



Research

The teacher, Joan Moser, organizes her reading class by using three main instructional strategies. First, she uses interactive, shared reading and instruction to involve all students. She uses it to teach the before-, during- and after- reading strategies that all students need.¹ This forms a “common core” of experience for the entire class. Secondly, she places students into small groups on the basis of their assessed performance. These groups give individual children and small groups of children the specific strategies and help that they need. She also gives students the opportunities and skills they need to become independent readers. She uses the “daily four” or five to help students learn about their individual preferences and take responsibility to meet their own needs. These three types of reading instruction help the teacher meet the needs of the class as a whole, and also focus on students’ individual needs.

This lesson demonstrates how a teacher can use small reading groups while other students are engaged in independent reading activities. Each experience and teaching method meets various goals of reading instruction. Guided reading may be offered in different formats. It is reading instruction in which the teacher provides the structure and purpose for reading and responding to the material. Small-group guided reading instruction can be valuable for the following reasons:

This format can help the teacher present strategies and skills that meet the needs of certain students. She keeps track of her students’ progress and can then “tailor” or intensify the instruction as needed. This format, like other types of small group instruction, also helps a teacher personalize interactions and strengthen relationships with students. This contributes to their motivation, learning and self-concept.

The quality of adult-student conversation in the classroom and the one-on-one or small group interactions that children experience are found to be related to their language skills.²

Small guided reading groups also give a teacher the opportunity to teach strategies which may be more difficult to teach in a larger group. This increases student engagement and oral reading practice... which, in turn, contributes to fluency and comprehension. The pairing of small group reading with the “daily five” provides a powerful classroom management technique.

¹ Flood, Jensen, Lapp and Squire, 1991.

² Phillips, McCartney and Scars, 1987.

In this video, third grade students demonstrate their independent reading skills while the small groups interact with the teacher. Joan uses the “Daily Five” as an organizer to teach independent reading skills. When students decide to work on their own, this provides a structure for their choices. They can choose to:

- Read to themselves
- Read to someone else
- Reread a familiar book
- Practice writing...and
- Listen to reading

Students can choose which of these activities they want to pursue on any given day. They are heavily involved in their independent activities while the teacher continues working with small reading groups.

One of Joan’s strategies is to maintain a book box for each student. Students within a given group all have copies of the same text, but they’ve also chosen other books they can read independently. This means that they always have a collection of books to read during Daily Five or other times. They also have the same books as members of their small group and can work with partners in various reading and comprehension activities.

The value of this approach to reading instruction management is that students have a shared experience for learning as well as an opportunity to work on individual skills which have been identified by classroom assessments.