

**Abstract**

This study examined the “dip” in students’ literacy learning progress that is reported internationally to occur in years 9 to 13. It reports current research that analyses the match between learning needs and classroom strategies and proposes shifts in current practice. The study employed an online survey designed to investigate current reading literacy practices for was Y7-8 students. In addition, observations of practice and interviews with literacy leaders, teachers, principals, students and parents were carried out at five case study schools. The five schools were representative of a cross-section of school types, locations within the Canterbury Region and school decile ratings. The survey indicated that teachers may under-estimate the importance of user engagement and direct teaching strategies. The case studies exemplify the need for good PD, supportive leadership, good class management strategies, a positive engaging learning environment, teachers with a passion for literacy and above all exemplary and sustained guided reading. In conclusion it is extremely important that teachers in the later stages of primary school do not lose sight of the importance of actively teaching reading to ensure students continue to make gains in reading.

**Introduction**

There is a growing body of research evidence to support that reading achievement drops off as students move through their schooling and that reading is not consistently taught at the Year 7-8 level (Brozo, 2005; Chall & Jacobs, 2003; Hattie, 2007; McNaughton, Amituanai-Toloa & Lei, 2007). The focus in the reading pedagogy debate has often been on teaching students to decode in the early years, rather than on the critical place of comprehension as texts increase in complexity later in their primary schooling (Hattie, 2007). Many students who are competent readers at the third grade level, do not automatically become proficient comprehenders in later grades (Bishop, Reyes, & Pflaum, 2006; Snow, 2002). According to Hirsch (2003), it is of some concern that educators have not been able to resolve ‘the fourth grade slump’. Chall and Jacobs (2003) reported that students from low income families, who had been in the normative range up to grade three in reading achievement, were particularly vulnerable to deceleration in grade four, with word meaning the first and most likely to slip. They suggest that the
students’ own language was sufficient for reading content in the first three grades, but it was not sufficient to meet the demands of more complex texts in grade four and beyond. This trend continues through their schooling and is not just restricted to students in the United States or to students from low income families. Brozo’s (2005) close analysis of international reading assessments, namely Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed that achievement levels in several countries, such as England, Sweden, Germany, Greece, the Russian Federation and Italy, declined for students from 10 to 15 years of age.

Hattie (2007) when examining a representative sample of 92,000 New Zealand students, representing 20% of the school population, reported that 80% of students in Year five\(^1\) were achieving at or above their expected levels in reading, but by Year eight 50% were below expectations (Ministry of Education, 2003a). Hattie emphasises that there is not a slump or dip in achievement rather a plateau in Years five to eight. Unlike, Brozo’s (2005) findings, the New Zealand students’ reading achievement accelerated as they moved through the secondary school system and by Year 11 (fifteen year-olds) it had returned to about 80% achieving above expected levels.

Other New Zealand research (McNaughton et al., 2007) indicates that there appears to be a “tapering off” of progress in reading at year 6 and into year 7 in some low decile schools despite successful interventions at an earlier level. They questioned whether this may be in part due to the change from teaching reading processes to reading content with the issue of timetabling reducing the opportunities for reading instruction in Years 7 and 8.

In order to understand the reading process it is useful to examine some of the theoretical stances. Tracey & Morrow (2006) contend that viewing the reading experience through multiple lenses allows each theory to make ‘a unique and valuable contribution to understanding the phenomena under examination’ (p. 20). The social constructivist view of reading acquisition is that it is socially constructed through interactions with others (Cullen, 2002). The learner is an active constructor of their own knowledge with new knowledge being integrated into existing knowledge. For this to occur, readers need adequate background knowledge about the concepts and meanings presented in the text in order to comprehend the content or the world view presented (Ministry of Education, 2003c, 2006). Therefore, reading is a process of interaction between the reader and text, with readers bringing their own experiences and cultural knowledge to the text, and their understanding of language.

Social learning perspectives extend this stance by emphasising the importance of social influences and interactions on literacy learning. Literacy learning, including reading, develops from within a social context and as such is viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon. The work of Vygotsky (1978) is integral to this theoretical perspective, and therefore to implications for teaching and education. A key feature is that higher order cognitive processing occurs from out of social interaction. The socialisation model of

\(^{1}\) In New Zealand Year five is equivalent to grade four.
literacy learning is built on the idea that learners construct meaning within social settings. Social and cultural practices in fact shape all learning, and learners’ literacy development is shaped by their interactions with those around them’ (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 20). Socio-cultural theories emphasise the roles of social, cultural and historical factors on the human experience (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). This aligns with the Vygotskian perspective on literacy learning that includes the identification of the zone of proximal development where explicit teaching and collaboration with and by peers and teachers are essential to the development of new understandings. Cullen (2001) extends this notion of collective learning by exploring the links to the values and expectations of the broader community for what she defines as the post-Vygotskian era. Defining thinking and learning as social constructions promotes a favouring of socio-cultural and critical approaches to literacy acquisition.

Some researchers have examined the needs of the students for reading development to occur, for example Davis (2007) states that “Struggling readers need explicit instruction everyday in order to improve their reading comprehension” (p.14). How much time is spent on reading in a classroom, and the associated impact on reading achievement, has been an ongoing concern of literacy researchers (for example, Gambrell, 2007 and Nicholson, 1998, cited McNaughton et al., 2007). Students need to be involved in engaged discussion of reading texts that allow them to gain a deeper understanding of texts. Too often students are reading in isolation in many middle school reading programmes rather than teachers encouraging authentic discussion with peers and developing a critical analysis of literature (Wilson & Laman, 2007). Comprehension needs to be explicitly taught through all grades and the substituted practice of sustained silent reading does not improve reading results (Snow, 2002). Also, as students move further through their schooling, specific reading instruction that makes learning fun and engaging becomes rare (Brozo, 2005; Strommen & Mates, 2004) thus further alienating the engagement and motivation to read.

The evidence of instructional time in reading dropping in Years 7 and 8 was evident in McNaughton et al.’s (2007) New Zealand based schooling improvement research project. When the school changed its reading practices, including increasing the amount of time given to instructional reading, the students’ achievement in reading improved.

Making connections to students’ life experiences and using these to deconstruct texts allows students’ prior knowledge to be acknowledged, thus fostering meaningful and critical dialogue (Ministry of Education, 2006; Wilson & Laman, 2007). McNaughton et al. (2007) highlight the importance of comprehension including the need for explicit and implicit instruction in vocabulary, and the requirement for close analysis of text and critical reading in Years 7 and 8 in preparation for secondary level schooling.

Davis (2007) contends that not all instruction is as effective as it could be and it is the quality of teaching practices by teachers that has the largest impact on raising achievement. She defines high quality instruction as “instruction that focuses on pedagogy – pedagogy that is designed to develop literacy concepts and skills and improvement achievement opportunities for all students” (p.2). Davis suggests that
instruction needs to be consistent, carefully planned and monitored and that instruction that was irregular and varying in intensity and consistency will not lift the achievement of students. Also, formative assessment occurring during the learning and teaching can result in greater effectiveness and raise standards of achievement (Clarke, Timperley, & Hattie, 2003).

Students need to be motivated to read and to be an active participant in a community both in the school and at home pursuing reading as a significant and enjoyable recreational activity and a life-long endeavour (Strommen & Mates, 2004). Brozo, Shiel & Topping (2007) in their analysis of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) where 32 countries participated in an international assessment of reading literacy in 2000, and again in 2003, concluded that there was a direct connection between engagement in reading and reading achievement. Higher engagement in reading correlates consistently with higher achievement in reading. Globally, a decline in motivation and engagement in reading occurs as students move through their schooling, thus, influencing reading achievement (Brozo et al., 2007; Snow, 2002).

It is important to recognise that expectations and experiences of literacy are culturally bound and acknowledge the critical place that families and communities play in literacy development. Successful literacy instruction builds on the knowledge and understandings that children bring to the learning environment from their diverse cultural and language backgrounds (Alton-Lee, 2003; Au & Raphael, 2000; McNaughton, 2002; Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006). Literacy instruction will also be more effective where partnerships are developed between family and school and where cognisance is taken of the divergence between home and school expectations (Gee, 1990; McNaughton, 2002). There is a need to have a close fit between the text and the reader in terms of the text’s level of difficulty, the student’s interests and prior knowledge. The increasing diversity of students in New Zealand classrooms has implications for teachers regarding not only their knowledge of the learner and the cultural capital they bring to the classroom, but in the teacher acknowledging this in their choice of texts for instructional purposes and the provision of culturally appropriate reading material within the learning environment (Fletcher et al., 2006; Fletcher et al., 2005; Fletcher et al., in press; Parkhill et al., 2005; Taleni et al., in press).

Dynamic and enjoyable literacy activities following guided reading are designed to facilitate and consolidate learning rather than unproductive ‘busy work’ such as that located in the content of many worksheets (Alton-Lee, 2003; Brozo, 2005). Literacy activities should also be designed to enhance students’ ability to use academic language and use existing and emerging communication technologies (Ministry of Education, 2006; Snow, 2002).

The six dimensions of effective literacy practice identified by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006) are well supported by research both nationally and internationally (Allington, 2003; Davis, 2007; Duke & Pearson, 2002; McNaughton, 2002; Pressley et al., 2002). These effective literacy practices include: an in-depth knowledge of literacy learning; expectations that all students will achieve; a
range of instructional strategies; knowledge of the learner; the ability to engage learners with texts and establishing collaborative partnerships with homes (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006).

In the United States observations of outstanding literacy teachers, where students achieved high outcomes, it was reported that such teachers balance skills-teaching with immersion in quality literature and authentic text experiences (Pressley et al., 2002). In contrast, observations of teachers who had not achieved such high outcomes for their students revealed a lack of integration and holistic experiences within their literacy programme. Classrooms with the highest achievement also included careful scaffolding of literacy instruction which necessitated in-depth and consistent monitoring of student progress. Self-regulation strategies were encouraged and reinforced and reading and writing integrated with cross-curricula connections.

**Research aims**
This research, aims to investigate current reading practices at the Year 7-8 level and to determine criteria for exemplary practice from a series of case studies.

**Methodology**

The study employed an online survey designed to investigate current reading literacy practises for was Y7-8 student and observations of practice and interviews with literacy leaders, teachers, principals, students and parents at five case study schools (Schools B, C, D, E, F).

**Survey**
An online survey was sent to all upper South Island schools with Y7-8 students. The survey was sent to principals, literacy leaders and Y 7-8 teachers. The questions were designed to ask about current school approaches, classroom programmes, teaching and learning strategies, use of resources, catering for individual needs, in particular, support for marginalised and underachieving groups. The survey investigated the use of literacy support resources, such as readers, School Journals, e-resources, commercial packages and teacher-developed materials taking particular note of those that are already available but which are being under utilised.

**Case Studies**

Five case study schools which represented a cross-section of types of schools (full primary/intermediate/area; state/integrated); location (geographical; inner city/suburban/rural), school decile\(^2\) rating were selected. The purpose was to identify aspects of practice that are effective and therefore contribute to a composite picture of exemplary practice. After consultation with our research project’s Advisory Committee,\(^2\) Decile is the classification used to ascertain the overall socioeconomic status of a school’s community based on population census data. The range of deciles is 1 to 10, with 1 drawing students from the lowest SES bracket and 10 from the highest SES bracket.
who consisted of literacy experts, Māori\textsuperscript{3} and Pasifika\textsuperscript{4} representatives and internationally recognised academics in the field of literacy, recommendations of schools were made. These case study schools were where effective reading programmes were occurring according to standardised assessment procedures such as Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (AsTTle)\textsuperscript{5}(Ministry of Education, 2003a) and the Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR)\textsuperscript{6} (Elley, 2001).

In New Zealand, where schools are self-managing, assessment practices differ. The selected schools in this study predominantly used STAR and/or AsTTle, however the methods of recording and presenting this data varied. This accounts for individual variation in reporting of results obtained from each case study school (see below).

The case studies involved classroom observations and interviews with Y7-8 teachers; interviews with three students of varying reading ability from each class observed; two parents of years 7 and/or 8 students of differing reading ability at each school; principals; and school literacy leader/s.

\textit{Case Study School Sample}

School B was a decile 5 full primary, state town school on the West Coast of the South Island with 407 students. The ethnic composition was New Zealand/European/ Pākehā 85%; Māori 12%; Other ethnic groups 3%. Two year 7 and 8 teachers were identified as effective teachers of reading literacy and were observed teaching and interviewed.

School C was a decile 9 full primary state rural school on the east coast of the South Island with 196 students. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 96%; Maori 4%. A year 8 teacher was identified as an effective teacher of reading literacy and was observed teaching and interviewed.

School D was a decile 8 intermediate state city school in the upper South Island with 604 students. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 87%; Māori 8%; Other European 3%; Other ethnic groups 2%. Two year 7 and 8 teachers were identified as effective teachers of reading literacy and were observed teaching and interviewed.

\textsuperscript{3} Māori are the indigenous population of New Zealand.
\textsuperscript{4} In New Zealand, the Ministries of Education and Pacific Island Affairs use the term “Pasifika peoples” to describe people living in New Zealand who have migrated from the Pacific Islands or who identify with the Pacific Islands because of ancestry or heritage. According to the Ministry of Education (n. d.), the term does not refer to a single ethnicity, nationality or culture but is a term of convenience to encompass the diverse range of peoples from the South Pacific in New Zealand who derive from a range of unique cultural and language identities (e.g., Samoan, Tongan, Tokelauan, Cook Island, Nueian).
\textsuperscript{5} AsTTle provides standardised data in relation to curriculum outcomes for reading and allows teachers to track the progress and achievement of individual students, year levels and schools against national standards.
\textsuperscript{6} STAR is a norm-referenced, New Zealand contextualised assessment tool that measures a range of reading skills (word recognition, sentence and paragraph comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, advertising language and writing style).
School E was a decile 9 integrated full primary school in the upper South Island with 219 students. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 91%; Other European 7%; Māori 2%. Two year 7 and 8 teachers were identified as effective teachers of reading literacy and were observed teaching and interviewed.

School F was decile 2 state intermediate city school on east coast of the South Island with 191 students. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 54%; Māori 27%; Samoan 12%; Other 7%. A year 8 teacher was identified as an effective teacher of reading literacy and was observed teaching and interviewed.

**Observation Schedule**

An observational schedule was collaboratively developed by the research team to identify the frequency of the different types of teacher interactions during guided reading sessions. The instructional strategies are derived from the deliberate acts of teaching described in New Zealand, Ministry of Education handbook on effective literacy practice (Ministry of Education, 2003b, 2006). These included:

- Modelling - articulating how a proficient reader operates on text and making the learning visible
- Prompting/probing - assisting students to use their current knowledge to further unlock the deeper meanings or word level knowledge
- Questioning - the most commonly used tool by teachers to develop strategies for making meaning and thinking critically
- Giving feedback - providing feedback to students that is either descriptive or evaluative
- Telling - supplying information to fill gaps or keep the momentum of the lesson
- Explaining - clarifying a concept or a strategy, a learning activity or the content of the text
- Directing - giving specific and deliberate instructions
- Managing – attending to off task behaviour to encourage engagement in learning

**Procedure**

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7 The term 'integrated schools' generally refers to schools with a religious focus – usually Roman Catholic in denomination – that used to operate as private institutions. In recent years, these schools have been integrated into the state system – hence the name 'integrated schools'. Integrated schools receive the same Government funding for each student as state schools but their buildings and land are privately owned so they charge attendance dues to meet their property costs. Although they follow the state curriculum requirements, all have retained their special religious or philosophical character. A small number of institutions, such as Montessori or Rudolf Steiner schools, are secular in character (Immigration New Zealand, 2008).
Two members of the research team investigated the five case study schools. During interview one person assumed a lead with the questioning while the other took notes. The interviews were audio-taped. During classroom observations one person took notes about the structure and content of the class programme while the other completed the observational schedule. Emergent themes were colour-coded and then correlated on a table/graph across the five case study schools. This process allowed the collation of emerging themes and the development of concepts and propositions in the interpretation of the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

**Findings and discussion**

*The survey*

The sample included 118 respondents (male=27.1%, Female=72.9%) of which 32.2% were principals, 15.3% deputy principals, 14.4% Literacy leaders, 19.5% Middle Management, 23.7% Classroom Teachers and 7.6% other. The sample consists of predominantly New Zealand Europeans (93.2%) with 5.9% Maori and 0.8% Asian. The majority of respondents were associated with Full Primary schools (67.8%), 19.5% Area schools, 6.8% Intermediate and 5.9% Middle schools. The mean number of years spent teaching for this sample was 18 years.

The following data was extracted from the wealth of information provided, and relates to 76 (approx 65%) of these respondents whose direct experience and roles qualified them to comment on this set of specific questions.

Taking cognizance of the extensive pointers to effective practice noted in our literature review, it is important to establish the positioning of practitioners with respect to setting up programmes, assessment tools, reading approaches, specific reading strategy teaching and professional development.

*What information about learners do you think is essential for establishing a year 7-8 reading programme?*

Respondents indicated that they believed that information about children’s comprehension strategies (87%), reading age level (84%) and attitude towards reading (83%) were essential factors in establishing a Year 7 / 8 reading programme. Fewer respondents rated the children’s interests and hobbies (74%) or reading material preferences (51%) as essential. This might suggest a possible source of mismatch and disengagement for some Year 7 / 8 readers. As previously indicated in the literature it is essential that students’ are motivated to read and engaged in the reading process (Strommen & Mates, 2004 ; Brozo et al., 2007; Snow, 2002).
Which of the following assessment tools have you used before and how would you rate each of your choices on a scale of 1-5 (where 1 is least useful and 5 is most useful)?

Whilst AsTTle and Running Records (Miscue Analysis) were equally viewed as the most useful reading assessment tool by almost half the respondents to this item, overall AsTTle was rated more highly (3.2/5). This was followed by PROBE (3/5), Running Records (2.9/5), STAR (2.8/5) and National Curriculum Exemplars (2.6/5). This rating supports the choice of standardised assessment tools (AsTTle and STAR) selected by the case study schools and reported in this study.

At what level(s) of the primary school do you believe the following approaches are best used?

All, or nearly all respondents to this question identified independent reading, comprehension activities and shared class story/picture book / novel as the best approaches for Year 7 / 8 readers. Indeed, more teachers identified them as better used here than with younger children.
Guided Reading was rated as more important in years 3/4 (95%) than in Years 7/8 (86%), which emphasises observations of a drop in the use of this strategy at the senior level of primary school. Similarly, about 85% of teachers believed that Shared Reading (compared to 91-97% for younger children) was best used at Years 7/8. Vocabulary Knowledge was viewed as marginally more important by teachers (85%) at the senior levels, compared to 71% at years 0-2. This cluster of more teacher-involved direct teaching strategies were less frequently identified than independent reading, comprehension activities and shared class story/picture book/novel approaches noted above. This may be perceived as contexts for less deliberate acts of teaching.

This is interesting as researchers (Davis, 2007; Wilson & Laman, 2007) suggest that explicit instruction is important for developing reading comprehension. Similarly, Snow, (2002) suggests that comprehension needs explicit instruction and that sustained silent reading is not sufficient.

![Figure 3 Graph showing the frequency of responses for each reading strategy at each school level](image)

Which of these approaches to teaching specific reading strategies do you think should be used at different year levels?

Between 88% and 100% of teachers responding to this question stated that specific reading strategies should be used at Years 7/8. All felt that children’s independent use of strategy was a priority. This was followed by teacher modelling (94%), scaffolded and supported collaborative use of strategy (92%), explicit description of reading strategy and how/when used (90%), and guided practice in applying strategy (88%). For all but the first of these, the numbers of teachers identifying these for Year 7/8 students was lower than for Year 5/6 students; again indicating a slight drop off of direct teaching acts.
What professional development occurs in your school to enhance reading programmes at year 7/8?

Of the 75 teachers who responded to the items about Professional Development (P.D.) to enhance Year 7/8 reading programmes at their schools, 77% cited informal discussion with a small group of colleagues, and 75% cited personal professional reading. Given the commonly-accepted view of teachers as self-motivated professionals who care about their students and learning, this is not entirely surprising. By contrast, around 53% of teachers noted that their school had established a formal school-wide strategy, and 48% identified external course attendance. Formal in-school focus was reported at a lower incidence (36% formal team professional discussion; 32% formal in-class support from senior colleague or advisor), indicating a shift from individual or syndicate-based PD to a more integrated whole-school approach.
In your PD sessions, which of the following have you experienced?

Most teachers said that this PD consisted of discussion (96%), while 71% had experienced some form of practice and feedback (though evidently not in a formal and possibly threatening in-class context, as this is much more than the earlier 32% reported above). 63% had viewed exemplars, and 48% experienced seminars. Only 31% of these teachers reported engaging in ongoing courses. This finding runs counter to current understanding that effective professional development should be ongoing, interactive and iterative, with plenty of opportunity for practice and specific feedback (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).
The case studies

Whole school practices
At all five schools there had been recent and ongoing whole school professional development in reading literacy and principals had ensured that for their school reading literacy was the sole focus. External expertise in literacy had been sought to lead the professional development. Alton Lee (2007) reminds us that effective leaders in schools who participate in whole school professional development, influence the improvement of student achievement outcomes.

The literacy leadership in each of the schools was allocated to one person. The leaders ranged in teaching experience from those with seven to eight years teaching to others who had an extensive teaching career. At all of the five case study schools, the literacy leader exhibited overt enthusiasm, dedication to raising literacy levels throughout the school by encouraging the more reticent teachers to engage in more effective delivery and reflection on their teaching. The principals in the respective schools strongly supported their literacy leader by providing release time, effective resources and the ongoing encouragement of all staff to be active participants. The Literacy Taskforce Report (1999) identified the importance of the role of leadership within the school in the effort to raise literacy achievement. Not only was there the pivotal role of the Principal in leading a school professionally but also alongside this focus, the taskforce also identified the importance of the role of a literacy leader.

At all of the schools there was standardised assessment of reading using predominantly STAR and/or AsTTle. The literacy leaders, teachers and principals jointly reflected on this data to enhance individual teaching practices and identify individual, class and whole school needs. For example, at School F, the literacy leader coordinated an analysis of the data using the STAR results.

What the case study teachers demonstrated

Evident in all classrooms was a strong underlying emphasis on a love for reading and literature. This was underpinned by respect for the teacher and well established, effective management strategies. The students were motivated by the positive learning environments and held their teachers in high regard. These two students’ comments typify those of others:

Everyone is really, really enthusiastic about it (reading and learning), but they all are happier to read than they were at the start of the year. (School B, Year 8 student)

It just is a better environment for us… with all of the new reading programmes. (School B, Year 8 student)

This finding that good classroom management and a respect for the teacher support learning concurred with Wang, Haertel, and Walberg’s (1993/1994) research on factors
related to student learning. The authors identified 28 characteristics that contributed to student learning. Of these, good classroom management was first in order of importance. Similarly, in a New Zealand study of Year 7-9 Pasifika students who were underachieving in reading, the students had reported noisy classrooms and thought their teachers were not successfully managing the poor behaviour of classmates (Fletcher et al., 2006). Effective classroom management is essential for engagement in learning.

Instructional strategies were demonstrated that enabled students enhance their expertise in analysing texts. The teachers in these case study schools critically examined the reading texts prior to teaching and planning often included the use of ‘Post its’ in the text to provide reminders of powerful teaching opportunities that the text provided in relation to the students’ needs.

It is the hooking in - the being able to inspire kids to want to read. To be good teachers of year 7 and 8, the teachers have to have read the books… there are extracts in a book you can emphasise and work lessons around. (Principal, School B)

Guided Reading Observation

The guided group reading lessons ranged in time from 16 to 33 minutes with an average time of 22.2 minutes. The predominant instructional strategy was questioning with an average of 30.6 questions per lesson. This was followed by teacher explanation and feedback. Most of the teachers had a pattern of asking a question followed by prompting for further depth or for students to add to the initial response. This was frequently followed by the teacher explaining the issue to the students.

One student, similar to others, expressed the value of this:
Because she explains it to us really in depth, so we really get it and she does not just say ‘here you go – go and do that…’ she actually explains it to you so that you get it. (School B, Year 7 student)

Interruptions to the guided reading lesson for management issues with the group or remainder of the class were overall infrequent. Teacher A at School B who had to address management issues the most compared to the other teachers (nine times) was reported by the principal as having a number of students with challenging behaviour.

Table one: Observation of instructional strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SB*TA</th>
<th>SB TB</th>
<th>SC TA</th>
<th>SD TA</th>
<th>SD TB</th>
<th>SE TA</th>
<th>SE TB</th>
<th>SF TA</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modelling</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompting/Probing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving feedback</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telling</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Explaining</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directing</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>99</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*S=School, T=Teacher
Teachers tended to generate opportunities to question the text and analyse, synthesise, infer and predict information in and around the text. Therefore the learners were able to make connections and have their personal and/or cultural knowledge and experiences valued. This also enabled students to fully engage with the text and build on prior knowledge and experiences. Table two shows samples of the types of questioning that the teachers used during our observations of their guided reading sessions.

Table Two Examples of teachers’ prompts and questions during guided reading sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Literal questions/prompts</th>
<th>Inferential questions/prompts</th>
<th>Questions/prompts that foster critical reading</th>
<th>Encouragement of metacognitive strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Which person was the most selfish?</td>
<td>What does it tell you about the people they are and their culture?</td>
<td>Do you think that the author would leave us hanging?</td>
<td>Did you see how I made a mistake?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is grandfather’s name? How do we know? What about the boy? What did he want?</td>
<td>Can you think of a Maori legend where the impossible happened? How do you know that?</td>
<td>Why do you think that the author chose a dragon?</td>
<td>What did I do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School C</td>
<td>What is narrative text? Okay, so Pete’s got a problem. What is that problem?</td>
<td>Why do you think he did that? If that was you, what would your Mother say you had?</td>
<td>Why didn’t I just go on?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School D</td>
<td>Why is he looking at her with disgust? It throws up a lot of questions doesn’t it?</td>
<td>It is inferred or implied not told. In what ways is she like a cat?</td>
<td>Take special note on what makes a good piece of writing and why he/she has used the language that is present. I wonder if the author has intentionally used alliteration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School E</td>
<td>What is the purpose of this community and what are the rules for each group? What are the main points of what you have been reading?</td>
<td>In our society, are you classed as adults at age 15? What do you think that we might find out from that article?</td>
<td>If that was you and you were living in that world how would it make you feel? What type of format is that article? What makes it easier if you bounce facts off each other? I like the way you told me what you thought and how you got it out of text as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School F</td>
<td>Who do you think George is? Is there anything in the story that tells us more about him? What are the other clues?</td>
<td>How would that tell us that he is more experienced? What makes you think that from what Grandpa said? What does that imply to us?</td>
<td>What does it make us think about texts like this? I like the way you used the text to tell you that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all of the lessons observed, the teachers also assumed the role of learners, partly through the tendency to favour open-ended questions and allowing many possible responses, but also through using text as a vehicle to explore wider issues in human
relationships and life in general. Creating these text-life connections for students was very visible in all of the lessons.

The students were also encouraged to formulate their own questions around text and discuss these together. A teacher explained how he motivated students’ interest in text rather than a common practice of setting comprehension questions as an activity to follow instructional reading.

The thing with comprehension questions in my view is that, if you give the children comprehension questions, they will look through the text and scan as quickly as possible, find the answer within five minutes and they will just start mucking around. So, you need to create an enthusiasm and a drive for actually wanting to do what you tell them to do and there is a reason behind it (Teacher B, School B).

All of the teachers interviewed articulated a real awareness of the importance of vocabulary for the development of comprehension strategies. According Hirsch (2003) explicit vocabulary instruction should not only include an environment that accelerates the incidental acquisition of vocabulary, but also provide massive immersion, for extended periods, in language experiences conducive to effective vocabulary learning. The literacy leader explained when discussing professional development around vocabulary teaching:

That came through [vocabulary] – the little bit of research that we did accompanying the PD was mostly focused on vocabulary and the link between vocab and comprehension. If kids aren’t understanding the words, then they are not going to be able to gain much comprehension of the text (Literacy leader, School D).

The teachers observed in all of case study schools articulated their own passion for reading and demonstrated a current knowledge of young adult fiction. Their classrooms and the school libraries were text-rich with ample opportunities for the students to engage in different text types. The students expressed positive sentiments towards their local community libraries and most were frequent users of this resource.

One male teacher, currently studying for a post-graduate qualification in children’s literature, used sophisticated picture books as the vehicle to ‘hook’ students into reading.

My personal belief is, I know with the whole guided reading approach, we go through that – but, I have come to the conclusion myself, that I don’t like to start the year with it. My personal belief is that I cannot get boys, and I don’t mean just wanting to read, I really want to create a need to read, like a real enthusiasm, and I don’t believe I can get them to do that through guided reading, so I don’t start the year with that. I start the year absolutely saturating them with many picture books and books that I have really enjoyed. I just attack them with that. (Teacher B, School B)

Student Observations and perceptions

At all of the schools the students were assessed in reading using either STAR and/or AsTTle. The teachers shared each student’s individual achievement with both the student and their parents. This included explaining how their reading achievement correlated with
their age related peers nationally. At School C, the students were unanimously against this occurring:

It shows you what you need to work on but it is not really good because you might have an off day. (School B, Year 8 student)

Most of the time I don’t like it because I get it back and I find out I am not as good as I was thinking. I don’t like that at all. Sometimes it is okay. (School B, Year 8 student)

However at all the other case study schools, the students were positive about finding out how they were achieving in reading and used this, along with advice from their teacher, to help set their future reading goals.

Motivation and engagement in reading were evident in all the classrooms we observed. The teachers had a sound knowledge and passion for literature. Their classrooms were text-rich. The schools’ libraries were viewed by both the teachers and the students as a central part of the literacy programmes. Many of the students interviewed consistently articulated that they were regular users of the school and community libraries. More often the students who were achieving at or above their peers in reading, identified that their parent/s were role models in demonstrating the enjoyment of reading. One student stated:

My mum reads a lot of books. She will get a new one –like the Stephen King one ‘Cell’ that has just come out. She has just finished that and she recommended it to me –so I want to start reading it. (School B, Year 8 student)

Other students stressed the need for reading mileage. This comment typifies what was said:

You have got to read and read because if you stop reading it gets harder to read… the more you read the better you get. (School B, Male, Year 8)

**Conclusions**

The survey supports the idea that guided reading practices drop off in most schools during the senior primary school years. The place of Guided Reading which embodies the development of critical literacies, the use of metacognitive strategies, vocabulary and comprehension expansion and the connection to authentic contexts; all relying on planned explicit instruction illustrates this point. Whilst most of the teachers viewed Guided Reading as best practice for middle school students fewer agreed on this for Year 7/8 students.

Teacher modelling and collaborative use (scaffolded and supported) of strategy was also prioritised by fewer teachers for senior students supporting the general beliefs that students have been taught to read up to Year 6, and should merely apply, rather than develop this set of skills in Years 7/8 and beyond. The survey findings also underlined a reluctance by teachers at the senior level to prioritise the attitudes and interests of their
pupils when constructing reading programmes. This would appear to contradict the notion of employing cultural capital and ensuring that authentic connections are made to the worlds of learners to engage and motivate them.

Participants in the case study schools demonstrated attributes, understandings and beliefs about pedagogical practices and teacher knowledge of literacy processes was evident. Regardless of reading level, teachers planned explicit instruction around text with vocabulary knowledge and comprehension strategies recognised as the two key areas. Also evident in their questioning was the prompting and questioning for metacognitive strategies and the fostering of critical reading literacy approaches. Ownership and responsibility for learning was discernible in the students’ interviews with reading perceived as critical. The demonstration of authentic discussion surrounding text and making connections to the students’ life experiences were clearly visible in the case study observations.

School wide assessment data and in-depth analysis of the implications of the results were discussed amongst staff. Regular use of assessment to guide effective literacy practice ensured that all staff were accountable and working cohesively.

In all of the schools the students discussed the critical role of the school and local libraries. The students exhibited a motivation to read with sustained engagement at both school and for recreational purposes. School data showed that this engagement in reading had a direct connection to reading achievement.

This research highlights the need for instructional reading to be taught at all levels of schooling, in particular at the Year 7 and 8 levels. In these case study schools at least, there was no evidence of a tapering off of progress in reading achievement perceived to be due to the continued active teaching of reading processes.

‘Excellent literacy teachers do it all. They balance skills teaching and holistic experiences while flooding their classrooms with motivation’ (Pressley et al., 2002 p 11).
References


Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), What research has to


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