

**Guided Reading, What Can It Do For Students?**

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### ABSTRACT

Guided Reading is currently considered one of the most important components of balanced literacy instruction. It provides developing readers with the support they need to develop their skills and understanding of the reading process. Many theories are used in implementing guided reading, whole language, phonics approach, Zone of Proximal Development and a constructivist approach as well. There may be many approaches and theories that are incorporated into guided reading, but using leveled books at students reading level is crucial. Implementing before, during, and after reading strategies guides students to become independent readers. Understanding the components of guided reading and the practices of it reveals why it provides such a powerful environment for learning.

## **Guided Reading, What Can It Do For Students?**

### **Guided Reading, What is it?**

To move forward with defining Guided Reading first, we need to identify what reading is. According to Cunningham & Allington (1999), readers are not just people who can read, they are people who select books that appeal to them and set aside time to read for their own pleasure and information. Reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Learning how readers integrate these areas to make meaning from print is crucial. If reading involves all these areas, then what can guided reading do? Will guided reading assist students in developing a love for reading? Does guided reading provide the reader with all the skills they will need to take meaning from the text? So, then what is guided reading?

Guided reading has many components that fit into it, so identifying one specific skill is challenging. Guided reading can be done with all age levels from elementary all the way up to secondary levels. The process that takes place is the most important component. Yes, it relies heavily upon the teacher. Students walk away with learning just as many reading strategies than if they were in a large group setting.

Many experts believe that guided reading is premeditated, deliberate, and focused instruction. It usually is in small group settings. The role of the teacher is to help students learn more about the reading process (Opitz & Ford, 2001). Some may say that shared reading and guided reading are similar. Fisher and Medvic (2000, p. 3) state that “shared reading is a time when the entire class gathers together to share a variety of literacy experiences by reading and discussing a variety of texts.” Whereas Fountas and Pinnell (1996, p. 1) state that “it is through Guided Reading that teachers can show children how to read and can support children as they read.” According to these two different reading approaches, guided reading allows students to

focus on establishing and reinforcing strategic processes by evaluating the text at crucial moments. Shared reading allows for students to read for fluency, not focusing on key strategic processes.

As any strategy is implemented everybody has a differing idea of how to implement the reading approach, the size of the groups and material to be read, but one main idea still remains. The most important role of guided reading is to provide students with the tools to become independent readers and eventually “lifelong readers.”

### **What theory approach is guided reading?**

#### **Whole Language**

The philosophy of guided reading strongly resembles Kenneth Goodman and Frank Smith’s definition of whole language. They propose that students learn to read through the act of reading itself (Smith, 1975; K. Goodman, 1986), and that a teacher’s fundamental role is to support, encourage, and assist in such a way that children are eager to become readers (Smith, 1995). Goodman (1968) acknowledged early on that individual word identification supports reading development (p. 15-17), but later distanced himself from the idea that reading is dependent upon graphophonic (how text looks) information alone. As early as 1973, he associated “miscues” (how readers make sense of text) reflective of the brain’s attempt to “make sense” of print through a process involving “more than just sounding out or recognizing letters or words.” (1996, p. 5). Goodman places the emphasis on the linguistic nature of reading and considers miscues as a “demonstration of language sophistication” that affords an opportunity to learn more about the reading process. The whole language approach is more than just reading words on a page. While students are reading text they need to ask themselves does it look right

(graphophonic), sound right (syntax), and does it make sense (semantic).

With the whole language approach students are to be exposed to text, reading, and writing throughout the entire day, this includes home life as well. Students that are not read to frequently at home and develop language skills may learn to “sound out” words through phonics instruction. The child may learn to read, but may not develop the flow and rhythms to stories that are learned through repetition of reading. Teaching students how to read for meaning and identify the quality of books, can be taught during guided reading instruction.

### **Phonics Approach**

Guided Reading does not only spend time on assisting students through reading for meaning, evaluating text, but it can also assist students with phonics. There has been great debate whether phonics should be taught to students or expose them to words gradually with more reading. Phonics knowledge in the young child can be an excellent predictor of later reading success. Research by Stanovich (1986) indicated that the "rich get richer" and the "poor get poorer" that is, children who are early successful decoders read more and improve in reading, while those who have difficulties decoding read less, fall increasingly behind in terms of reading ability. Likewise, Juel (1988) revealed "a high probability that a child who is a poor reader at the end of first grade would still be a poor reader at the end of fourth grade." (p. 444). Children who do not get early strong phonics instruction early on may continue to struggle with reading and have reading problems into adulthood, while their peers with strong phonics and reading foundations will use this knowledge to surpass the poor readers. Phonic lessons provide students with the skills to decode unknown words. Students that are not taught decoding skills most likely will guess what the word is and continue reading. With teaching students phonics they can attempt to decode the word and then think does it make sense. The intent of teaching phonics is

that once students practice the skill enough it will become automatic. The student's brain will be able to recognize the blends, graphemes, and phonemes quicker allowing for comprehension to take place. Guided reading includes the best elements of both phonics and whole language and incorporates them with appropriate intensity into a comprehensive combination of both.

### **Zone of Proximal Development**

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Potential/Proximal Development refers to the level of development in which the child can solve problems with assistance. There are four strategies that should be implemented in determining the level of development. These strategies include: (1) demonstrate solving the problem and observing the child imitate the demonstration, (2) begin solving the problem and ask the child to complete it, (3) ask the child to cooperate with another more developed child to solve the problem, and (4) explain the process of solving the problem to the child, ask leading questions, and analyze the problem for the child. Items that factor into this transition from interpsychological functioning to intrapsychological functioning include the child's cognitive readiness, the adults willingness to transfer responsibility to the child, the use of reflective assessments by the adult, the explicitness of the adults directives, and finding a way to communicate with the child so they can participate in the task.

Vygotsky believes that reading includes operations that require awareness and deliberate control and that voluntary attention begins when a child can control their behavior with the help of symbolic stimuli. Word meaning and speech are two mechanisms that help in the development of verbal thinking. The development of inner speech is dependent on the child's basic speech and this development has implications on children with poor vocabularies or whose language is something other than English. When a child enters school, Vygotsky believes that a child's inner speech is weak and not fully functional. In order to enhance this inner speech the

child must think aloud. This teaches the child to be conscious of his/her own operations, following each step, and controlling the course of thinking.

This theory is useful in the classroom for increasing your students reading ability by increasing the amount of time your students spend reading within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). When students read books within their ZPD they become better readers faster. This optimizes their learning because this is the area in their development where they are most successful where learning is neither too easy nor too hard. By using the ZPD method you can individualize your reading programs to meet the needs of each student.

### **Reading Stages**

#### **Emergent, Progressing, Transitional, and Fluent**

According to Schulman and Payne (2000) there are four reading stages that students progress through in the lower elementary grades. These four stages are: emergent, progressing, transitional, and fluent. Each stage resembles a student's reading ability at the time. It is crucial that the teacher evaluates and adjusts students frequently, due to the growth that may take place. The first three stages move from a beginner reader to independent. "In these stages the focus of instruction is to help students learn to use and integrate the sources of information and reading strategies while reading." (Schulman & Payne, 2000, p. 38). Once students understand the reading process and can read numerous texts provided to them they move to the fluent stage. Guided reading still continues, but now instead of focusing on decoding they will focus on more reading strategies. Each stage focuses on specific skills to help the reader move to the next level.

The emergent stage students understand that the print on the page is trying to relay a message to the reader. While reading, students show that they understand left to right, top to

bottom motion, and are able to identify some known words. Students will use picture clues to assist them in deciphering unknown words, and recognize some letter sounds. The text on the page is consistently placed in the same location on each page and the sentences may be repetitive. (Schulman and Payne, 2000).

After the student has moved from emergent they will gradually move into progressing. In the progressing stage students have good control of early reading strategies such as directionality, one-to-one word correspondence, locating known and unknown words. Students begin to rely less on picture clues, students begin to check and make self-corrections. Students begin to cross-check one source of information (Schulman and Payne, 2000). Cross-checking involves an ability to simultaneously check one source of information to another. The reader is checking one cuing system against another. (Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). At this stage cross-checking is looking at meaning, language structure, and visual/grapho-phonetic connections. Students also begin to engage in discussions about what is read. With these strategies they are learning during guided reading lessons, the student will continue to advance in their reading ability.

After students have progressed through the progressing stage they move into transitional. Transitional is helping the reader use more strategies in understanding the story they are reading. Students continue to use what they have learned adding predictions and confirming those predictions while reading. Students recognize beginning, middle, and end of words, using their problem solving skills to decode unknown words. In their stories now punctuation marks will begin appearing more frequently and the student will be expected to read them correctly. Students also will be recognizing story structure elements and literary language as well. At this

stage many of the decoding skills are beginning to become automatic. (Schulman and Payne, 2000).

Once the skills have become more automatic they move into the fluent reader stage and are becoming more independent readers. During the fluent stage, students are working on challenging themselves more. The teacher is starting to emphasize vocabulary and knowledge of words working together. Students are reading with correct phrasing and fluency, adjusting to the correct pace depending upon the text that is being read. Students are beginning to support their ideas about events in the story. Students are beginning to read for pleasure and knowledge.

All of these stages are developing independent readers. An independent reader is someone that can read a text accurately 95 to 100% of the time. When students are truly reading independently they are in their zone of proximal development, which I mentioned earlier. (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Schulman and Payne they view reading much like swimming. You do not expect a person to learn how to swim by throwing them in the deep end. Instead, you gradually work from the shallow end towards the deep end learning new skills. Reading is the same way, students gradually learn skills they need and eventually become independent readers.

Students read at different rates and abilities depending upon the text that is in front of them. Making sure that each student has the correct text in front of them will only help them to grow as a reader. According to Hoffman and Goodman (2009) students that can read accurately at 95-100% are considered independent. Students that read with an accuracy of 90-94% are considered at their “instructional level.” This means that the student is able to use semantics, syntactic, and graphophonic clues. (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). These percentages were created by using a “running record” (Clay, 1993). of oral reading. Students that are reading below 90% are reading at a frustrational level causing them to not be able to use the strategies they have

learned. As students read text that is too difficult for them they spend all of their time decoding words and lose the meaning of the text. (Taberski, 2000). If students are trying to read for meaning they need to be reading text that will allow them to practice their reading strategies, not spend all of their time looking at unfamiliar words. “When children understand what they're reading, they often comment on the story as they go” (Taberski, 2000, p.55). It is exciting to hear students comment on the story before any questions are asked. They are making connections and thinking about what they are reading!

During guided reading students are able to grow as readers. Guided reading is not only reading a book at their level, but also includes the discussions that follow. Young readers enjoy having great books to read, discussing the book with their peers, and finally making self-connections. With guided reading after reading the text the last two elements of what students crave takes place. As the discussions follow, the teacher can watch and observe as the students grow. As the teacher is determining placement of students being aware of the frustrational level of your students is pertinent. Placing students with books that are too challenging for them will not only limit their reading growth, but may eventually turn them off to reading all together. As students are reading they use so many different strategies to help them comprehend their books. To best meet students needs the books they read need to support their use of background knowledge (schema) and language structure (syntax), as well as letter-sound relationships (Taberski, 2000). According to Sharon Taberski, (2000) it is shown that students reading at a frustrational level often do not sustain their reading long enough to practice the skills they need to work on. Both Taberski and Fountas & Pinnell believe that matching students with “just right” books allow them to use a variety of information sources and strategies as they read. Taberski believes that by matching students with the right book will keep them engaged in their

reading longer. “Leveled texts” allow teachers to find that “just right” match for their readers. If teachers support the belief that students can learn more efficiently when texts are within their “zone of proximal development”, then they will match books to kids, via leveled texts. Providing students with “just right” texts will allow for the student to grow and become confident in their reading. With guided reading students are working with text that is at their level and their skills ability.

### **Motivating Students to Read**

Taberski believes that finding books that are “just right” for even very young readers will allow them to read for extended periods of time. “Engagement is a process by which the learner sees himself as capable of learning a particular skill and decides to do whatever is necessary to acquire it.” (Taberski, 2000, p. 136) Students need to see themselves as capable, which creates motivation for them to learn and read. Students also need to see themselves as potential doers of an activity that is taught to them. While students are working hard they also like to have the positive feedback relayed to them. Praising children to help them feel an intrinsic value is crucial in helping students be motivated in their learning (Marzno, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). By finding books that are at their level will only continue to motivate and help students develop a love for reading. The child will be able to read the book and understand it when it is on their level.

### **Readability vs. Leveling of Books**

Many times people are able to pick up books and determine if they are able to read them. Most people have heard of readability of text, this is different from leveling of text. “Harris and

Hodges defined readability in *The Literacy Dictionary* as “the ease of comprehension because of style writing.” (Hoffman and Goodman, 2009, p. 174). Readability is determined by a computer formula. The two inputs that have been researched and evaluated are; “1. a measure of syntactic difficulty (grammatical complexity), usually measure by the sentence length; and 2. a measure of semantic difficulty (meaning or word meaning).” (Hoffman & Goodman, 2009, p. 175). With a computer generating a numerical score for readability the book is then ranked in difficulty. A major concern with readability formulas is that the computer cannot take into account the cognitive factors. The formulas are only good at predicting comprehension and reading ease (Hoffman & Goodman, 2009). Leveling is similar to readability that it evaluates various components to determine the difficulty of a book. Leveling takes into account more components than readability does. Leveling evaluates more text features such as: Is the content appropriate or familiar to the age group? Do the illustrations tell or explain the story? Is the length of the book and words on the page appropriate? The scores of the students do not necessarily match the grade level, allows for finer grading. The text that is selected does it match teaching methods and/or framework? Does the text include repetitive words or phrases and does it flow? Can the levels be adjusted using subjective judgment from experience? Finally, the type size, spacing, and page layout affect the reader’s outcome. Leveling of books is more subjective but allows for younger students to read the books at their levels. (Hoffman & Goodman, 2009).

Any person that picks up a book about guided reading is going to quickly see leveled text or leveled reading. Guided reading uses this to help students learn. In an International Reading Association (IRA) publication on leveling books Brenda Weaver defines it as “selecting books to match the competencies of a reader or writer.” (Hoffman & Goodman, 2009). Leveling of books is primarily used in grades K through 6, whereas readability is used in a much wider range

(armed services, industry, government, and law). Readability provides a score quickly through entering the passage into a computer, it is objective and consistent. Leveling books allows for more factors to be considered and evaluated for students. Leveling of books will help young readers connect and not be in the frustrational level of reading.

### **Components of Guided Reading**

Guided reading is one part of a balanced literacy program which includes reading and writing. In a balanced literacy program students are taught independently, whole group, or in small group settings. Independent work may include interventions in reading and writing skills. Whole group activities may include read-aloud, shared readings, write-aloud, and shared writing experiences. Small group activities are based upon developmental needs/levels, so students are grouped based upon ability. Small groups of this nature lend itself very nicely to Guided Reading and guided writing.

Brian Cambourne (1988) identified eight “Conditions of Learning”. He lists them as immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectation, responsibility, approximation, use, and response. All of these are integrated into Guided Reading. These “conditions of learning” align very closely with the constructivist view of teaching. The ultimate goal of a constructivist learning environment is to create students with “positive disposition(s), [so] the learners may become able to operate at a higher level of performance” (Flynn, Mesibov, Vermette, & Smith, 2004, p. xi). These conditions mesh with the three stages of guided reading; before, during, and after reading activities. The eight “conditions of learning” take place throughout the guided reading process, so it makes it very difficult to pinpoint which condition is being addressed during a specific stage of guided reading.

**Before Reading**

*Before Reading* activities prepare the students to get ready to read by activating background knowledge and engaging the learners in questioning and predicting (Taberski, 2000). It provides teachers with opportunities to assess what children already know (schema) and assisting them in teaching what they need to know to be successful in reading the text that will follow (looking for clues and patterns). It often includes mini-lessons on skills or strategies that may be helpful to the students to be successful in reading the selection. *Before Reading* activities include the following: picture walk, previewing discussions, predicting activities, vocabulary, prior knowledge discussions, KWL charts, genre investigations, settings, and concepts of print activities. By conducting these activities students have an idea and better understanding of what might take place within the story. Building background knowledge of a text is important in helping students make connections while reading, such as self to text, text to text, and world to text. Creating these connections builds upon during reading experiences.

**During Reading**

*During Reading* activities may include reading out loud, reading silently, reading to answer questions or for information, and opportunities to discuss comprehension or word difficulties as they arise. As students are reading the teacher can use words and question students ask to help explain and comprehend the text. During reading the teacher is allowing students time to practice learned strategies, but also correcting errors. Prompts and cues are provided for students to use their problem-solving skills. Teachers can record observations and intervene when necessary. (Routman, 2000). There are many activities that can take place during guided reading such as periodic comprehension checks, decoding/phonics skills activities,

semantic skill activities using content and/or context, syntactic skills activities, self-correcting and monitoring activities, journal activities, graphic organizers, Post-It-Notes, reading with proper voice inflections, reading silently or to a partner, choral reading activities, buddy reading, guided questioning, and many more. The activities that can take place during reading are endless, as long as the skills being learned are further developing student's comprehension and love for reading. (Taberski, 2000).

### **After Reading**

*After Reading* activities include discussion of the material on a cognitive or affective level. This requires students to explain their positions using the text, prior experience, or both. Follow-up lessons often include specific target skills or strategies lessons based on the text. These may focus on the content of and the application of phonics, specific comprehension skills, fluency practice, and/or writing extension and applications of the newly explored skills and strategies. Even though the teacher leads follow-up discussions it is important to ask discussion questions during all three phases of reading. (Miller, 2008). The After Reading phase includes activities that engage children in application, reflection, and clarification. Some of these activities might be: comprehension checks, summarizing, follow-up writing activities, reading responses, predicting what might happen next (sequel), application projects, enrichment activities, retellings using puppets, pictures or memory, introducing stories by the same author, introducing stories by same illustrator, story mapping, using graphic organizers, creating replications, creating innovations, comparing and contrasting. Through a wide variety of activities students can comprehend the book at a new level. Students can learn that once you are finished reading a book you can continue to learn new skills from that book. (Taberski, 2000).

**What are other Children Doing?**

Guided reading is one component of a balanced literacy program. While the teacher is working with small groups what are the other students doing? As stated above and agreed upon by many authors, guided reading is **only** one of many components to a balanced literacy program. (Cunningham & Allington, 1999; Opitz & Ford, 2001; Taberski, 2000; Tompkins, 2007). A balanced literacy program contains many components such as: “reading, phonics and other skills, strategies, vocabulary, comprehension, literature, content-area study, oral language, writing, and spelling” (Tompkins, 2007, p. 16). All of these components work on specific skills in furthering the development of young readers. Since, guided reading is one component of a balanced literacy program what a great way to incorporate the other components through literacy centers. Refer to the Figure 1-4 from Tompkins to identify the components of a Balanced Literacy Program. With creative thinking, centers can be created to further the development of students. A few examples of centers that Schuman and Payne have created are: Retelling centers- students use props or role-play to dramatize or retell stories. Writing centers- students compose and publish work in a variety of genres. Letter and word study centers- students work with a variety of materials to reinforce or to make known words. Content-area centers- students could investigate or read content specific material. Centers keep students engaged and excited about learning. While the teacher is focusing on Guided Reading with students, the rest of the class is engaged in meaningful learning experiences.

## **Assessments**

As a teacher we spend time instructing and teaching students strategies, but then how do we go about assessing? There are wide assortments of strategies a teacher can use to determine the growth of their students. This may include observations, running records, paper/pencil comprehension test, oral retelling, anecdotal notes, reading log record, book interview with a student, writing pieces, and many more (Schulman and Payne, 2000). After collecting all this data the teacher needs to evaluate it. If it is collected, but then nothing is done with it the teacher can miss very important cues that would help the student succeed. Guided reading is the teacher guiding students through the reading process. If at the end of each reading session students expect questions to be answered they may miss the entire process that is taking place. Teachers are trying to foster an enjoyable environment for students to grow and develop a conscious level of making sense of text.

## **Conclusion**

Routman (1990) beautifully summarizes the heart of guided reading in a quote taken from her article “Reclaiming The Basics” written as a defense of one reading approach over another. In the words of Routman, “We will all continue to teach students who have difficulty learning to read and write, regardless of the method we use. Those kids won't just need phonics to become proficient readers, writers, and thinkers. In order for reading and writing to make sense in their lives, they will need a whole lot more beyond “basic skills”. We need to reach for higher literacy “that goes beyond basic skills and includes enhanced abilities to think critically and creatively; to reason carefully; to inquire systematically into an important matter; to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information and arguments; and to communicate effectively to a variety of audiences in a variety of forms.”

Guided reading allows teachers to use intuitive notions in assisting students to their highest need. The teacher can focus on specific skills that students are weak in and can facilitate an individualized approach in instructing each student. Students are allowed to become independent thinkers, readers and writers in a structure setting as opposed to a scripted lesson for all students. Since the classroom is constructed in such a way it prepares “readers” to read for pleasure and information, since they have been guided to gain meaning from the text on the page. A teacher that understands all the various theories that form the guided reading perspective understands that there is more than decoding print; reading is finding meaning and developing a passion for reading for each individual.

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Figure 1-4 Components of a Balanced Literacy Program

Component	Description
Reading	Children participate in a variety of modeled, shared, interactive, guided, and independent reading experiences using trade books, basal reader textbooks, and self-selected books.
Phonics and Other Skills	Children learn to use phonics to decode and spell words. In addition, children learn other types of skills that they use in reading and writing, including comprehension, grammar, reference, and study skills.
Strategies	Children use problem-solving and monitoring behaviors called <i>strategies</i> as they read and write. Types of strategies include word-identification, comprehension, writing, and spelling strategies.
Vocabulary	Children learn the meaning of words through wide reading as well as by posting key words from books and thematic units on word walls and by participating in vocabulary activities.
Comprehension	Children choose appropriate reading materials; activate background knowledge and vocabulary; consider the structure of the text; make connections to their own lives, to the word, and to other literature; and apply reading strategies to ensure that they understand what they are reading.
Literature	Children read and respond to a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts as part of literature focus units, literature circles, and reading workshop.

<p>Content-Area Study</p>	<p>Children use reading and writing to learn about social studies and science topics in content-area units. They read informational books, learn to conduct research, and prepare projects to apply what they have learned.</p>
<p>Oral Language</p>	<p>Children participate in oral language activities as they work in small groups, participate in grand conversations and instructional conversations, and present oral reports. They also listen to the teacher during read-alouds, minilesons, and other oral presentations.</p>
<p>Writing</p>	<p>Children use informal writing when they write in reading logs and other journals and make graphic organizers, and they use the writing process to write stories, essays, reports, and poems.</p>
<p>Spelling</p>	<p>Children apply phonics, syllabication, and morphemic analysis skills to spell words. They learn to spell high-frequency words first, and then other words that they need for writing through a variety of spelling activities that may include weekly spelling tests.</p>

( Tompkins, 2007, p. 16)

*Figure 1-4 Components of a Balanced Literacy Program* provides very specific components to a balanced literacy program and defines each category as well.