Chapter 2  The Role of Demonstration

Children develop attitudes about reading and writing as they hear and watch how readers, writers, and speakers think and act. Good attitudes toward reading and writing generate confidence. Teachers can demonstrate the confidence they have as readers and writers. They can also demonstrate that risk taking and approximating are parts of learning, and that—while reading and writing are sometimes challenging—it’s worth it in the end.

Marilyn Duncan (2005, 130)

*Demonstration* is an essential teaching approach in supporting the learning of a skill at any level or grade and is the most supportive of all the teaching approaches (Cambourne 1988; Mooney 1990). The other teaching approaches—shared, guided, and independent—are all used to support student learning, but each approach respectively offers less teacher guidance than the one before it. As the students gain more knowledge about a particular skill, they need less support and the approach should change. Demonstration is typically used to introduce a new skill to a whole group, but it can and should apply to individuals or a small group whenever more support is needed for their learning.
For many students entering preschool or primary grades, playing at reading consists of nothing more than flipping through books and looking at pictures. At most, this way of engaging with books is only a surface-level interaction between the book and the reader—a somewhat passive activity that requires limited thinking. In that respect, this kind of playing at reading is not much different from that of a child watching television. The playing at reading that we described in Chapter 1 is a thinking or comprehension activity and often requires some teaching. In order for children to think more deeply about books, teachers need to consider their students’ development in hearing and using oral language and noticing detail. Teaching begins when teachers determine what their students know and which approach best offers the learning opportunities their students need.

In the following teaching excerpt, the teacher has assessed her students’ ability to play at reading by monitoring independent reading in the library and has decided that most of her students aren’t looking closely enough at the pictures to support their ability to tell a story. She has noticed that most of her students are using just one- or two-word phrases to talk about the pictures. In addition, she has noticed that their storytelling does not connect one picture to the next. The teacher knows that she needs to model or demonstrate, in front of the whole class, how you can use pictures to tell a story. She has chosen a book with very few words so that everyone’s focus is on the pictures. During planning for the lesson, the teacher reads the book to decide where there are opportunities in it to address the previously mentioned needs of her students. As she does this she is deciding what the story will sound like as she tells it to her students. She considers how she will engage her students by using storybook language, characters’ voices, interesting descriptive phrases, and higher-level vocabulary.
The Role of Demonstration

Her whole class is gathered around her rocking chair as she begins to model how to play at reading by looking at and talking about the cover of the book. Because the teacher uses the teaching approach of reading demonstration daily—a favorite part of the day—her students take their place on the reading rug quickly. The teacher chooses books for these demonstrations that will engage her students and help her reveal positive attitudes toward reading. At each reading demonstration her students strive to be as close to the teacher as possible in order to get the full effects of the book’s illustrations as well as the teacher’s animation as she uses her voice and body to help deliver the story.

In the following teacher demonstration vignette notice how the teacher uses the phrase, “I wonder . . .” when looking at specific detail in an effort to generate discussion. Think about the close connection between attention to picture detail and oral language when the teacher uses the “I wonder . . .” phrase. This phrase works to draw students’ attention to the significant detail within the story. In addition, notice how she incorporates book-handling skills without interrupting the flow and development of the story. For ease of reading and understanding, what the teacher says to the children is in italics; what she is reading is in bold, and the notes explain why the teacher is doing what she is doing.¹

¹All images from the book Hug (Alborough 2000) are used by permission of the publisher.
The name of the book that we are going to read today is **Hug**. Let’s look at the cover to see if we can find out what this book is going to be about. What can you tell about how this monkey feels? What’s he doing with his arms? He’s saying, “**Hug**” (emphasizing the speech bubble over the monkey’s head by pointing to it). *That’s what he is saying, but he’s all by himself. Why is he saying, “**Hug**?” Who is he saying it to? I wonder if he wants a hug.*

Notes: A teacher’s book introduction is designed to emphasize the significant information that the author and/or illustrator uses to help focus the reader’s attention on what is to come. In this particular book, the significant information on the cover is the monkey and the speech bubble, which also contains the book’s title. The speech bubble could suggest that the monkey is searching for a hug.
Here’s our monkey friend again. I wonder why he is the only thing on the page. He’s all alone, but he looks happy, doesn’t he? Where do you think he’s going?

Notes: Every page has something to offer, especially in a picture book. This page comes before the title page and helps add to the discussions and questions that were asked previously, during the look at the cover.
Chapter 2

Here he is again. He’s not the only thing on the page this time. The story looks like it might take place in the jungle. He seems to be going somewhere. Where do you think he’s going? Is he looking for a hug? Let’s read and find out. The name of this book is Hug (pointing to the title) and it’s by Jez Alborough (pointing to author’s name).

Notes: The title page can be a place where readers get more information that will help to confirm or add to the readers’ initial predictions. In this particular book the readers get the chance to confirm their prediction that the monkey is alone and might be in search of a hug.
As she shares pages 1 and 2 with the students, she says: *As Little Monkey walked along the jungle path, he saw a mother elephant giving her baby a hug. He called out, “HUG.”* *I think he wants a hug from Mother Elephant.*

Notes: Because she wants her students to understand that books have a language style different from our daily speech, the teacher uses phrases such as this opening one to mimic storybook language.

To demonstrate the book-handling skill that a left page is read before the right-hand one, the teacher gently taps the left page to focus the students’ attention on where to begin. The teacher has learned how to naturally incorporate and demonstrate book-handling skills without necessarily discussing them and interrupting the flow and development of the story.
For pages 3 and 4, the teacher reads and comments: **He continued along the jungle path when he came upon a mother iguana giving her baby a hug. He called out, “HUG.” A little farther down the path he came upon a mother snake giving her baby a hug. He called out, “HUG.”** I think he really wants a hug. I wonder how he feels. Look at his face. Do you think he’s been getting hugs? Where is his mother?

Notes: Repetition of story language helps students anchor on words or phrases that enable them to participate in the initial telling of the story and in subsequent independent retellings of the story over time.
Looking at pages 5 and 6, the teacher reads: *Little Monkey kept walking. Look at his friends. What are they thinking? Do you think they want to help him? What will they do for Little Monkey?*

Notes: In most books there are natural stopping points that can be used to further develop the students’ ability to make more meaningful predictions about events to come. By using more teacher talk (what the teacher says to the students during the reading) than text talk (the actual reading), teachers can guide students to notice details that are critical to the story. It is the teacher’s tone of voice and the language the teacher uses that differentiates between teacher talk and text talk.
As the teacher shows the students pages 7 and 8, she says: **Mother Elephant picked up Little Monkey. He said, “HUG.” She wanted to help Little Monkey. “Are you looking for your mother?” She picked him up and off the three friends went in search of his mother.**
The teacher continues on pages 9 and 10 with: *The three friends walked and walked and walked. At the edge of the jungle they saw a mother lion hugging her babies. From the top of the elephant's head, the monkey called out “HUG.”*

Notes: The teacher shifts to using more text talk and less teacher talk at pages 7, 8, 9, and 10 because the students now have more knowledge of the story and can begin to make more connections and predictions for themselves.
On pages 11 and 12, the teacher reads and comments: *A little further along, the three friends spied a mother giraffe with her baby. “HUG.” I wonder if he will ever find his mother.*

Notes: Vocabulary development can be controlled more easily in a wordless picture book than a regular picture book. Teachers can decide when to introduce new vocabulary words. In this example, to introduce a new vocabulary word, the teacher changed the word “saw” on pages 9 and 10 to “spied” on pages 11 and 12. This kind of intentional decision on the teacher's part shows children how many different words can convey the same meaning.
For pages 13 and 14, the teacher says: **Oh, look at all the animals. These are all the animals that Little Monkey has seen. Look at their faces. How do you think they feel?** 

**As Little Monkey and the elephants were about to leave, they spotted a baby hippo hugging its mother. “HUG,” murmured Little Monkey.**

Notes: The teacher looks for every opportunity to reinforce her previous teaching. On page 13, the teacher points out the critical detail of the animals’ faces that could easily be overlooked by students. In addition, the teacher continues to develop vocabulary in a meaningful way—saw, spied, and spotted. The teacher also shifts from using words such as *said* and *called* to more interesting vocabulary such as *murmured.*
On pages 15 and 16, the teacher shares: *It was all too much. Little Monkey couldn’t stand it any longer. He screamed at the top of his lungs, “HUG!”* Look at Little Monkey’s mouth and how big the word “hug” is. You can really tell that he is screaming.

Notes: This nearly wordless book presents an opportunity for teachers to make connections between pictures and words. On this page there is a strong connection between the picture and the way the word “hug” is used. Should a book contain absolutely no words, the teacher may want to write a word or two on a self-stick note and place it in the book in order to make the connection between the pictures and words more intentional.
While showing the students pages 17 and 18, the teacher says: “HUG,” moaned Little Monkey. All he wanted was a hug from his mother. Nobody knew what to do. Do you think he will ever get that hug?

Notes: To foster students’ engagement at this point in the telling of the story, the teacher may change the position of anchor words or phrases. On pages 17 and 18 she changes the position of the word “HUG” to the beginning of her narration. In addition to the change in the location of the word, there would also be an accompanying change in the teacher’s tone of voice.
As the teacher reaches the climax of the story, the emphasis from that point on needs to address the questions that are on the mind of the reader (or in this case, the listeners)—Where is Little Monkey’s mom? Will his friends help him find his mom? Will he get the hug he needs so badly? How will the story end? The structure of a story is important. Teachers need to understand how a story builds, where and how it climaxes, and how a story comes to a satisfying ending. Satisfying endings, whether happy or sad, are important to readers (or listeners) in understanding that messages have meaning and touch something inside them. At the end of our story *Hug*, Little Monkey and his mom finally meet. As one might expect, all the other animals are there to be part of the cheerful reunion between mother and son. Before they both depart back to the jungle, Little Monkey turns to the mother elephant and gives her a huge hug for the help she gave him in finding his mother.

With the teacher content that she was able to demonstrate how a story flows from picture to picture, she knows that her students have a better understanding of the beginning, middle, and end of a story. This teacher understands that she will need to model this narrative feature and others many times in order for her students to take on similar behaviors. She understands that her students will need opportunities to practice these skills and has created a substantial classroom library that will provide the materials for this practice. This classroom library will support the teacher in assessing her students’ playing at reading skills by offering a place to observe and monitor what the children are practicing and beginning to understand. This assessment information will provide the teacher with specific teaching points or objectives for future demonstrations. In Chapter 3 notice how the teacher has intentionally organized the materials and the space in her classroom library to support students as they practice these skills and her actions as she conducts assessments.