullest and most authentic sense, fluency is reading with and for meaning, and any instruction that focuses primarily on speed with minimal regard for meaning is wrong" (Rasinski, 2012, p.

2). Excessively fast reading can be just as disfluent as an excessively slow reader. This is where Readers Theatres can be beneficial to students. In a Readers Theatre, students will perform a play for other students. Students are required to practice their parts several times. The repeated reading is not aimed at improving reading speed, but rather the students are working on reading like they talk with adding expression, phrasing, and tone. Students may also read books, poems, or short passages several times to improve reading fluency (Gilfeather, 2018; Rasinski, 2012).

"The ultimate goal of a fluent reader is to read at a normal speaking pace while comprehending what is being read" (Faver, 2009, p. 1). One-minute fluency measures have become more prevalent, due to the National Reading Panel's recommendation that "teachers should assess fluency regularly". One-minute fluency measures do reliably identify students who are at risk for reading difficulty, and help teachers develop reading goals in fluency as needed (Deeney, 2010). Once students have adequately mastered reading fluently, they are ready to dig deeper into comprehension skills.

## Comprehension

Comprehension is a fundamental aspect of reading. Students begin with oral comprehension from a very young age and continue to work on comprehension throughout the entire reading process. Teaching comprehension is critical to ensure that students are able to understand what they have read (Diller, 2007). Effective teachers must be knowledgeable about all readers and be mindful about text choices, defining the purpose of each activity, and providing contexts to advance students' skills in reading comprehension (Snow, 2002).

Some teachers have been led to believe that comprehension is complicated to teach and that there are hundreds of strategies to teach to their students. Jan Richardson (2016, p.256) recommends focusing on the top 12 comprehension strategies:

1. Comprehension Monitoring- is aware when meaning breaks down
2. Retelling-recalls information in nonfiction, retells story elements in fiction
3. Developing Vocabulary-understands the meaning of a phrase or word
4. Asking and Answering Questions-asks and answers questions based on details in the text
5. Identifying Main Idea and Details-is able to identify the main idea/central message and most important details
6. Analyzing Characters-can identify character traits and motives
7. Analyzing Relationships- expresses an understanding of relationships between people, events, or ideas
8. Inferring-makes an inference or draws a conclusion from details in the text
9. Summarizing-synthesizes information and prepares a condensed account that covers the main points



10. Evaluating-understands the theme, author's purpose, point of view, and fact vs. opinion, and gathers evidence to support the author's point
11. Using Text Features-uses the table of contents, headings, bold words, sidebars, pictures and captions, and diagrams and maps to clarify and extend his or her understanding of the topic
12. Understanding Text Structure-understands how the author organizes the information within the text: description, problem-solution, cause-effect, compare & contrast, and time order/sequence

These twelve comprehension strategies will help teachers choose a goal on which each student can work based on observations of what they are already doing while reading. These are all strategies that would be taught whole group, but then would be carried over into a guided reading group for further practice and exploration. These strategies can be adapted for all levels of learners.

There are many components and strategies that a teacher must be cognizant of when planning and implementing guided reading groups. Teachers must be knowledgeable of each student's reading needs and abilities to be able to plan and execute effective guided reading lessons. Since a teacher is only able to meet with 4-6 students at a time, one last valuable component of effective guided reading instruction is having effective classroom management for the rest of the students that are not working with the teacher.

## **Daily 5**

Once guided reading groups are established, the other students also need to be engaged in meaningful literacy activities. It is essential to teach the students how to work independently on skills taught explicitly in a guided reading lesson or in another area of a balanced literacy program. Teachers must demonstrate and practice expectations for five to six weeks, so that these skills become automatic for students and they know what is expected of them. These lessons will start on the very first days of school (Guastello, 2005).

Gail Moser and Joan Boushey have written several books and articles on how to manage a literacy block. “The Daily Five is a student-driven management structure designed to fully engage students in reading and writing” (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p.12). Daily 5 is fairly simple. If schedules allow, the whole class meets for short bursts of instruction. Then students are able to choose a Daily 5 task for 15-20 minutes and then they come back to whole-group instruction. This allows for frequent movement and small times to focus on specific tasks (Boushey & Moser, 2012). The ultimate goal of guided reading is to help students grow their love of reading and gradually become independent readers and thinkers. The teacher will guide and instruct students during guided reading, and then the students will apply and practice these skills learned during Daily 5, or independent center time.

Teachers should always have the goal of guiding children to become excited about reading. One of the best ways to promote a love for reading is to let students choose their own books to read. To help students learn how to choose books that are appropriate and at their level, teachers should start the year off with a lesson on teaching students to find a good-fit book. The goal is to empower children to choose good-fit books for themselves each time they pick out a book to read.

## **I Pick**

**I** Choose a book

**Purpose**-Why do I want to read it?

**Interest**-Does it interest me?

**Comprehend**-Am I understanding what I am reading?

**Know**-I know most of the words

(Boushey & Moser, 2006, p.30)

Once students are able to pick out good-fit books, they should be given a book bin, bag, or something in which to store their personal choices in for independent literacy time. Teachers must decide how they want to structure the independent literacy block. Students not working in the small group must be focused and accountable for their work during this time. They should not interrupt the guided reading group and they have to learn to problem solve on their own. This takes several weeks of training, before small groups even begin. If the children have had specific independent literacy stations in previous years, they may not need as much training time (Richardson, 2016).

The Daily 5 structure by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser fosters literacy independence in the elementary grades. Students have five literacy choices to choose from each day. Students may choose from read-to-self, read-to-someone, word work, writing, and listening to reading with technology. Before teachers begin with Daily 5, they must create an anchor chart for each of these areas and discuss what it should look like and sound like. These should be created together, so students take ownership in working independently. These hang on the wall so they can be referenced throughout the year (Boushey & Moser, 2014).

Students must be taught that there are different ways to read a book. First, the teacher should show the class that there are three ways to read a book. Students can read and talk about the pictures, read the words, or retell a previously read book. Every child should have read-to-self each day. Every moment children are able to spend time reading independently, gives them the opportunity to apply what they have learned in guided reading groups and whole group instruction to real, relevant context (Miller, 2013).

A second independent choice is read to a partner. “One way to give children additional exposure to books is to increase the amount of time they hear fluent and expressive reading by others. This can take place in many forms during the day: read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, partner reading, or books on CD” (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p.30). Students need to be taught how to sit side-by-side and how to hold the book, so both are able to see the words and pictures, how to decide who reads, and how to check for understanding while they are reading.

Students may also choose listening to reading. Listen to reading may consist of books on CDs, iPads, and other listening devices. Listening to stories is beneficial for hearing fluency and expression, it teaches critical listening, it can introduce new genres that students might not otherwise consider, it helps them track print, it allows children to focus on comprehension instead of decoding words, and it also provides support and exposure to ELL students. “Audiobooks can be a welcome addition to every classroom. Many students are avid readers while others are struggling to become readers and still others have given up hope. Audiobooks have something to offer all of them” (Johnson, 2020, p.1).

A fourth literacy choice for students is to work on writing. Students may work on a writing of their choice individually or with a partner. Classrooms should have a separate writing

time where students are working on specific skills or strategies. Students need to be aware of expectations and need to be trained and practice until work habits become automatic. Some common options are made up stories, personal narrative, thank you letters, poems, and journal entries.

The final choice for Daily 5 is word work. Word work allows time for experimenting with words for learning and practicing a spelling pattern, memorizing spelling patterns, and adding to students' knowledge and curiosity regarding unique and interesting words. Teachers can use a variety of materials for students to practice these ideas. These may include whiteboards, magnetic letters, Wikki Stix, letter stamps, or games (Boushey & Moser, 2006).

There are many variations on how teachers can choose to organize these literacy stations. Some teachers create a schedule for students to ensure that all students are doing a set amount of centers and the teacher can choose which children can work together. Some teachers let children choose and keep track of what they have picked, and other teachers may have a list of things for students to complete by the end of the week. As an educator, each teacher must choose what organization and classroom management system works best for his/her classroom. This is especially important during guided reading instruction, so that a teacher may have that focused amount of time with small groups of students.

## Chapter III

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In summary, guided reading is a complex teaching strategy and can yield many positive results if used effectively. Good instruction is the most powerful means of developing proficient readers. Guided reading is a component of a balanced literacy program that starts with good teaching. In a balanced literacy program, *how* it is taught is as important as *what is* taught. Accomplished teachers use their knowledge of literacy development and literacy processes to constantly make educated, precise decisions on what to teach next, and when to make adjustments to lessons or small-group instruction to best suit the needs of all learners (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Effective reading instruction involves helping students attend to many features of print, so that they are able to become flexible, thoughtful, and fluent readers (Pressley, 2006, cited in Cartwright, 2006). Teachers must be knowledgeable regarding their students' strengths and needs in order to place them in guided reading groups. Guided reading gives teachers an opportunity to explicitly teach different reading strategies at each student's reading level.

Guided reading reinforces reading strategies and skills while working on comprehension, fluency, and accuracy in small groups of 3-5 students. In order to have productive small-group reading instruction, a teacher must also have effective classroom management when deciding what the rest of the students are going to do while they are meeting with reading groups. The Daily 5 format by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser offers specific literacy choices for students to work on to keep them engaged and excited about reading. Students have the power to choose their books and their literacy rotations, and therefore, tend to be highly engaged during the

literacy block. When students are engaged and independent, the teacher has time to assess, lead small-groups, or conduct individual conferences (Boushey & Moser, 2012).

If all of these pieces fall into place, there should be a variety of literacy options all happening at once. While the teacher is giving explicit instruction with 3-6 students at their reading level, the rest of the students will be working independently on read-to-self, read-to-partner, work on writing, work on words, and listening to books. As with any good classroom management, the teacher needs to go over expectations, practice with students until behaviors become automatic, and then hold students to high standards for their work.

Teachers must also know their students' reading needs and abilities. Instructors have to be aware of flexible grouping and know when to move a student based on reading strategies and goals met. There is not just one book to follow to have efficient guided reading instruction. Every child is different in how he/she reads and what goals are established to make progress. Teachers need to collect and analyze data, such as running records and observations, so students are able to process increasingly challenging books with fluency and comprehension. The goal of guided reading is for teachers to scaffold reading support through modeling of different strategies until readers are able to achieve independence in reading.

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