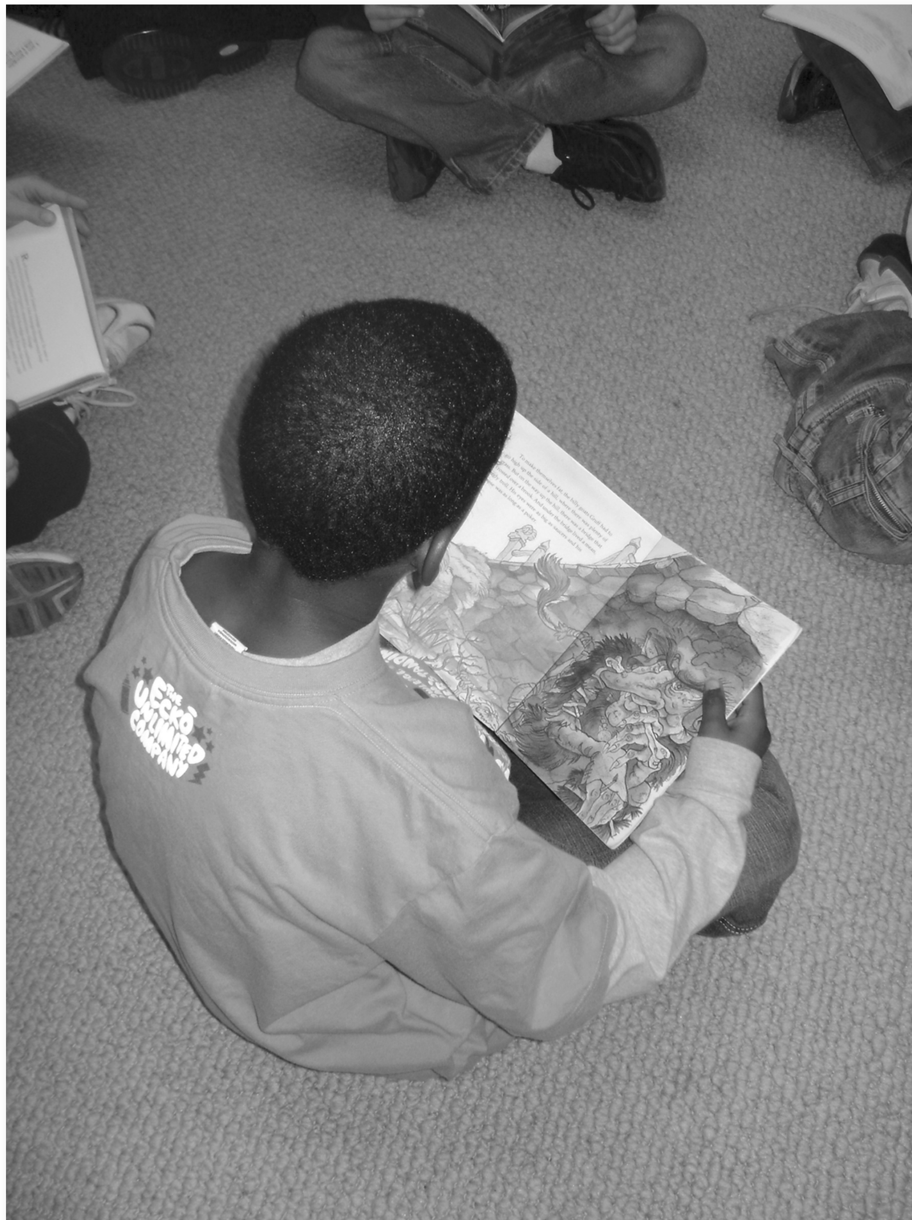
Introduction



So, what's new? Well, as an educational society, we now have scientific evidence—thanks to the neuroscientists—that new knowledge does attach to existing knowledge: Vygotsky was right! We are realizing more and more that as the planet continues to shrink, educators have a responsibility to differentiate more than ever before. The need to differentiate has pervaded cultural (including language, religion, traditions, and beliefs), cognitive, physical, psychosocial, and other aspects of classroom life. This second edition attempts to address the constructivist nature of learning and the increasing need to differentiate. This edition represents the continued thinking about and working with children in learning how to read. Experience shapes and reshapes what we once thought we knew. The changes in my understandings, my increased awareness and understanding, are documented here. The book remains a practitioner's guide to teaching children how to read.

What is the same? Well, we continue to read and to teach children to read. Educators—most of us, anyway—read everything from professional books and journals to those quality trashy novels. Ah, the trashy novel. . . . The question remains the same: How did we get this way? What happened that made us such consumers of print? More important, how do we help our students to become such readers?

HOW IT HAPPENED

The Introduction to the first edition of this book invited you, the reader, to think back to how you learned to read. How old were you? Was it in school or out of school? Who was involved? What kinds of things do you remember reading? How did you feel about reading and being a reader? Was it pleasant or frustrating?

I admitted that I could not remember exactly how or at what point reading began for me. I shared a few stories of reading at home, being read to as a child, and just sort of *learning* how to read without being *taught* to read. As I look back on this now, I realize that my brother and I lived in an environment where reading happened all around us, all the time. I suppose you could say he and I were immersed in a literate environment. We saw reading happening as we watched our parents read newspapers and books. We were read to in the evenings before bed and on the front porch in the summer. We got books from the library every Saturday and read them over and over again, whether we could read them or not. I suppose it is true: you learn what you live, and we lived reading. No wonder we learned to read before we were taught to read.

I also admitted to being a middle-group student, and the dilemma it posed my parents. It was all the fault of Dick and Jane et al.: I now realize that part of the problem was that my schema for family did not match the family in the Dick and Jane house. While my father did go to work in a white shirt and tie and dress trousers, my mother wore neither pearls nor heels at home. We had neither cat nor dog—nor, indeed, a baby sister. And the Zeke in our lives was the man who lived alone in the house on the corner with the high grass to whom we were told not to speak.

The other issue causing my middle-group placement was the fact that my experience with text did not match the text provided in the Dick and Jane books. See, the books I was used to seeing had multiple lines of text, full sentences that sounded like talking. The first-grade Dick and Jane books of the forties and fifties had few words, sometimes only one or two, on a page. This confounded and confused me, because I could not make meaning from just "Look!" I looked like a slow reader because, in my mind, I was trying to fill in the gaps of plot and character interplay that the minimal words caused. I was indeed the daydreamer the teachers said I was.

My third admission concerned a semantic issue—the meaning of "Father." You see, I went to Catholic school, and the man called "Father" was the priest. The Father I knew wore only a black suit with a black shirt and a thin white collar around his neck, and he lived alone in the rectory next to the church. At six years of age, I was morally conflicted when introduced to a

different "Father," one who wore a brown suit and lived in a house with some woman and her kids. (This was before I knew about Episcopalians.)

So, this book addresses the need to consider schema and to differentiate to ensure that learning occurs from the teaching we do. We'll take a look at ways that reading happens in the mind, ways to provide for awareness, direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice at each stage of literacy development. In addition, we'll examine ways to differentiate instruction by accommodating expectations, materials, and instructional practices. I hope you enjoy, and learn from, this new edition.

HOW WE DID IT

Regardless of the methods and materials that we learned to read from and with, we turned out okay. Think about how we taught reading as teachers. I and many of my age-mates (counting the years or months to retirement, worrying about Social Security and long-term health care) have seen it all in reading instruction. So much so, we could write a book!

The small-group thing that we did early in our careers, in the sixties and seventies, wasn't so different from how we learned to read. We had the three groups and the worksheets, and we moved the kids progressively through the stories, one after another, five days on a story, then on to the next one. And you know what? Those kids learned to read! Some of them even became teachers.

Then we saw the advent, duration, and demise of whole language, whatever that was. Some of us did the literature-based thing. This was an interesting period in American education. We stopped phonicating and did the whole-word and whole-idea thing while we worked with the whole group of kids—everyone reading the same book. We selected a book not because it was within the students' zone of proximal development, or because it contained the concepts, skills, and vocabulary these students needed, or offered specific strategy use or comprehending opportunities; no, we chose a book because then we could make a quilt. That era was marked with such fascinating symbols: many of us wore denim skirts and wooden jewelry, and we placed woven baskets and wallpaper borders in our classrooms. And you know what? Most of those kids learned to read! Some of *them* even became teachers.

AND HERE WE ARE

Yep, here we are, even further along than we were ten years ago when the science of learning first peeked over the educational horizon. Many of us are still teaching reading. Granted, some of us may be looking at the golden rays of retirement, peering longingly at the enticing pink hues of reading anything we want at any time, maybe even joining a real book club. But, until that really happens, we keep showing up every day, teaching those kids who keep showing up how to read. The sobering reality is that the majority of these children we are teaching today will work in the health-care field in some capacity at some point in their lives. And they'll be taking care of us!

It seems as though we've seen it all. Guided reading is not a new concept: many districts across the United States and Canada have implemented this teaching practice to some degree. So, what's new? Actually, a lot—the science of learning has influenced the decisions we make. The changing demographics of the learning population warrant greater diversification for linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and affective concerns.

As an educational society, we have benefited from the work the scientific society has been doing. We now know so much more about brain research, language development, and literacy development in general. Teachers today are being asked to operate much more like scientists. We are being asked to make instructional decisions. We have to look at children as they operate on and

with print. It has become our professional responsibility to recognize literate behaviors, analyze those behaviors, interpret them, and then use that information to form groups, select texts, and design interactions in order to provide awareness, instruction, guided practice, independent practice, and application that enable children to assimilate new information with existing information. This is sure a whole lot different from just reading the boldface print in the teacher's guide.

Four cornerstones—group formation, text selection, teaching sequence, and teacher talk—form the foundational differences between guided reading and what we used to do. The following are some of the questions that folks ask when they begin investigating the differences between what we used to do and what we are currently doing in the name of reading instruction. Perhaps some of your wonderings will be answered here. If so, great—glad to be of service. In any case, be sure to read through the rest of book. The story only gets better.

SO, TELL ME . . .

Q. What is the difference between ability groups and homogeneous groups? Isn't homogeneous just a new word to describe an old idea?

A. Nope. The differences between the two are actually small, but the impact of those differences is significant. Homogeneous groups are refinements of ability groups. That is, we sort our kids into four groups: those who process quickly or who are operating above expectations; those who process typically or who are operating as expected; those who are operating marginally at expectations or slightly below; and those who process slowly or who are operating significantly below expectations. Of course, reality dictates that any combination of group formations may result from the children who make up any classroom. In general, these groups are grossly similar; examining children's broad performances with text or their abilities forms them. Next we look again at each of those groups and determine the specifics of what skills, concepts, vocabulary, strategies, and behaviors each child knows and uses. In other words, we examine the finite nature of literacy learning and pull together those children who are most alike on this microscopic level. It is matching four, five, or six children who are so much alike that they operate as though they were one child sporting six heads. Generally, the type of analysis we do enables us to morph three ability groups into four homogeneous groups. Sometimes we have to borrow or send a child or two from or to another classroom to make a group of four to six (this is called deployment). The more alike the children in the group, the more precise the teaching can be. The more precise the teaching, the more learning occurs. (See Chapter 5 for a full discussion of grouping.)

Q. Do you have to do guided reading with little books, or can you do it with any kind of book, even basal programs?

A. Books make up one set of tools used in literacy learning. If you want to get the job done right, you need to use the right tools. Books appropriate for reading instruction provide practice with what has already been learned while offering just enough opportunities for new learning. We do guided reading with what we have, no matter what that is. Some modifications may be needed, however.

Instructional narrative texts (fiction) should be 90 to 95 percent familiar to the members of the group; expository texts (nonfiction) should be 92 to 97 percent familiar. This means the children in that group can read, figure out, and understand most of the words and the children can use most of the skills the book requires. This doesn't mean the children have read or heard the book prior to the lesson, however. Familiar texts enable children to experience a great deal of success while they work just hard enough on the few bits that offer challenges. If the book is too difficult, which is often the case with grade-level basal programs, all of the children's cognitive

energy is used to figure out the words. The children become either exhausted, without enough cognitive energy to comprehend what is being read, or disinterested, without sufficient cognitive or affective stamina to keep up the fight. Books in basal programs are wonderful, with rich, vibrant stories, but this wonderfulness frequently renders them too difficult for the grade level for which they are intended. When the book is too difficult, generally the teacher must compensate in some way to bring the children to where the book is in terms of its difficulty. Frequently, that means reading it to them—which is fine, except the child who works learns, and the teacher already knows how to read. Taking children through a book that is too difficult is like me trying to squeeze into a size ten pair of jeans (I am larger than a size ten). I can let out the seams and move over the button or attach a rubber band, and then even not zip the zipper all the way. It's a lot of work and in the end the jeans just don't fit. I end up struggling, get sweaty and frustrated, and ultimately resort to eating ice cream. (Chapter 6 describes the details of analyzing texts and determining what is appropriate for which group.)

Q. Is there a certain way to teach a guided reading lesson? How do you handle the vocabulary, and what about the skills?

A. Each instructional practice has a framework of interaction, a logical progression of thinking that moves readers into and through a text. In guided reading, each of the five steps of the lesson serves a specific purpose and sets up the next step of the lesson. Vocabulary and skills are contextualized throughout the lesson so the children learn the specific words and skills in the environment in which they encounter them, and will probably encounter them in other similar situations later on. This eases the dilemma of change of state, which is learning something in one situation and not recognizing it in another.

The first step of the lesson is setting the scene, which Madeline Hunter called the "anticipatory set." This conversation between the teacher and the children in the group orients the readers to the concept, genre, and author. In doing so, the teacher enables the children to call forth schema-relevant thoughts, experiences, language, images, and so on that the children can use to connect what the author is saying to what they already know. Setting the scene is the first whiff of comprehending; it readies the readers for what the author has to offer.

The second step of the lesson is the book introduction. This step is most frequently used in nonfiction books that have access features such as a table of contents, index, and glossary.

The third step of the lesson is the picture walk. The purpose of the picture walk changes depending on the instructional practice. In guided reading, for emergent and early readers, the teacher guides the children's attention through the pictures in order to alert the children to potential sources of information for strategy use. In transitional guided reading, the pictures alert the readers to the literary elements of character, setting, and action.

The fourth step of the lesson is the reading of the text. Again, the method of reading is determined by the practice. The whole text is read orally in guided reading, while the text is read silently, paragraph by paragraph, in transitional guided reading. This step of the lesson is where the eyes and mind hit the print. It is also the prime assessment opportunity in the lesson.

The fifth step of the lesson is the return to the text. Whatever the readers do while reading the text determines what the teacher returns to. This is where the explicit skill, vocabulary, and strategy teaching takes place. This is also where the teacher guides the children in metacognition so their problem-solving actions become clear to them.

The last step of the lesson is the response. Responses—which may be oral, written, or visual (including three-dimensional)—drive children back into the text and provide different catalysts for them to express their understanding and the connections they make with the text. (Chapters 7, 8, and 9 describe the teaching sequences for different instructional practices.)

Q. What do you say to children when you sit down with them over a book? How do you get them to read it and understand it?

A. The most powerful tool a teacher has is his or her voice. What we say to children directs their thinking. Time spent in a lesson is short and precious, so we must make every second count. In guided reading, we guide children's thinking, and reading comes from thinking.

Teacher talk falls into three categories. One category is *coaching statements*. These are positive statements that tell children what they know or remind them what they know about. These statements initiate thinking. They are a positive start that points the children's thinking in the right direction. Another category of teacher talk is *questions*. These are interrogatives that stir the thinking. These questions get the children to think in terms of possible routes of problem solving or solutions to problems. We need to be careful to avoid the "have you ever" and "how many of you" questions. We use these as a means of including and building relevance, but too often they redirect the thinking away from the author's intent. The third category of teacher talk is *prompts*. These are statements that give direction; they tell the children what to do. These three types of teacher talk ignite the thought processes as children strategize, and they keep the children's thinking going in the right direction. Guiding children's thinking is like herding cats: the coaching statements, questions, and prompts are the prods we use to keep their thoughts moving along a somewhat straight, not-too-wide path.

We question, coach, and prompt children for two purposes: inquiry, which happens before and during the reading and takes the children into and through the text, and metacognition, which happens during and after the reading and takes the children through and out from the text. Knowing what to say at each point in the lesson requires a high level of expertise, because teacher talk does not come in a script. What we say is literally determined by what the children say and do. Excellent teacher talk makes you teach on the edge of your seat. (Chapter 4 discusses the types of teacher talk and when and how to use each one.)

NOW WHAT?

I guess the only thing left to do now is to read the book. I hope you enjoy the ride and maybe learn a thing or two. I work full-time at a university now, training those who want to teach reading and writing and those who strive to learn even more. My role there is to help teacher candidates think about what they would do. In addition, I continue to work as a staff developer and still do not want to change what you do; instead, I want you to think about what you currently do. It is still a wonderful time to be a teacher working with teachers and those who aspire to the role. So much to learn and so little time . . . let's get started.