Guided Reading

Overview

Guided reading works by placing students in small groups. Before reading the story, the teacher provides students background information to help them understand the story. Next, the students read the story out loud softly. The teacher provides feedback and strategies to the students as they read the stories. Following the out loud reading, the teacher asks students’ questions to assess their comprehension. Teachers should ask questions that guide students thinking about the text helping them to internalize what they are reading and to hear different perspectives from the students in the group. As students become more comfortable in the discussion, teachers should encourage students to think of questions and share opinions they have in order to expand on the ideas they have creating more active readers.

Theoretical support

The underlying theory behind guided reading is to teach comprehension strategies and for the students to develop the ability to think critically about what they are reading (critical literacy) (Fisher, 2008). Guided reading allows the students to internalize and ask themselves questions as they read beginning the process of becoming an active reader (Fisher, 2008). This is the goal of guided reading. Iaquinta (2006) describes that students develop a system that allows them to discover more about the process of reading while reading. As students develop strategies working with a group this will help them to apply what they have learned to begin successfully using strategies while independently reading with meaning (Guastello & Lenz, 2005).

Fisher (2008) presents different levels of comprehension: surface understanding, the formation of propositions and drawing inferences from the text, and personal evaluation of the text in a positive or negative way. Guided reading not only encourages the children to talk, but it also empowers them to construct their own understanding and meaning from the text (Fisher, 2008). In order to support the process of student’s thinking critically “beyond the text”, teachers serve an important role bridging the gap for students for what is known and new to them, helping them to problem solve and when appropriate allowing the students to take responsibility to continue the discussion (Fisher, 2008).

In order to create the environment for guided reading to work, “teachers need to be confident, both in their subject knowledge and their ‘book knowledge’” thus more successfully guiding their students during the intervention (Fisher, 2008). Guided reading should not be mistaken for students simply taking turns reading aloud in a group. Students should instead be provided with the opportunity to develop a deeper meaning for what they are reading through discussion and use of strategies presented by the teacher.

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Empirical support

Iaquinta (2006) presents a framework for helping teachers understand guided reading, its purpose and key elements as well as helping teachers understand their role in the process. In table III, Iaquinta (2006) explains how teachers should select and introduce the text. The text selected should help students expand and use strategies for how they process what they read. When introducing the text teachers should share information that will help students access and use all sources of information. Students should have the opportunity to problem solve while reading and practice using the context to help them understand word meaning. There are a number of steps to take while engaging in guided reading such as introducing the text, title, author, and supporting information; providing information about word meaning, prompts for interpreting illustration, and defining problems or plots of the story. After reading students should be allowed time to talk about the text and encouraged to express opinions and ideas about what they have read. Additionally, they should process the text and discuss the meaning behind what they read in relation to how it applies beyond the text.

Fisher (2008) conducted three case studies in real classrooms to get a picture of what guided reading looks like for fluent readers who do not need help reading aloud and also at the effectiveness and opportunities guided reading offered to further develop student skills. While this is a small sample of guided reading implemented in the classroom, it gives insight for how guided reading can be improved in classroom settings where the guidelines of guided reading may not be understood as much as the teacher believes.

- Case study 1 presented the notion that when openly discussing the text there may be no general consensus found, but hopefully students are challenged and understand a range of perspectives can be expressed and that people may interpret the text differently. Teachers should not have students on a quest for a ‘correct’ response to questions they pose. Questions should rather be used to generate thought and exploration, sharing ideas about the text.
- In case study 2, students took turns reading aloud for 15 minutes and the teacher posed some questions as the text was read and used a small amount of teaching. Fisher (2008) points out that this method did not encourage the students to pose questions themselves and when opportunities presented themselves for students to expand and relate outside of the text, that deeper meaning and opportunity for critical literacy was missed.
- In case study 3, the opportunity for student’s responses to be further explored more in depth were missed. It is important to prompt students to offer suggestions, comment on each other’s responses in order to gain their confidence as readers, and carry on the discussion.

In the cases presented in this study, teachers made the mistake by allowing “three-quarters of their teacher time listening to the children read” (Fisher, 2008, p. 25). It is rather more important to help the children create meaning and teach strategies for the students to analyze and think critically about the text. The goal is not to achieve the teacher’s interpretation of the text, but instead students should be drawing upon experiences to interpret the text and linking the text what they know. This provides the opportunity to relate to their reality and discuss other possibilities.

Guastello and Lenz (2005) present a “kidstation model” to address concerns of teachers in several schools in low-socioeconomic sections of a city, with crowded classrooms (some 30 to 35 students), generally reading below average compared to other students in the district. This model
provides a practical method of guided reading without compromising the goals and objectives of the intervention. By making some changes with the room design, using kidstations instead of centers, and creating flexibility with time allotted from each reading group helped teachers eliminate pressures and gave them “more time to monitor and interact with students at their kidstations” (Guastello & Lenz, 2005, p. 146).

The structure of this “kidstation model” started with the entire class taking part in a read-aloud session for 10 minutes and shared reading for 25 (roughly 30-35 minutes total). After that time, four groups formed: one with the teacher engaged in the guided reading session and the other three in their individual kidstations pre-prepared and ready for independent group work for about 30 to 35 minutes. When the group with the teacher finished they were given a brief activity to work on amongst their group while the teacher circulated the other groups to monitor and answer questions. This model takes preliminary planning at the beginning of the school year and should be used over the course of five to seven weeks in the form of a rotation cycle so that students can all engage in similar activities. Additionally, this places an opportunity for students to become responsible and accountable to complete their work amongst their group.

If you are having similar difficulty finding the best method to incorporate guided reading in your classroom as the teachers in Guastello and Lenz’s (2005) study did, this might serve as a method that can be used without compromising the key goals of guided reading. For a more in-depth explanation of classroom design, activities to use at kidstations, and a deeper understanding of the planning and rotations of this method I encourage you to take a look at the article for further explanations.

References

