

Intervention: Differentiating Instruction

Differentiation: Using Small Group Instruction - Guided Reading & Skill-Focused Lessons (Early Childhood-Grades PK-2; Upper Elementary Grades 3-6)

(Excerpt from: **Differentiated Reading Instruction: Small Group Alternative Lesson Structures for All Students** by Marcia Kosanovich, Karen Ladinsky, Luanne Nelson, Joseph Torgesen. Florida Center for Reading Research)

Differentiated instruction is matching instruction to meet the different needs of learners in a given classroom. The range of instructional need within one classroom is large. In order to accommodate these instructional needs, it is recommended that teachers plan for:

- Small group, differentiated instruction
- Ample student practice opportunities in the form of Reading Centers

When is Differentiated Instruction Implemented?

Differentiated instruction is implemented *during* the designated block of time for reading instruction. Usually, whole group instruction is provided, and then classrooms and instruction are organized in the form of Reading Centers. Reading Centers are special places organized in the classroom for students to work in small groups, pairs, or individually. Students practice, demonstrate, and extend learning independently of the teacher at *Independent Student Centers* or students are provided with explicit instruction by the teacher at the *Teacher-Led Center*. Students frequently work at Independent Student Centers while the teacher conducts small group, differentiated, explicit instruction at the Teacher-Led Center.

How is Differentiated Instruction Implemented with Small Groups?

Differentiated instruction is implemented at the Teacher-Led Center. The Teacher forms small, flexible groups based on student data and observations. The classroom is organized in terms of time (number of days per week and number of minutes per day) for each small group. The Teacher determines the appropriate small group lesson structure for each group. Differentiating instruction at the Teacher-Led Center requires the Teacher to use data to form small, flexible groups so that each group meets the specific needs of the students assigned to it, in terms of:

- Size of each group (e.g., 3-5 for struggling readers, 5-7 for other students, etc.)
- Number of days per week each group attends the Teacher-Led Center (e.g., daily, twice/week, 3 times/week)
- Number of minutes per day (e.g., 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, etc.)
- Type of lesson structure for each group (i.e., *Skills-Focused Lesson* or *Guided Reading*)
- Content and level of the lesson (reading skill and level of instruction).

From: <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/pdf/smallGroupAlternativeLessonStructures.pdf>

Intervention: Differentiating Instruction: Guided Reading **Using *Guided Reading* as an Alternative Lesson Structure for Differentiating Instruction (Early Childhood-Grades PK-2; Upper Elementary Grades 3-6)**

Observations during regularly scheduled site visits conducted by the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) as well as continuous observations conducted by *Reading First* Professional Development (RFPD) coordinators suggest that the dominant lesson structure currently being used to provide differentiated instruction during the 90 minute block is the “guided reading” format. As outlined in the work of Fountas and Pinnell, “*Guided Reading* is a context in which a teacher supports each reader’s development of effective strategies for processing novel texts at increasingly challenging levels of difficulty” (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, p. 3). The structure of a typical *Guided Reading* lesson roughly follows the following pattern:

- Selecting the text
- Introducing the text
- Reading the text
- Discussing the text
- Teaching for strategic activities
- Extending meaning (optional)
- Word Work (optional)

In broad overview, a typical *Guided Reading* lesson occurs as students read text that has been selected to be at an appropriate level of difficulty. The teacher’s role is to provide supports to students in the appropriate use of a variety of strategies to identify words and construct meaning from the passage. Instruction from the teacher is provided primarily through questioning students and scaffolding more accurate responses when they make errors during reading. *Guided Reading* provides a context in which the teacher can monitor and guide the student’s application of specific skills in decoding and comprehension to construct meaning while reading.

There are many reasons why *Guided Reading* is an important lesson structure for teachers to implement at the Teacher-Led Center. The *Guided Reading* lesson structure provides teachers the opportunities to: monitor how well students are applying skills to reading text, encourage and support application of skills during text reading (e.g., word level skills and comprehension skills), engage students in thinking about the meaning of text, and build a sense of reading as a meaningful, enjoyable activity.

At the same time, *Guided Reading* may not be the appropriate lesson structure to implement with all small groups of students, especially struggling readers, since it typically emphasizes discussing the meaning of text rather than building specific word analysis skills. Due to this emphasis, *Guided Reading* may not be the best lesson structure for providing focused and systematic instruction in specific skills and knowledge the student is struggling with (i.e., letter-sound fluency, blending, suffixes, multi-syllable strategies, etc.). Students who have fundamental knowledge gaps, particularly in the skills necessary to apply phonemic decoding skills during reading, require focused learning opportunities to help them become accurate and fluent readers so that they will enjoy reading and be able to focus their attention on the meaning of the text. Many of the “leveled books” used during *Guided Reading* lessons may not actually provide good supports for instruction that emphasizes explicit development of skills in phonemic awareness and phonics as an important foundation for the development of initial reading accuracy leading to reading fluency. Finally, during a *Guided Reading* lesson, it is difficult to build in the systematic review of critical knowledge and skills that struggling readers need.

From: <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/pdf/smallGroupAlternativeLessonStructures.pdf>

Intervention: Differentiating Instruction: Skill-Focused Lessons

Using *Skills-Focused Lessons* as an Alternative Lesson Structure for Differentiating Instruction (Early Childhood-Grades PK-2; Upper Elementary Grades 3-6)

Given the strengths of the *Guided Reading* lesson structure in the hands of a skillful teacher, it is clear that such lessons should continue to play a role in providing differentiated instruction and support during the 90-minute reading block. However, it also seems important to consider other lesson structures that might be more effective in providing explicit and systematic instruction for students who do not yet have the necessary skills and knowledge to be integrated together in the reading of text. These *Skills-Focused Lessons* would be provided in order to help insure mastery of elements like letter-sound knowledge, phonemic decoding strategies, critical vocabulary, or reading comprehension strategies.

Skills-Focused Lessons are teacher-planned lessons that provide the opportunity for more systematic and focused practice on a relatively small number of critical elements at a time (e.g., unknown consonant digraphs, vowel teams, r-controlled vowels, etc.). They would also provide the opportunity for sustained, systematic, and interesting “word work” (e.g., Beck, 2006) in order to build fluency and confidence in the application of these skills to reading words. These lessons could draw upon lesson formats and content from the core reading program to reinforce knowledge and skill that was only weakly learned when it was taught in the whole group format. In schools that serve a high proportion of poor and minority students, it does not seem reasonable to expect that most students will be able to master many of the skills they are taught if they are only presented and explained during whole group instruction. Many students will need explicit re-teaching of both knowledge elements and skills, as well as extended opportunities to practice the application of these skills in a variety of contexts ranging from individual words, to phrases, to sentences, to connected text.

Skills-Focused Lessons will be successful to the extent that they are fast-paced, interactive, and targeted appropriately on critical skills for each reading group.

There is not one set format that a Skills-Focused Lesson follows. Rather, these lessons could be closely aligned with results from the DIBELS® progress monitoring measures (particularly for letter knowledge, phonemic awareness, phonemic decoding, and reading fluency) as well as other assessment data.

Resources that may be utilized to implement Skills-Focused Lessons include curriculum maps (<http://reading.uoregon.edu/appendices/maps.php>), Core Reading Program activities, K-3 Student Center Activities, Just Read, K-3 Reading Academy Guide, or activities drawn from Supplemental or Intervention reading programs. Another source for developing Skills-Focused Lessons would be teacher oriented books that provide examples of how to deliver explicit instruction and practice in early reading skills such as *Bringing Words to Life* (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002), *Making Sense of Phonics* (Beck, 2006), and *Comprehension Process Instruction* (Block, 2004).

From: <http://www.fcrr.org/assessment/pdf/smallGroupAlternativeLessonStructures.pdf>