Teaching for Independent Strategic Action

Sarah F. Mahurt, Ph.D., Director of Curriculum, Assessment, and Technology
Virgin Islands Department of Education

Ruth E. Metcalfe, District Elementary Literacy Coordinator
Goshen, IN Community Schools
Learning to read and reading to learn are co-processes that continue throughout development. As individuals move from novice to more competent reader, their breadth of knowledge in the reading domain should increase along with their depth of knowledge about specific reading topics.

Alexander, 2005/2006
Life-span Perspective

- Readers moving beyond early reading have:
  - Limited or spotty background knowledge
  - Basic processing in place (see Clay model)
  - Basic reading knowledge in place: letters, phonemic awareness, basic sight and meaning vocabulary, etc.

- Readers moving beyond early reading need:
  - Deeper background knowledge base
  - Deeper strategic processing (see Puig model)
  - Individual interest developed
  - Understand reading knowledge beyond the basics: text structure, complex words, nuanced meaning vocabulary, etc.
  - Understand the different contexts for reading and how to adjust

Alexander, 2005/2006
Background knowledge

- Build background before reading: book introductions, focused study, pictures and video field trips
- Teach how to preview books
- Integrate content-area study with language arts
- Help children learn how to activate relevant knowledge
- Teach children how to orchestrate knowledge about language and reading
The next morning, when Mr. McGrody saw his garden aprons
he was angry.
So he built a small wire fence
all around his vegetable garden.

"There," he declared. "No bunnies can get into my garden now!"

"And Kent seemed," said Mr. McGrody, "I'll join
fill my barn with lots of fresh veggies."

- Predicted
- Schema for rabbits
- Predicted bunnies would jump
- Schema for rabbits
- Mental image

What did Mr. M. decide to do?
SHARE!
How does a reader know when he does not understand?

- no mind pictures
- can't predict
- "what's that?"
- "huh?"
- not involved in book
- don't remember what happened

What do readers do to fix up understanding?

* get ready to read
- reread
- keep going
- pictures
- look closely (words)
What other kinds of things might we do with to support readers?

- **Select texts carefully**
  - Read and encourage reading in longer texts
  - Move from stories with separate episodes to stories that build
  - Read more than one book from a series
  - Read a wide variety of genre
  - Find out interests. Build on interests and expand their horizons
Gradual Release of Responsibility: Moving Toward Independence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning new knowledge and applying only through teacher support, demonstration, and modeling.</th>
<th>Applying knowledge with teacher prompting and limited support.</th>
<th>Applying knowledge with no teacher prompting or support.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Teacher Support</td>
<td>Low Teacher Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Teacher-directed lessons  
• Modeling and demonstration  
• Whole class or small needs based groups | • Teaching and support in workshops and guided reading and writing  
• Focused application in interactive writing and shared reading  
• Shared experiences and activities | • Small group practice during independent work stations  
• Individual practice in reading and writing  
• Application in independent reading and writing |

**Instructional Contexts**
- Read Aloud
- Reading Minilessons
- Writing Minilessons
- Word Study Minilessons
- Shared Reading
- Shared Writing
- Interactive Writing
- Guided Reading
- Writing Workshop
- Reading Workshop

- Independent Reading
- Independent Writing
- Independent Practice of Word Study Skills
- Projects/Presentations/Products

*From Building Bridges From Early to Intermediate Literacy, Grades 2-4, Mahurt, Metcalfe, and Gwyther 2007*
Teacher Support Levels

Teach
Show, demonstrate, tell “how” within the context of the action. “This is what you could do.” Supply knowledge or information the child does not have.

Prompt
Call for action that is within the child’s control. Use a question or prompt that is short, direct, and to the point. (Must teach before you can prompt.)

Allow for independence
Provide opportunities for children to orchestrate through book selection and introduction. STAY QUIET and observe! Readers need to do the process themselves.

Askew & Doyle, 2008
Determining an Appropriate Level of Teacher Support

Child doesn’t know…………………………Teach/demonstration

Child has made an approximation……………Share the task

Child has partial control…………………….Guide practice

High support prompts
Clear information, few words

Child is becoming more consistent…………..Gradually withdraw
with desired response

scaffold
Low support prompts
Clear information, few words

Child initiates strategy independently…………Specific feedback or praise

Askew & Doyle, 2008; Clay, 2005; Younts 2005
Teacher language

- **Change the nature of interactions**
  - Provide book introductions and model how to think before reading.
  - Model thinking as you go (“I’m not sure what’s going on here. I need to go back and reread that part…Now I think…”)
  - Model thinking as you go (“Oh, so that’s what’s going on. . . . or “So, now I’m thinking . . . .” or “Oh, now I get it !!”
  - Model unfamiliar vocabulary that can be figured out from context (“Hmmm I’m not sure what that means, but I think ___ because ____”
  - Finish that day “we LEARNED…” (synthesis)
When we are explicit with our students about the purpose behind our teaching and give them a window into our thinking about how this will support their reading development, it helps set them up for learning. Students do not need to spend the first five minutes (which may exceed their attention span!) trying to figure out what a lesson is about. They need to be explicitly told so they can set their mind to the topic at hand, activate their schema on that topic, and ready themselves to accept new knowledge. It is easier for students to see reading as a "message-gaining" activity when they understand the message we are trying to teach and understand how this message can help them solve the problems they encounter as they read.

Landrigan & Mulligan, 2008
Some teaching language

- It is important to make sure you know what is happening as you read. Readers notice when they aren’t understanding what they are reading. If you are not sure what you just read, go back and reread.
- Today, I want you to be sure to read the words quickly and in phrases. Phrases are groups of word. *(On p. 2, practice phrased and fluent reading through echo reading.)*
- On this page, there is a lot of dialog, and it can get hard to keep track of who is saying which part. One thing to notice is if the author included “said”, etc. Another thing you might try if it gets confusing is rereading and imagining (visualizing) the conversation. When I make a picture of the characters talking to each other, it’s easier to understand.
• When you were reading the other day, I noticed that when you came to a word you didn’t know you worked hard at looking at the letters and thinking about the sounds and working through the word. That’s something readers need to do, so keep doing that. Now, there is one more thing readers do that can help you. Think about what you are reading and check to be sure that the words also make sense. If it doesn’t make sense, go back and fix it. (Model on p. 4).

• We can use headings to help us know what to focus on—sort of like a sign for what to expect. You can also use them to help check your understanding. When you are done with a section, you can reread the heading and ask yourself: “What did I learn in this part?” If you can’t answer, reread while looking for information about that heading.
One thing that I noticed when you were reading was that some of you read too fast, and some of you read without expression. Do you know what expression in reading is? (Discuss.) We are going to read with expression today. One thing that helps with expression is to think how characters are feeling. Let’s look at p. 3. The teacher is asking who wants to be the lead character in the play. How do you think a teacher would sound asking that? (All read.) And, the child in the book is saying *I did!* Find those words on the page. Notice the exclamation point. I think he really wants to be that character. How would you say something if you really wanted it badly like the child in the book? Let’s read it together that way. When you are reading today, think about the characters and how they might say the words and try to use expression.
One way to know if you are not understanding is if you cannot picture the story in your head. Or, if you stop at end of section/paragraph and are not able to tell yourself what just happened. Another way to tell is if you feel your eyes going across the words but not really sinking into your mind. If any of that happens, go back and try to picture what’s happening as you reread.
Some prompting language

*To think about processing*
- You solved the puzzle. How did you do that?
- How did you know that?
- Which is it? What do you think?
- What’s wrong with this? (Repeat what child said)
- What do you know that might help?

*To think about meaning*
- What are you thinking is going on here?”
- You stopped—is this part making sense to you?
- I noticed you went back here—did you figure out what was happening?
- Read some more. What could the word mean?

Open-ended

- What did you notice?
- Were you right?
- Look carefully and think about what you know.
- Why did you stop?
- What can you do to help yourself?
- What could you try?
- How did you know . . . ?

Prompts are not just talk! Short prompts give a maximum of information to the child using the fewest words. ‘Too much teacher talk’ interferes with solving a problem. Conversations in the lesson should be warm and friendly, but when the child must attend to something or must pull several things together, the prompt should be short, clear and direct. What is the next most helpful thing the child can do?

Clay, 2005, p. 202
Feedback language

- I noticed you . . . .
- You ______. That’s what readers do.
- First you ______, and when that didn’t help, you _______.
  Good problem solving (thinking).
- You noticed what didn’t make sense, so you _____________.
- Good thinking (problem-solving). You _________________.

Our instructional support varies in relation to student abilities and the demands of the tasks they face. Providing explicit instruction and numerous opportunities for shared and guided practice, while gently moving children to independent practice, allows them to take on the knowledge and abilities they will need to succeed.

Mahurt, Metcalfe, & Gwyther, 2007