

## **Guided Reading – An examination of the literature**

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Guided reading is a structured, practical way of matching reading instructions with diverse individual readers in the class. It provides opportunities in a small group setting to give direct instructions to meet the needs of specific individuals. Through modeling or prompts, teacher guidance/coaching allows students to think about the reading process and helps build comprehension skills so they are able to read the text with understanding. Research evidence supports the provision of requisite guidance for students having reading difficulties. Guided Reading is one of the most widely implemented approaches to early reading instruction (Fountas & Pinnel, 1996), as it deemphasizes explicit instruction and practice of reading skills for guided reading of the students at beginning phase. In the past decade much research has been carried out to provide guidance to early childhood teachers on how guided reading could address the challenges of reading in the early years. This article evaluates the existing practices of guided reading in the School X Private School against the backdrop of the available research on the subject and suggests measures for further improvement.

### **Introduction**

Reading in the early years has a very important bearing on the development of mental capacities as a foundation for better comprehension throughout the student's academic career. Available research amply signifies this aspect. Research also highlights that one in three children faces difficulties in learning to read (Adams, 1990). Furthermore, research conducted during the past two decades also indicates that children who have a poor start in reading in early stage lag behind their peers throughout their schooling (Lentz, 1988; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Torgesen, 1998; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). A study on reading and comprehension concluded that a child with poor reading capacities in their first grade is 88% likely to be a poor reader in fourth grade (Newark & Juel 1988). A number of researchers have concluded that a targeted focus during the early years in addressing the reading difficulties is key for future success (Pinnell, 1989; Clay, 1993; Slavin, Madden, Dolan & Wasik, 1996). Consequently, using the research-based strategy of guided reading, is an important "best practice" associated with today's balanced literacy instruction. It has become one of the most important contemporary reading instructional practices. (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000) and accepted as a particularly appropriate strategy for children who are moving toward fluency in the early years of literacy development (Mooney, 1990).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this article is to define and describe the key elements of guided reading and to describe the teacher's role in the guided reading process. In doing so I analyze the present practices of guided reading in School X Private school and suggest how existing techniques can be improved in the light of literature review.

### **What is Guided Reading?**

Guided reading is a teaching approach used with all readers, struggling or independent, that as proposed by Fountas & Pinnell (1996) has three fundamental purposes:

1. To meet the varying instructional needs of all the students in the classroom, enabling them to greatly expand their reading powers;
2. To teach students to read increasingly difficult texts with understanding and fluency; and
3. To construct meaning while using problem solving strategies to figure out unfamiliar words that deal with complex sentence structures, and understand concepts or ideas not previously encountered.

Guided reading usually involves small groups of students who are at a similar place in their reading development. These students can demonstrate similar learning needs and process text at about the same level. Small-group instruction is effective because teaching is focused precisely on what the students need to learn next to move forward. Ongoing observation of students, combined with systematic assessment, enable teachers to draw together groups of students who fit a particular instructional profile. The teacher's goal is to strive to provide the most effective instruction possible and to match the difficulty of the material with the student's current abilities. Materials should provide a challenge that is "just right" for the students. When working with a classroom of twenty to thirty students, it is impossible to select texts that will "fit them all." For some, the text will be so difficult that they cannot possibly learn anything positive about reading as they struggle simply to "get through it." For others, the text will be so easy it won't offer the appropriately stimulating reading challenge necessary for learning. Selecting and introducing texts for a particular group of students who share similar developmental needs at a point in time creates a context that supports learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996).

### **Teacher's Role In The Guided Reading Process**

In a truly balanced literacy program, how you teach is as important as what you teach. Skillful teachers use their knowledge of literacy development and literacy processes to decide where to go next, independently of the commercial materials they use; when to intervene and when not to; when to draw children's attention to which features of text; and how to model and explain strategies in ways that children can make their own. Guided reading, as a component of a balanced literacy program, starts with good first teaching (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Paramount to the success of guided reading is understanding the point at which the teacher introduces such skills. Every guided reading lesson is different because each group of readers has different strengths and needs. A framework for guided reading lessons provides for different kinds of learning in different ways; each element has a function related to students' ability to construct meaning. These components work together to form a unified whole and create a solid base from which to build comprehension. Like selecting the text, introducing the text, reading the text, discussing and revising the text and adopting various strategies for teaching.

### **Concept of Guided Reading at School X Private School**

Practice of guided reading in centers is traditionally, only one kind of grouping based on ability which is used for classroom reading instruction. Assumptions that underpin traditional reading

groups is the focus on skills to read the selections in a basal text; static, unchanging groups; Centers follow Guided Reading aimed to develop a self-extending system of reading that enables the reader to discover more about the process of reading while reading. As children develop these understandings they self-monitor, search for cues, discover new things about the text, check one source of information against another, confirm their reading, self-correct, and solve new words using multiple sources of information.

The process of guided reading in School X Private School focuses on teaching students to adopt to reading skills through various means. Through the focused and a concerted effort, the engagement of the class teacher with students is informed by various strategies. These include, supporting student comprehension through pictures, videos and other training aids like charts and models. The teacher works with one group to develop comprehension and fluency skills whilst the other three groups work independently on different writing activities. Although these centers may often be viewed as “busy work” with lots of worksheets to keep students on task, at times students tend to get distracted as direct instructions are not given but rather, interests of the students in reading and writing is the key focus of the centers.

### **Current Reading Context**

Given that in the first year of schooling (Kindergarten) at School X, students enter the school with little or no English skills, it is the role of the teacher to address the challenge of engaging the students and ultimately become bilingual learners. Student records and assessment indicate that they generally lack in confidence and verbal expressions resulting in limited vocabulary delays their reading process. Teachers begin to focus on verbal skills to help students build their confidence in speaking English and eventually will be able to express themselves through their meaningful writings.

Observations of class practice by school leaders and colleagues note that the popular technique practiced in school is that teacher reads with one group with students having multiple copies of the same book to follow the teacher and student’s oral reading of the story. Comprehension activities related to the book have been read and explained to the students previously and each day students in targeted groups rotate through a series of set reading activities. Challenge begins here when teachers are not aware of how to instruct the unguided group and engage them in purposeful reading activities. Even in groups where the teacher is guiding only 1 or 2 students through prompting and speaking strategies, and the process of guided reading is not adhered to.

Our school data analysis points out that encoding and decoding skills develop at a higher rate as compared to the comprehension skills. This leads us to the conclusion we should be drawing our attention to build student comprehension skills. In addition, our findings reveal that students are not trained how to do self reading or read for comprehension.

### **A Way Forward**

Daily 5 is the popular technique followed for guided reading in major centers for developing the reading skills of the young children, Daily 3 routines are essentially followed in kindergarten settings for this purpose. In subsequent paragraphs a general layout of the techniques is outlined. A way forward for our school is to adopt the best technique to enhance reading skills of the children at beginning stage.

### **What is Daily Five?**

The daily five is a literacy structure that allows for differentiation in the classroom and provides consistency. The Daily Five seemed to offer a well-balanced and cohesive management system for classroom literacy instruction. The Daily Five breeds independence and provides students with authentic environments to participate in reading and writing. (Moser & Boushey, 2006). It is an integrated literacy instruction and classroom management system for use in reading and writing workshops. It is a system of five literacy tasks that teaches independence and covers the entire literacy block. The program allows for three to five focused lessons and leading to more intentional teaching. In providing students with substantial time to read and write the teacher is able to facilitate the integration of reading and writing. The daily five incorporates a variety of clearly defined instructional routines that accelerate learning. It aims to build stamina to ensure longer periods of time students read and write. It also articulates student's behavior that culminate in highly engaged learners and teaches students to understand and monitor their literacy goals. Daily 5 is a commercial program defined, by Boushey and Moser (2006) as a structure that helps students develop daily habits of reading, writing and working independently that will help lead them of literacy independence. (Moser & Boushey, 2006).

Through regular Kindergarten team meetings discussion on reading intervention strategies lead to a series of belief statements and a way forward to address the reading concerns. At School X, we decided that teachers should focus on explicit guided reading instructions and best fit books; while teaching targeted phonics programs, guided reading should also be implemented simultaneously. Furthermore, we should be strengthening, from outset of the school year, students training about appropriate and inappropriate reading behavior. Through everyday practice they should be trained or do self-reading or peer reading and retelling. Agreement that picture books are an excellent source to serve this purpose. As early years teachers, we need to begin with building comprehension skills because students with English as a second language find it difficult to express themselves. A study of various picture book series was undertaken to match the phonic development skills to the needs of our students. It was felt that Rigby Star series serves the purpose and are used in classroom settings. This book series evolves from a simple picture book and eventually extends to books with pictures and words and later on with sentences (books include comprehension questions and steps for teachers to be used during the guided reading sessions). Whilst working with a small group discussion to check the comprehension and understanding of the students, teachers should move away from traditional ways of asking "who knows what" where one or two students will answer. I strongly recommended to use cooperative learning strategies in group discussions like partner work, round robin, rally robin where equity is maintained and each student gets the chance to express his/her ideas.

### **Adopting the Daily Three Strategy**

Daily Five is a complete reading and writing program. However, I chose to only implement the part of the program (ie daily three) because it focuses on only the reading activities while the more focused writing comes later in kindergarten. As an early years' educator, I believe in kindergarten setting, with a majority of the students developing in a bilingual environment, we need to work on the listening and speaking skills of the students to build a strong foundation and place students in a routine where daily three works well. The daily three is a student driven management structure designed to fully engage students in reading. It is a structure that allows

for differentiation in the classroom and provides consistency. It consists of three literacy tasks that teach students independence.

### **What is the difference between The Daily Three and Traditional Centers?**

The daily three encourages real life reading experiences which is not only highly effective but requires little preparation on the teacher's behalf. As mentioned previously traditional centers may often be viewed as "busy work" with lots of worksheets and "fluff" to keep the students busy while the teacher works with small groups. Whereas the daily three focus is only on reading activities. It aims to teach students independency where they are trained to check their own understanding as well as peers. The Daily Three consists of three rotations that replace the traditional centers, which begins -with a whole group mini lesson followed by a 10-20 minutes work time. During the work time, the students choose one of the Daily three rotations (*read to yourself, read to someone, listen to reading*) while the teacher meets with small groups (guided reading or specific strategy driven instruction) or holds individual conferences.

### **Step One: Establishing Reading Behaviors**

The first step is to teach students appropriate and inappropriate reading behavior by modeling. It should continue until all students are trained and should become part of everyday practice. Here the teacher should praise the appropriate reading behaviour and confront inappropriate reading behavior. An example of appropriate behavior for the guided reading center is actively participating in the group discussion about the book they are reading either as a group or quietly reading to the teacher. An example of inappropriate behavior would be reading when they are supposed to be discussing the book or talking to other students that are not in their group. Asking students to identify and role play inappropriate and appropriate behavior, which is not only fun for the students, but clearly reinforces the rules. The use of an I-chart is a great visual aid for showing appropriate and inappropriate behavior. In preparing the I-chart with the students all rules are clear in their minds. It is important that the teacher's role should also be mentioned in the I-charts so students are aware that what teacher is doing during that time.

### **Step Two: Three Ways to Read a Book**

This is the foundational lesson before introducing Read to Self. Its necessity became very clear once I was asking students to read to themselves and none of my students were able to read. Students would state that they "don't know how to read". My reflection question was "how could I possibly ask students to read independently if they didn't see themselves as readers yet?" To address this picture books played an important role as I began to teach students how to read pictures with details like talking about characters, settings, problems, predicting, sequencing and problem solving. After a couple of weeks of routinely teaching and when the students' phonics knowledge grew stronger I added word books where students get to use their phonetic knowledge to read the words along with picture reading.

As I researched, I discovered children learn to read by engaging in the act of reading by "Reading the Pictures", "Reading the Words" and also "Retelling a Familiar Story". With this in mind I begin my teaching with modeling "3 Ways to Read" using a short picture book. Teaching students the 3 ways of reading a book included:

1. Read the pictures: I model how to read pictures like boys and girls, let's look at the cover page there is a girl and a dog so I think the book is about these two characters or what do you think the book is about? We continue through the story telling about the pictures,
2. Retell the story: I then tell the students there is another way to read and that is to retell a familiar story. I use the same book and retell the story by looking at the pictures and stating what is happening.
3. Read the words: After couple of weeks when students are able to decode and encode words I introduce word books. I tell them another way of reading that is reading the words.

### Step Three: Self Reading

Teaching appropriate behavior for self reading is very important and at School X consists of a number of strategies. Children reading to themselves is the foundation for creating independent readers and writers. The key strategies used are:

- **Read to Self**: The first strategy we begin with is "Read to Self". Given the development of appropriate reading behaviors "Read to Self" embodies the language, routines, expectations, and behaviors on which all the other components of Daily three are based. Children need to read a "good fit" book. If they are attempting to read books that are too difficult, the result is often pretend reading and it is not helping them progress. Reading picture books is a fine choice for beginning readers. For the teacher, teaching students by modeling how to read to self involves the following four elements:
  1. Read the whole time
  2. Stay in one spot
  3. Read quietly
  4. Get started right away

**Read to Someone**: Read to Someone is designed to support fluency practice, to allow students to read with someone else for support with a similar strategy or sometimes because it is downright fun for them. There are two ways to read to someone. The first way is reading the same book together while taking turns. The second way, and most common, is reading two separate "just right" books. Teachers may be apprehensive to use the read to some one strategy because it can be noisy. I would recommend that a strong reader sharing a book with lesser skilled student each time the struggler pause (either its reading pictures or words) his partner helps. Here coaching or time technique works well. As partners read together, if the reader pauses, partner two remains silent, He silently and slowly counts to 3, while raising a finger for each count. When he reaches three, he says, "Would you like coaching or time?" If partner one says coaching than partner one coaches how to blend instead of telling the word or explains the picture or may say, "Look at the picture for a clue." or "Break the word in half, because you probably know the first chunk." It provides the reader with a small gift of time, which is often enough to try one or two strategies and decode for themselves. It provides their partner with a purposeful and challenging activity. I have seen it work with kindergarten so it will help in other grades too. However, a lot of training and consistency by the educators is required once the students are on track lots of collaboration and progress in reading and comprehension will be seen in classroom setting. The steps for read to someone are:

1. EEKK- (Elbow to Elbow-Knee to Knee whilst sitting with partner)
2. Whisper voice

3. Check for understanding
4. Read the whole time
5. Stay on on spot

**Listening to Reading:** Listen to Reading is a great option for our bilingual students. It is a popular favorite of most primary students as well. When a student chooses "Listen to Reading" they grab all the materials they will need for that choice. For my students, this includes ipads, IWB, audio books which have traditionally been used in schools by teachers of second-language learners, learning-disabled students, and struggling readers or nonreaders. In many cases, audio books have proven successful in providing a way for these students to access literature and enjoy books. Kindergartners love Listen to Reading, and since independence and stamina for two daily choices is already established, this launch usually goes smoothly. Listen to Reading helps to improve fluency, vocabulary, and language acquisition for English Language Learner students. It can also be a focusing and calming activity for students. after listening to the story teacher asks questions to check their understanding. Steps for listening to read are:

1. Get out materials
2. Listen to the whole story
3. Follow along with pictures and/or words
4. Stay in one spot.
5. Listen quietly.
6. Get started quickly
7. Put materials away neatly

**Guided reading group with teacher:** Once all the daily three reading routines are implemented and students stay on task teachers get plenty of time to work with a group and checks comprehension, accuracy, fluency and vocabulary of the students whilst doing comprehension activities all group members should be actively involved by using cooperative learning strategies. Teacher can also check and assess students reading for understanding let the students reread the book if they are not understanding it or can use partner work to coach.

### **Benefits of The Daily Three for Teachers**

I have found the daily three classrooms produce productive, highly engaged students who are developing a true love of literacy. However, there are some limitations. Initially, schedule and daily routine will take some time and teachers might lose patience. However, perseverance will see many benefits including students developing independence, stamina, and accountability. Less time consumed by classroom management leaves more for instruction. It also improves school wide literacy achievement and behaviors of independence transferred to other content areas. Through this study, the results have indicated to me, as a teacher, that daily three is a reliable system to implement a balanced literacy approach to reading and writing. The structure of the program is important because it allows students to be independent in their choices and allows more time on task for other teacher instruction. Using the Daily three, students are self-sufficient; their independence would allow me more time to focus on individual instruction such as guided reading groups. As a teacher, this system will allow for a strong routine of events that provides structure for students. Students become familiar with components that are expected of them, thus allowing for a strong behavior management system within a classroom.



Teaching in this format allows the framework to be altered to meet individual classroom needs and in return provides authentic opportunities for students to undertake reading and writing on a daily basis. The results of this study have provided me with the tools necessary to compose a structure of a systematic teaching methodology that encourages students' independence and engagement while fostering their reading and writing development.

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