

The following material on instructional strategies in primary grades is extracted from Chapter 4 of Effective Literacy Practice.

PROMPTING

Prompting means encouraging the learner to use what they already know and can do. It is an effective strategy to focus students' attention and to build their metacognitive awareness and their confidence. In order to prompt effectively, the teacher needs a detailed knowledge of the learner. Prompting may take the form of a strong hint, a clue, or a gentle "nudge" to help students use their existing knowledge and literacy strategies to make connections and reach a solution. A prompt often takes the form of a question and involves allowing "wait time" to give students the opportunity to develop and express their own ideas.

These are examples of teachers using prompting strategically. Other deliberate acts of teaching can easily be identified.

Teacher I think you could work out how to write the word "tooth."

Student I could write down all the sounds I can hear.

Teacher Good! Then how could you check whether you were right?

"You might need to check your conclusion again – if you look at the success criteria you may see that there's something more you need to do."

"Josh, you said 'shop,' then you changed it to 'stop.' You knew something was wrong ..."

"I know you know the sound for _____. Let me see you write it."

"I wonder why Dad thought Jack wasn't telling the truth. There could be a clue on this page that you just read."

"You could make those words stand out. Remember the story in guided reading yesterday. What did the words look like in the part where the farmer shouted?"

GIVING FEEDBACK

The impact of effective feedback on student outcomes has been established through a number of studies (for example, Hattie, 1999, and Crooks, 1988). Hattie, on the basis of extensive research, describes feedback as the most powerful single factor that enhances achievement. Like modeling, feedback pervades the school day: most interactions between teachers and students involve some element of feedback.

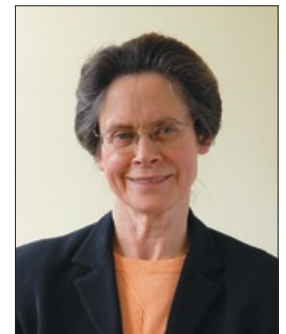
The purposes of feedback are:

- to affirm;
- to inform;
- to guide future learning.

Feedback can be defined as "... providing information how and why the child understands and misunderstands, and what directions the student must take to improve" (Hattie, 1999, page 9). Like all the teaching strategies, feedback is most effective when it relates to specific learning goals and to the ultimate goal of enabling students to monitor and regulate their own learning.

about the writer

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Effective feedback motivates students to learn. The way that students feel about and perceive themselves affects their expectations and consequently their performance. A simple comment can have a major impact – positive or negative – on a student’s motivation. It is important to consider cultural appropriateness when giving feedback (and when using any other teaching strategy).

Feedback may be thought of as either evaluative or descriptive. Evaluative feedback involves making a judgment about what the learner is doing or has done and carries the idea of approval or disapproval. Descriptive feedback means describing or explaining what has or has not been achieved and why. It also involves giving information on how to learn further or what to do next in order to succeed. Interactions involving feedback can yield valuable knowledge of learners as well as enabling them to move forward.

The primary purpose of feedback is not to indicate whether learners are right or wrong but to enable them to reflect on their use of strategies for reading and writing and on their learning. Feedback involves conveying information to learners about where and when to use their knowledge and strategies. Effective feedback can provide a model of how good readers and writers think. Feedback should be honest and specific so that learners know how they are doing. An important message for teachers to convey to students is that using effective strategies in their reading and writing is what caused their success; this is crucial to building students’ metacognition. It’s especially useful to encourage students themselves to suggest what they could do. This is a great way to build their awareness of how they can take control of their learning.

Feedback may be verbal or non-verbal, spoken or written. The quality of the teacher’s written feedback on a student’s writing is especially important, both for providing further guidance and for the student’s confidence.

The teacher should not allow their feedback to take over the ownership of the learning task. For example, a teacher may be tempted to “improve” a student’s piece of writing, with the result that the student’s voice

or sense of ownership may be lost (even though the teacher may feel that the work is better crafted).

Success criteria that arise from shared goals give valuable focus to teachers’ conversations with students and to the feedback that they provide. It is essential to ensure that the students understand the information conveyed through feedback and to provide time and opportunity for them to act on it.

These examples show effective use of feedback in several literacy contexts. In giving such feedback, teachers are also providing good models to the students.

“Well done. You have seen that from another point of view. What reasons can you give to back up your opinion?”

“I like the way you’ve started your sentences in different ways – it makes it more interesting for the reader. I can imagine what your grandma is like by reading your story.”

“That was good thinking. I could see you used the pictures and the title to help you make that prediction.”

“I noticed that you went to our reference texts to help you find the information. That’s good use of research skills. Next time, you could try the websites listed for our topic study.”

“You looked at the end of the word carefully – you fixed it yourself.”

Teacher What else could you tell us about the big storm? You’ve told us where you were and how you felt.

Jane I could say how it sounded.

Teacher That’s a great idea – storms are always noisy. What words can you think of?

Jane Roaring ... howling ...?

Teacher Oh, I can hear it! You need to think about where to put this new information in.

TELLING

At its simplest level, telling means supplying what the student needs, such as an unknown word or a topic for a literacy-learning task. The idea is to fill a gap at that moment to enable the student to move on.

A strategic use of telling may involve providing the language needed to participate in an activity. The teacher tells the students how to spell the word they need for a piece of writing or, at the beginning of a reading task, tells them the theme of the text. This may be the most effective way to work with some students who do not have the background knowledge on which to base productive prediction. Simply providing a label or definition may be the most efficient way to move a student's learning on.

Telling can also mean providing information about when to use a particular literacy strategy in a given task – making explicit the fact that the students can apply their existing knowledge at this point and so building their awareness of when to apply that knowledge in future situations. Telling students when to apply their expertise is particularly useful for students who are experiencing difficulties in reading or writing.

Examples of a teacher making a strategic decision to supply what the students need at that moment may be:

"Today we're going to focus on ..."

"That word is _____. It means _____. Now read on."

"This book that we are going to read tells us about all the ..."

"When you write 'stopping,' you need two p's."

"This is a new idea. You need to start a new paragraph."

EXPLAINING

Explaining can be thought of as an extension of telling. Teachers may explain the task itself, or they may explain the content of a text or learning activity. For example, the teacher may explain:

- what they want the students to do while reading a particular text;
- how a certain task will help the students to achieve a particular goal;
- how procedural text is set out;
- the background to a topic (for example, as an introduction to a writing activity).

Teachers also use explanations in the context of

classroom management (for example, when they explain what is involved in an activity such as paired reading) so that all the students can participate confidently.

The following examples show explanation in relation to text content and a text feature.

In a shared reading session, the teacher and children read together until the word "thistles," which the teacher reads.

Ethan What are thistles?

Sally Flowers?

Teacher Thistles are like prickles. They have a pretty flower on the top, but if you touch thistles, they feel like prickles. They are a problem for farmers. But goats are great on farms because goats will eat anything. Even prickles.

"Look at the text in the blue box. It tells you what equipment the men needed to help move the building. This information is not part of the main story, so it is shown in a different way so that the reader can see that it's something separate."

A characteristic of explanations is that they are verbally explicit. Careful explanations enable students to develop their own understandings. Throughout the many interactions that occur during the school day, the teacher needs to be alert and ready to explain things, picking up cues from the students and adapting their use of this teaching strategy to supply what each learner needs. Sometimes a direct approach is best ("Let me explain this to you"), especially for students who are not yet familiar with the established classroom literacy activities.

DIRECTING

Directing is simply giving a specific instruction. Like all these instructional strategies, it is used deliberately, for a purpose.

Everyday classroom examples of directing are:

"Put your finger on ..."

"Write the letter for that sound."

"Find the part in your piece or writing that ..."

"Turn to your buddy and discuss why ..."

"Look at the checklist on the wall if you're stuck."

INTEGRATING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

This final example shows several of these strategies being used in combination in a typical interaction during shared reading. The teacher is modelling, giving feedback, questioning, and prompting.

Teacher	Let's see who he watched on Monday. Who is he watching?
Ethan	[looking at illustration] He's watching the cat.
Teacher	What's the cat's work?
Ethan	[again drawing from illustration] Chasing the mice.
Teacher	Let's read it together and see if you're right. [reads] "On Monday he w... [pauses] watched the cat. She ..." Oh. How does the cat move?
Several children	She p... r... [they make separate sounds]
Oliver	pr ...
Children	... prowls!
Teacher	Good boy for getting that blend, Oliver. [reads slowly, drawing out the new word, and the children join in] "She pr-owled up and down looking for mice."

A number of the interactions and examples appearing throughout this book also show these deliberate acts of teaching in use in a range of contexts.

*The article above is extracted from Chapter 4 of **Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4**. See the column on the right for more information about ordering this title from **Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.***



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Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4

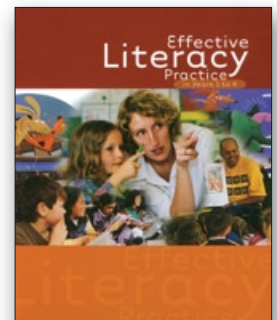
Ministry of Education,
Wellington, New Zealand

This new literacy resource from the New Zealand Ministry of Education describes in plain language research-based instructional practice that has been linked to improved outcomes for students. Explore effective reading and writing instruction in the first four years of school through case studies, examples of student work, and transcripts of teacher-student interaction.

Ask about the discussion guide to accompany this book.

Effective Literacy Practice

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