

Effective Guided Reading: Theory and Practice

September 2013 to October 2015 saw schools in Redbridge exploring Reciprocal teaching as a method to improve practices in Guided Reading. The project, funded by the London Schools Excellence fund (supported by the Mayor of London and the DfE), was led by Dr Wayne Tennent of the University of East London.

Reciprocal teaching for Guided Reading

Teachers demonstrate the different components of reading comprehension so children develop the skills to find a deeper understanding of what they read. In Reciprocal teaching, teachers model comprehension strategies then encourage children to apply them until the children are able to use the strategies independently. As the process is very oral, providing many opportunities for dialogue, it is well-suited to a Guided Reading situation.

The strategies include:

Clarifying: readers identify tricky parts of the text – language, passages or concepts – and look at how to make sense of them, e.g. using a dictionary.

Predicting: readers make connections using their own prior knowledge and information from the text to imagine what might follow.

Questioning: readers ask questions about parts of the text they find unclear or find ways to make connections. It can deepen understanding and encourage skills of inference-making.

Summarising: readers identify important information in a text (or part of a text) to organise into a clear description of the whole. It uses recall and literal understanding.

Visualising: readers may arrive at a mental representation of a text. Encouraging children to verbalise what they see can be a useful way to support understanding.

Evaluating: children are encouraged to begin to consider a text critically and to form and justify opinions. It might require linking to prior knowledge and understanding.

The strategies support descriptor statements for Key Stage 2 Reading (DfE, 2014)

The project was set up in response to concerns that, in the teaching of reading, decoding has been prioritised over comprehension for some years with a result that there has been very little professional development on the processes of text comprehension. It involved eleven primary schools, 181 teachers and 3750 pupils across Key Stages 1 and 2.

Included in the key aims were: to improve teachers' Guided Reading practices; to develop teachers' subject knowledge around the comprehension process; to develop teachers' pedagogical use of the Reciprocal teaching approach; to develop the practice and knowledge of a team of teachers to disseminate knowledge on this area.

The London project trained teachers in the methods of Reciprocal teaching for Guided Reading. These 'Reading Champions' shared the methods with their colleagues. There were regular meetings of the Reading Champions to share experiences and expertise.

The schools involved are convinced enough by the results to continue with the process even after the funding finished – and more schools are getting involved.

Key findings

Evidence was gathered through teacher questionnaires, reading progress data, interviews with Reading Champions, evaluations by Reading Champions, observations of teaching sessions, and evaluation by delegates at a reading conference.

Informed, improved and confident teachers

Before the study, of the more than 100 sessions observed, 74% were judged to be outstanding or good and 26% as requiring improvement; exit observations showed 96% and 4% respectively. *Going through this process with the Guided reading has improved my teaching as a whole* (Teacher).

Teachers felt they had a greater subject knowledge and a better understanding of the role of talk. *My subject knowledge vastly increased during the Reading Champion sessions* (Teacher). Teachers were more familiar with the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising, and the question types useful to deepen understanding and support inference-making.

Teachers were more confident in all aspects of their Guided Reading sessions; the use of strategies, the purpose of sessions, the organisation of reading-response activities. One teacher noticed an increased enthusiasm for Guided Reading among colleagues. They felt that their planning had become simpler but more structured. *Follow-up activities have been more purposeful and more closely related to reading outcomes* (Teacher).

Reading Champions found being part of a group that allowed opportunities for dialogue and reflection helped their confidence. The experience has been career-enhancing for some teachers. *It is great for CPD and anyone looking at moving into an English coordinator role* (Teacher).

Increased reading progress – and reading for pleasure!

Average Point Score data were used to assess children's progress. Across all schools, children made above expected progress; scores backed up by teachers' own assessments. Improvements were most pronounced in Key Stage 1 and with EAL and SEN children, perhaps demonstrating the benefits of talk for these learners. *Huge progress for all children especially for those that are below target because the focus is on comprehension as opposed to decoding* (Teacher).

Scores showed no benefit for Year 6 children. This is possibly due to the emphasis on SATs.

Teachers commented that there was *higher quality listening and discussion* and that children were *more engaged in guided reading text*. They felt that children were becoming more independent in their follow-up work and *developing a greater maturity in their attitudes to texts*.

More children enjoyed reading: *I really enjoy talking about the questions and listening to people's ideas; I didn't like reading when I came to this school but now I love it*. One teacher felt that the children's love of reading had an impact on the quality of their work as they took more pride in it.

Notes

The schools that had the most success had support from Senior Leadership.

Schools were challenged by issues of staff turnover but once practices were fully embedded in a school (teachers felt this took about two years) this caused less impact.

Teachers felt that they had received very little input on reading comprehension during their training or while in post.