

Part One – A Background to Reading Instruction

What is reading? What is the best way to teach reading?

In the world of TESOL, these two simple questions no longer seem to rouse any heated debates. The battles over the best ways to teach reading have largely been won, and academic literature, coursebooks and international reading assessments seem to present a unified and coherent approach. At least where reading is concerned, it seems that teachers can walk into the classroom confidently knowing that their arsenal of reading activities have the consensual approval of the industry. Before questioning this prevailing approach to reading instruction in TESOL, it is worth examining some of its assertions.

How many of the following statements sound familiar? Tick the ones you agree with.

- Students should be encouraged to work out the meaning of unknown words from the context.*
- Students don't need to read or understand every word in a text.*
- Student should mainly be engaged in reading texts rather than reading isolated sentences or individual words.*
- Where possible, reading texts should be authentic and not specially written.*
- The three main subskills of reading are skimming (for gist), scanning and detailed reading. These should be practised in class and also form the basis of assessments.*
- Students should be encouraged to read quickly. If they do not, it will be more difficult to achieve a global understanding of the text.*
- Reading aloud is unproductive and unnatural. It unnecessarily slows readers down and encourages them to subvocalize in silent reading.*
- Reading should be contextualized. Teachers should build up students' expectations before reading a new text to encourage them to make conscious and unconscious predictions about the text. Reading the text can then confirm or refute these expectations.*
- Extensive silent reading will develop reading ability and widen reading vocabulary.*
- Reading is best assessed by checking understanding of the text, for example by using comprehension questions or cloze tests.*

Most reading teachers will sympathise with many, if not all, of these assertions. They form the basis of reading lessons in ESOL classrooms around the world, what might be referred to as "top-down reading" where instruction aims to develop the reading skills that are necessary for world outside the classroom using authentic reading tasks.

Many of these ideas stem from psycholinguistic research into expert L1 readers. Researchers moved away from seeing reading as a simple skill of decoding written marks on a page to a view of reading as a complex process of information processing (Crandall 1995). Meaning was no longer something to be extracted from a text, but was the result of each reader's interaction with the text. In other words, readers drew on their own knowledge of the subject (content schemata) and a knowledge of how information in texts tends to be structured (formal schemata) to construct meaning. Reading was thus construed as a process of

'sampling' the text in order to confirm or revise the top-down predictions suggested by the schemata. Research backed up this view by showing "that good readers just pass their eyes quickly across the text, focusing on a few letters or words here and there and forming predictions based on background knowledge" (Birch 2002:60).

The result was that reading instruction began to emphasize global or top-down processes such as predicting, guessing from context, and inferring. Teachers started to discourage students from trying to read every word as this seemed to go against the idea of sampling. Materials reflected the view that reading was best acquired by immersing the student in global reading activities, with typical tasks mirroring real-world activities - skimming, scanning, extensive reading, reading for gist, reading for specific information, using authentic texts etc. This seemed particularly useful in ESOL where the students could not be expected to know the meaning of every word they met in a text. Of course the bottom-up strategies of letter recognition and word identification were still important, but crucially it was assumed that they would be acquired naturally if students were given enough exposure to written text and appropriate activities. In other words, students should 'read to learn'.

Reflection: Is Top-Down Reading Successful?

Think about the Arab students you know.

1. How successful are they at reading?
2. How would you characterize the difficulties they have?
3. Do elementary and advanced readers have different kinds of problems or is it simply a question of degree?
3. Do you think the current approach to reading outlined above addresses these difficulties?
4. How well do your students spell? [This may seem an odd question for a discussion of reading, but as Ryan (1997:184) notes, "when teachers examine the spelling problems of their learners, they are observing the visible signs of a reading process which has only been partially absorbed". If students write 'plan' instead of 'plane', how quickly and accurately would they be able to read the words 'plan' and 'plane' in a text?]
5. Do you think your students should be able to read aloud words they might not necessarily understand? Could your students accurately read (decode) the following words?

short words: *moat, slope, wrist, knight, braid, sleigh*

long words: *circumnavigation, dysfunctional, comprehensibility*

An alternative View

For many students, particularly those whose own languages use Latin script, this top-down approach to reading may well produce successful readers. However for many Arabic speakers, reading often remains an area of weakness, and to use Goodman's (1967) famous phrase, little more than "psycholinguistic guessing game". What can teachers do to remedy this? Is there an alternative to the current approach to reading instruction?

One common, but far less prominent perspective in the literature acknowledged the usefulness of top-down processing strategies, but adds the caveat that a top-down approach can only be effective once a learner has achieved a degree of automaticity in the bottom-up skills of letter recognition and word identification. If this is not in place, readers can remain perpetually 'word-bound'.

More current views of this learner problem argue that students are word-bound precisely because they are not yet efficient in bottom-up processing. The problem is that students do not simply recognize the words rapidly and accurately but are consciously attending to the graphic form (and in many second language texts there are often far too many new forms for students to attend to efficiently). No amount of guessing, which many poorer students actually seem to be good at, will overcome this deficiency and lead to automatic word recognition.

Grabe 1991:391

This view is radically at odds with the top-down approach so pervasive in ESOL. Here, it is acknowledged that some readers may need additional help with bottom-up processing before comprehension is possible. Reading instruction is no longer about getting learners to behave like expert readers as quickly as possible. Instead, learner readers may first need to go through a transitional phase where they are given the chance to develop automaticity in letter recognition and word identification. Only when a basic level of reading fluency has been achieved is a reader's attention free for comprehension - the real purpose of reading.

Reflection: Bottom-up Processing

Think about the Arab students you know.

1. Do you think they have good letter recognition and word identification skills?
2. Do they get letters confused, for example when spelling aloud?
3. Do they have poor copying skills?
4. Do they fail to attend to punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing conventions etc.?
For example, a student might ask "What does Edinburgh mean?" as they fail to notice the capital letter for proper names.
5. Do they sometimes misread basic words (for example they read 'take' for 'talk' or 'enjoy' for 'enough')?
6. Do they find it difficult to accurately read a simple text aloud without undue hesitation and with appropriate intonation?
7. Do they spell the same word differently in the same piece of writing?
8. Do they sometimes misread a word that you know they know? (For example, a student might not be able to decode the word 'calculator' in a text, but can name one when you point to it.)

'Yes' answers to these questions may well indicate that your students have a deficiency in bottom-up processing skills. Note that getting the answer right in comprehension tests does not necessarily indicate that students have good bottom-up skills. Weak readers often develop a whole range of strategies for getting the right answer without necessarily engaging with the text appropriately. A typical example is a student who spots an unusual word in the question, locates it in the text as though doing a word search puzzle, and simply copies the information around it. In actual fact, little comprehension may be involved.

What do we teach our students?

At this point it is instructive to think about the training Arab learners might typically receive before they arrive at college. They are taught the order of the alphabet, how to say the names of the letters so they can write down words that are spelled to them. They are also shown how to write lower and upper-case letters. From then on, they are expected to automatically decode words written using the rather chaotic English spelling system where

there is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds (unlike Arabic). Is it any surprise that many Arab students struggle with reading?

In our anxiety to show progress in English L2 reading, we often rush students into texts that are too difficult, without allowing them the time to acquire automaticity with English graphemes and common spelling patterns. We will rush our students if we overlook or minimize the complex task of switching from their L1 orthography to English.

Birch 2002:147

Reading Instruction and English-Speaking Children

Although reading instruction in the world of ESOL is largely rooted in top-down approaches, this is not the case in primary education where the concept of phonics has a great deal of currency. Phonics is often erroneously described as an approach, when in fact it is the body of knowledge that describes how sounds and spelling patterns related to each other. Phonics training aims to allow students to intuitively decode (read) and encode (spell) words, even if they don't know their meaning.

Unlike top-down approaches that see reading as a unique and separate skill, phonics links reading (decoding) to writing (spelling) and speaking (pronunciation). Phonics is increasingly being incorporated into national curriculums (e.g. the National Literacy Strategy in UK primary schools) and long-term studies repeatedly demonstrate its effectiveness in improving reading age. [See Report of the National Reading Panel 2000 (US), or National Statement for Improving Attainment in Literacy in Schools 2002 (Scotland)]. Phonics is often pitted against the "whole language" or "whole word" approach. The differences are summarized in the table below.

Whole Language	Phonics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one step process: print → meaning • emphasis on visual decoding • meaning paramount at all times • word guessing using all strategies – word length, shape, context clues, pictures • whole words the smallest focus • extensive reading • authentic and meaningful language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two step process: print → sounds → meaning • emphasis on decoding of sounds • accurate decoding is initial focus with meaning a secondary goal • words are sounded out – no context is given to minimize the risks of guessing • parts of words → whole words • intensive reading, especially reading aloud • reading drills

A key element of phonics is Phonemic Awareness which research has consistently shown to be one of the best predictors of progress for beginning readers. Phonemic Awareness is simply the ability to recognise and manipulate the phonemes (or individual sounds) that make up a language. Those learners, both children and adults, who are unable to discriminate and manipulate sounds are invariably poor readers as they are less successful at mapping sounds onto letter patterns (Kruidenier 2002). Activities used to test or develop phonemic awareness include blending (where individual sounds are combined to make words - /t/+e/+l/= tell) and segmenting (where words are separated into constituent sounds – shape = /ʃ/+e/+p/). When students have a mastery of sounds, then it is much easier to map graphemes onto those sounds in reading. Research supporting the importance of Phonemic Awareness, particularly for young learners, is extensive:

The data we now have on the early stages of reading are rich and varied in detail, but put together, they lead to one general and inescapable conclusion, which is that children's phonological awareness and phonological abilities play a crucial part in learning to read. There is ample evidence now that children have to be able to analyze the sounds that make up words and syllables in order to begin learning to read, that their awareness of these sounds is a contributory factor in learning to read and write, that extra teaching in breaking words up into their constituent sounds and connecting these sounds to alphabetic letters and to sequences of alphabetic letters improves their reading, and that children who are slow to learn to read are often also particularly insensitive to the sounds in words.

Nunes, Bryant and Bindman, 1997:151-152

Rudolph Flesch (who is perhaps best known for developing Flesch-Kincaid readability statistics) wrote an impassioned plea for the end to the whole language approach in American primary schools in his seminal book *Why Johnny Can't Read*. It is perhaps worth quoting him at length since many of the ideas run counter to the prevailing wisdom of ESOL.

He says that when students are trained in what he describes as whole-word guessing:

They can't read; they can't spell. Not only that, they can't even learn how to spell properly because they have been equipped with mental habits that are almost impossible to break - except by starting all over again from scratch and relearning to read and write English with phonics.

Flesch 1955:42 - Original emphasis

If Johnny, the archetypal poor reader, has been taught using a whole language approach, the phonics teacher should:

Let him stop all reading - all attempts to read. Explain to him that now he is going to learn how to read, and that for the time being, books are out. All he'll get for several months are lessons in phonics. ... This, incidentally is important. Take him fully into your confidence and explain to him exactly what you are trying to do. Tell him that you are going to do something new with him - something entirely different from what his teachers did in school. Tell him that this is certain to work. Convince him that as soon as he has taken this medicine he will be cured. ... Start him on the phonics lessons. ... Only when you are through - or almost through - with the drills and exercises, start him again on reading. At first, let him read aloud to you. Watch like a hawk that he doesn't guess a single word. Interrupt him every time he does it and let him work the word out phonetically. He'll never learn to read if he doesn't get over the word-guessing habit.

Flesch 1955:115

This phonics-only position clearly lies at one end of a spectrum of different possible mixes of bottom-up and top-down approaches to reading. Clearly it would be difficult for whole scale phonics to be adopted at HCT. First of all, HCT students lack a wide ranging vocabulary so even if they successfully sound out a word, they may not know the meaning. Secondly, students often lack the ability to discriminate all the phonemes of English. This makes the process of linking phonemes and graphemes much harder and implies more attention to pronunciation practice. Thirdly, students arrive in the classroom with considerable knowledge of the Arabic alphabet. Arabic is a language that requires students to have phonemic awareness, particularly of consonant sounds. Fourthly, students may have already been reading in English for many years and would be unlikely to respond to a reading programme

that denied them access to texts for several months. Finally, students always have the spectre of exams hanging over them which demand comprehension of texts and not just mastery of word drills!

This, however, does not mean that phonics training cannot be adapted to reading instruction in TESOL, especially for elementary students to supplement work on top-down skills. Part 2 of this document describes a number of activities that can develop bottom-up skills and introduce phonics training into the ESOL classroom.

Many struggling readers have difficulty moving to a level of automaticity and fluency that allows them to easily comprehend what they are reading... Research in the area of developing accurate decoding has consistently indicated that a systematic code based approach is important for teaching beginning reading skills.

Hook & Jones 2002

Part 2 -Activities for the Classroom

The activities described here can be used with any adult who has problems with basic reading literacy. The activities offer students the chance to work on basic coding using the alphabet and should allow automaticity and reading fluency to develop. In many of the activities, words are presented in groups that share similar sound/spelling patterns. This offers students systematic knowledge about the English - the words covered are merely examples of the orthographic system and not ends in themselves. Unlike conventional reading instruction which is often seen as a distinct skill, reading in these activities is often related to pronunciation and spelling.

Activity 1 - Exploiting Analogy

A powerful technique to encourage students to see similarities between words with the same sound/spelling pattern is the use of analogy (Ehri 1997). For example, understanding the common features of 'night' and 'right' can help students correctly decode new words such as 'might' or 'sight'.

In this activity, the teacher focuses on a single sound that the students have problems coding. (Errors will be most obvious in student writing.) The procedure outlined here is for students who regularly confuse the sounds /ʌ/ and /æ/ and the symbols that represent them, though it can be adapted to any phoneme.

Procedure

1. Quickly model and drill the selected sound in isolation and then in a few example words.
2. Follow up with some work on minimal pairs. For example, write the words on the board in two columns, A and B. Say a word and have the students tell you if it is in column A or B. (It is not important for students to know the meanings of the words.)

<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>
cat	cut
hat	hut
mad	mud
dabble	double
sadden	sudden
master	muster

This stage can be extended with a student saying a word while the other students say which column the word belongs to. Further practice in closed pairs or small groups can be useful at this point.

3. Ask small groups to brainstorm words that contain this sound for a few minutes. As a class, feedback about 20 or so words to the board. Highlight a few words to draw students' attention to the different spelling patterns that are used to represent the sound. In this example /ʌ/ is represented using the following patterns - u (up), o-e (one), o (own), ou (ouble). Exceptions are oe (oes) and oo (ood).
4. Students create a table with a column for each spelling pattern and copy the words from the board into the correct column. (See below.)

u	o	o-e	ou
Sunday	month	come	young
husband	mother	one	cousin
uncle	brother	some	
but	son	love	
us	other		
lunch			
hungry			
fun			
much			

- Students should practise reading the words aloud, either to the class or in small groups to reinforce the sound/spelling relationships between words (i.e. the analogy).
- Finally, the table of words that the students now have can be used as the basis of a spelling test. Conventional spelling tests are based on words linked by meaning which can create confusion as a wide array of spelling patterns are juxtaposed. Here, words are grouped by sound and spelling pattern making it much easier for the student to learn systematic knowledge.

Because most adult poor readers have difficulty with letter-sound skills, they tend to use a whole word recognition approach much more than do children who are reading at the same level. Whole word recognition only works if the words mastered are sight words. The result of continued reliance on whole word "recognition" instead of phonetic skills when decoding unfamiliar words is guessing and misreading.

Kruidenier 2002 39-40

Activity 2 - coding simple vowels

Activities 2 to 4 use letters written on pieces of card. If you plan to use a number of these exercises, it is worthwhile having a full alphabet for each student. (Students can be asked to cut up the cards for homework!) Each of the activities requires students to focus on a small number of cards. Before the main activity begins, students can be asked to put all the letters in alphabetical order. The teacher can then name the letters that are required for the particular activity. It is worth repeating that it is not essential for the students know the meanings of the words. The activities are simply to get students to focus on how the spoken form and the written form are related. Using a limited number of letters forces students to explore the full range of values that each letter can have. It is actually very easy to come up with raw word lists based on a longer word using a site such as <http://www.a2zwordfinder.com/anagram.html>.

Procedure

The simple vowels can cause immense confusion for Arab learners, even those at quite high levels. This is often a problem of pronunciation and a general uncertainty about how those sounds are represented in the written form. Ask the students to separate the following 12 letter cards from the full set.

a b c e h i n o r s t u

Say the following three letter words to the students. The students listen and make the word using the cards. To make the next word in the list, the students have to change one of the letters to form a new word. Note that 'sit' is both the first and last word so the activity can be seamlessly repeated if necessary.

sit bit bet set sat cat cut rut rat ran can con cot not hot hit sit

The activity can be made slightly more complicated by repeating words. For example, the teacher repeats the word 'cat' and sees if any of the students try to make any changes to the word they have.

The activity can be extended further by randomly choosing a word from the list.

Study after study has shown the importance of phonological awareness, especially in segmentation skills, in early reading for native English readers. Phonological awareness is acquired through aural and oral activities, but total mastery of the sounds of English is not necessary before beginning to read. Often, learning the letter shapes and sounds together can bootstrap phonological awareness. Students need to learn the alphabetic principle anyway, so teachers should teach it explicitly.

Birch 2002:147

Activity 3 - Coding short and long vowels

This activity uses the same 12 letter cards from Activity 2 to introduce and practice what are often called "long" vowels using a final 'e'.

Procedure

Explain how adding an 'e' to a three letter word often (but by no means always) changes the sound of the first vowel.

<u>Short Vowel</u>	<u>Long Vowel</u>
hat	hate
pet	Pete
pin	pine
hop	hope
cut	cute

A useful way for students to remember the 'long' vowel sounds is simply to show that it is the same as the name of the letter. This time students then must change one or two letters each time (or none if repetitions are used). A possible sequence of words is:

sit site bite bit bet set sate sat cat cut cute rut rate
rat ran can cane con cot not note hot hit site sit

To make the activity more challenging, students can be given these words in random order.

[Note: There are exceptions to the 'e' rule described above. These words are often found in very common words (often ending '-ve' or with 'o' as the first vowel): live, give, have, love, come, done, above etc.]

Sounding out and blending practicing -
there is no other way. It's like practicing
scales on the piano or practicing driving
until you're good enough for the road test.
Flesch 1981:75

Activity 4 - Coding more complex sounds

A number of different variations are possible using just 8-10 letter cards and a list of words.

- 1) The teacher spells a word letter by letter. The students make the word and say how it is pronounced.
- 2) The teacher says the letters in the incorrect order and asks the students make the word. (Clearly with anagrams, students are expected to know the meaning of the word.)
- 3) The teacher gives the students the sounds of the words instead of the letter names. For example, the teacher says /m/ /eɪ/ /s/ and the students make the word "mace" using the cards.
- 4) The teacher can make this into a sound anagram activity by saying the sounds in the wrong order. For example, the teacher says /tʃ/ /s/ /n/ /æ/ and the students have to make 'chance'.
- 5) The teacher says a word. The students spell it using the cards.
- 6) Students are given lists of previously covered words in pairs. One student dictates it to the other who then spells it out with the letters.
- 7) Students try to make as many words as possible using a set of letters. The teacher can specify that the words must contain a particular sound or a particular group of letters.

This time students are asked to write some letters on small pieces of card, for example C-M-H-S-N-I-E-A. These letters can make up a secret word - in this case MACHINES. Students then manipulate these letters to create a number of words (see list below).

Sample Words 1

Letters used = C-M-H-S-N-I-E-A

Secret word = MACHINES

[Note: In the lists that follow, the words have been grouped in the order of difficulty, though lower levels would not be expected to cover all the patterns in the same lesson! The teacher should make the teaching point of each group of words explicit.]

One and two letter words

I, a, an, am, is, in, as, me, he, hi

Short vowels in three letter words

man, Sam, cam, can, mac

hen, men

him, min, sin

Contrasting short and long vowels (final letter 'e')

man/mane, can/cane, cam/come, Sam/same, sham/shame, min/mine, shin/shine

Hard and soft 'c'

contrasts - mic/mice, mac/mace

soft 'c' - ice, ace, mince, since, cinema

hard 'c' - cash, can, came

Digraph Vowels and Consonants - ai, ea, ch, sh

ai - aim, chain

ea - mean, each

ch - chin, chance, chime, china, inch/inches, chase

sh - ash/ashes, mash, mesh

Long Words

[Students may not know the meanings, but they should be able to sound out the words correctly.]

iceman, minces, manic, amnesic, cinemas

Different pronunciations of 'ch'

/tʃ/ chin, chase etc

/k/ schema, ache/aches

/ʃ/ machine

Finally, students can be asked to find the secret word that can be made using all of the letters.

Sample Words 2

In order to increase phonemic awareness, it is useful to regularly ask students to divide the words they make up into the composite sounds by physically separating the letter cards. (If the word has a final 'e' as in 'make', it can be raised with the preceding vowel to show they work together - m^ak^e.) At this point, students can be asked to count how many sounds the word had and how many letters it has. Students can then segment the word by pronouncing each word separately.

Students should also be given 'spelling tests' of practiced patterns. These spelling tests are different from the standard spelling tests currently in use in classrooms:

- words are grouped by sound and spelling pattern
- the students do not know in advance which words will be in the test, only which sounds will be covered
- the students transcribe what they hear, not what they have studied (the students may not have encountered the words before)
- the spelling tests aim to reveal the students knowledge of the phonics system and not what words the student can remember

Letters used = R-M-T-S-E-E-I-A

Secret word = EMIRATES

One and two letter words

I, am, as, at, is, it

Short vowels

mast, mat, sat, ram, set, met, its, rim, sim, sit

Contrasting short vowels and long vowels that have a final letter 'e'

at/ate, mat/mate, rat/rate, Tim/time, sit/site (also sir/sire, star/stare)

Making the 'ee' in 'sheep'

ea - ear, eat, tea, team, meat, sea, east, steam, stream, smear, easier, eaters

ee - seem, meet, see, tree

e - meter/metre, remits (n)

Making the 'i' in 'like'

i-e - smite, items, arise, miser, satire, time

Making the 'a' in 'farm' ('r' controlled)

ar - are, arm, art, armies, star

5-letter Anagrams - Can you spell these?

[Students may not know the meanings, but they should be able to sound out the words.]

mister/merits/timers/remits/smiter

Finally, students try to make the secret word using all of the letters.

ESL and EFL readers must be active, soaking up and storing new words, morphemes, and meaning in their knowledge base for receptive and productive use. For them to learn to do this, early reading must be carefully controlled to be at their comfortable but challenging level and they should not be pushed into reading texts that are too challenging too soon.

Birch 2002:148

Activity 5 - Guided Discovery

This activity has been adapted from Birch (2002:89) and aims to encourage students to arrive at a rule for common patterns of letters.

Procedure

Students are given groups of words that illustrate a feature of the English spelling system.

For example:

A	B
gain	giant
go	gentleman
gun	gym
C	D
cage	bag
huge	hug
change	log
village	sag

Students are invited to read the words aloud and find a rule that explains the different pronunciations. Students can ask the teacher to read individual words for words for them. If students find the activity difficult, the following questions can be asked.

- What letter do all the words have?
- Where is this letter in the word for each group?
- What letters come after 'g' in each group?
- When do we use a soft 'g' and when do we use a hard 'g'?

Another set of words can be given. This time the students have to decide on a rule for the hard and soft sounds of the letter 'c'. The rule is essentially the same as for hard and soft 'g' and the students should be able to arrive at a rule with little or not help.

A	B
cap	city
copper	cement
cup	cycle
C	D
lace	picnic
peace	music
nice	comic
fleece	tarmac

Finally, a general rule for the pronunciation of soft and hard versions of the letter 'c' and 'g' can be formulated. To give further practice and assess whether the feature has been assimilated by the students, a spelling dictation of other words containing hard and soft 'g' and 'c' can be given. (age, ago, ace, case, again, urge, rage, care, bilge, German etc. Note that there are some common exceptions - get, girl, gift)

Activity 6 – Reading Aloud

In TESOL, asking students to read aloud is often discouraged as it is believed to be a mechanical process that doesn't demonstrate comprehension of a text. It is also seen as an unnatural skill - while we often read silently, how often do we read text aloud in every day life?

However, asking students to reading aloud is a useful way to diagnose those with weak decoding skills. "The lack of fluency in poor readers is evidenced by their slow, halting, and inconsistent rate; poor phrasing; and inadequate intonation patterns" (Hook & Jones 2002). Also, the National Reading Panel, established in the United States as response to a 1997 congressional directive, found that for L1 children at least, reading aloud should be a key component of reading instruction.

The panel also concluded that guided oral reading is important for developing reading fluency- the ability to read with efficiency and ease. In guided oral reading, students read out loud, to either a parent, teacher or other student, who corrects their mistakes and provides them with other feedback. Specifically, guided oral reading helped students across a wide range of grade levels to learn to recognize new words, helped them to read accurately and easily, and helped them to comprehend what they read.

National Reading Panel 2002

Reading aloud need not be boring. In fact, very often, low level students enjoy it, perhaps because they have an awareness that it will benefit them. All forms of groupings can be used:

- student to class
- student to teacher (one-to-one)
- student to student (one-to-one and within a group)
- teacher (or cassette) to student. Students follow the text.

1. Ensure an appropriate text is selected. The text should be much simpler than a typical reading comprehension passage where there may be a high number of unknown words. For example, a page from a graded reader might well be appropriate. Both fiction and non-fiction should be used. Texts designed for top-down practices should not be used.

2. Students can be given time to prepare the text by reading it silently first. At this point they can ask for the pronunciation and meaning of unknown words.

3. When the student is reading aloud, the teacher/peer should listen out for:

- reading speed - laboured or fluent?
- incorrectly pronounced words
- excessive hesitations and self corrections
- intonation - is it appropriate or is it flat? Does it reflect the punctuation/meaning of the text?

Student can also be asked to read the same passage several times until fluency, intonation and pronunciation are perfected. Repeated reading has been shown to be effective in increasing fluency and comprehension for both adults and children (Kruidenier 2002). Finally, reading aloud can be incorporated into classroom assessments, perhaps as a component of speaking exams. If student know this skill is to be assessed, it will undoubtedly encourage students to practice and have a positive effect on their reading fluency.

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