Small Group Instruction: Teacher Best Practices

Grouping students

1. **How do I group my students?**
   Four to eight students can be grouped by reading level as determined by assessment or by reading skills needed. These groups should be flexible and fluid throughout the year.

Focus is on Strategy development and individual skills

1. **How does small group differentiated reading help our students become successful readers?**
   The skills and strategies that are taught during small group instruction must be targeted and explicit. The selected target will be determined by student assessment, teacher observation and the required NGSSS benchmarks. Small-group differentiated instruction provides systematic comprehensive coverage of the strategies required to move students to greater achievement in reading.

Select books based on student’s levels and instructional needs

1. **How do I match texts to readers?**
   It is important to match readers and text that have appropriate supports and challenges for the readers. Texts and readers can be matched by interest, reading level and skills. It is important to use texts that are at the instructional level of the students. Matching texts to students is supported by assessments that are ongoing and directly linked to instruction. Teachers gather information from both formal and informal assessments about how students are progressing in their learning.

2. **How do I pick books for a specific skill?**
   The expertise of matching books to skills and to readers takes time to develop. It is important to read the book before using it for small group instruction. This pre-reading will give you the time to develop schema and comprehension questions. Take every opportunity to become familiar with the books in your book room.

Provides explicit instruction

1. **How do I teach small group reading?**
   Click to access: Key Features of the Reading Process

Students working independently

1. **How do I engage the other students in my class?**
   The expectation for students is to work independently and to be engaged in meaningful reading practice. This expectation will become a routine if the behavior is explicitly defined, modeled and practiced. During the course of the week students will work on skills that include vocabulary, word work, comprehension, and fluency (if
appropriate). Students will also use technology programs such as FCAT Explorer, or program related software.

2. **How do I hold my students accountable for quality work?**
   There are several ways to put accountability measures in place during Independent Practice. Some suggestions include: reading response logs, directed practice notebooks, and student checklists. It is important to remember that most of the students' time should be spent reading, and not completing accountability worksheets.

3. **How do I provide tiered activities that meet student needs?**
   Tiered instruction is a means of teaching one concept and meeting the different learning needs in a group.

   It can be an:
   - assignment
   - lesson
   - strategy

   For Best Practices tiered instruction is fundamental because:
   - Each student is appropriately challenged.
   - As opposed to focusing on learning differences the focus is on the concept.
   - **It maximizes learning.**
     - It meets the needs of all students. Often gifted students are not appropriately challenged. With tiered instruction the gifted students' needs will be met and they will achieve a new level of success.
     - Unless groups are based on individual intelligence tests, groups will vary greatly each time you choose this teaching strategy. Your groups may vary according to the type of tiering you do or the concept you focus on.
     - It provides assignments that appropriately challenge students' progress. Like any other teaching strategy we must use a wide range of assessment tools.

   The assessment of individual projects, etc. varies with each. You may choose some of the following assessment strategies: Rubrics, tests, checklists, contracts, self-evaluations, peer evaluations, or conferences.

**Student monitoring their own data and setting goals**

1. **How do I help students to use data in order to set their own reading goals?**
   Teachers need to conference frequently with students individually to share and analyze data. It is important to talk about what the data tells about the student’s learning (strengths and needs), and use that to set goals. Students need to gain ownership of their learning by charting, graphing, and/or documenting scores from various assessments given throughout the year.
Genre Studies

1. Why are genre studies important?
The analysis of different types of literature promotes cognitive development because it gives students an opportunity to apply similar skills and strategies, such as identifying themes discussed in one genre—fiction, for example—to other genres like poetry, reports, descriptive pieces, and plays. Research also shows that the more experience students have in reading different genres, the more successful they will be in writing in different genres.

2. What does a genre study entail?
When studying a genre, one examines the structural elements that combine in the telling of a story and find patterns in collections of stories. When these elements (or codes) begin to carry inherent information, a genre is emerging. Conventions are phrases, themes, quotes, or explanations that we EXPECT to find in a certain genre. They could be considered as 'stereotypes' of that genre. For example, Science fiction is expected to be set in the future, and have futuristic events and ideas. Realistic Fiction is expected to contain a story about people who could pass as real struggling through real situations etc.

Literature Circles

1. What are Literature Circles?
In literature circles, small groups of students gather together to discuss a piece of literature in depth. The discussion is guided by students' response to what they have read. You may hear talk about events and characters in the book, the author's craft, or personal experiences related to the story. (Schlick Noe, K. L. & Johnson. N.L., Getting Started with Literature Circles, 1999 Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc. p. ix.)

2. What is its purpose?
Literature circles provide a way for students to engage in critical thinking and reflection as they read, discuss, and respond to books. Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. Students reshape and add onto their understanding as they construct meaning with other readers. Finally, literature circles guide students to deeper understanding of what they read through structured discussion and extended written and artistic response. (Schlick Noe, K. L. & Johnson. N.L., Getting Started with Literature Circles, 1999 Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc. p. ix.)

3. How do I do it?
1. Select members for the Literature Circles (discussion groups).
2. Assign roles for the members of each circle.
3. Assign reading to be completed by the circles inside or outside of class.
4. Select circle meeting dates.
5. Help students prepare for their roles in their circle.
6. Act as a facilitator for the circles.

Some roles may be:
Discussion Director - develops questions for the group to discuss
Passage Picker or Literary Luminary - chooses a selection that the group rereads and discusses because it is interesting, informative, the climax, well written....
Vocabulary Enricher - chooses words that are difficult or used in an unfamiliar way
Connector - finds a connection between the story and another book, event in their personal life or the outside world
Illustrator - draws a picture related to the reading
Summarizer - prepares a brief summary of the passage read that day
Travel Tracer - tracks the movement when the characters move a lot
Investigator - looks up background information related to the book

The teacher will determine what roles should be used depending upon the age and ability of the students as well as the reading selections.

**Additional Information for Small Group Instruction**

1. **How can I view small group instruction videos?**
   Go to PD360.com, type in your SLC email address as your user name. PD360 is the initial password to use until you establish your own. **You must log on to PD360 for these links to work.**
   - Specific strategies using intensive and explicit instruction Length 7:45:  
     http://www.pd360.com/index.cfm?ContentId=1290
   - Planning must include assessment Length 14:06  
     http://www.pd360.com/index.cfm?ContentId=163

   Select the link to go to Learner.org. Scroll down to find a video series. When the menu opens, click on the VOD button.
   - Asking questions  
     http://www.learner.org/libraries/makingmeaning/makingmeaning/asking/#

2. **How can I find additional information on instructional strategies?**
   - Direct practice discussion questions:  
     http://www.teachervision.fen.com/tv/lounge/newsletter/literature/ll_anybookd.html  
     http://www.readingquest.org/strat/321.html
   - Five basic ways in which authors may choose to organize information in expository text:  
     http://www.readingquest.org/edis771/paragraph Frms.html
   - Explanation and instructional strategies for explicit instruction:  
   - Before, During, and After:  
     ...
3. **How can I find out more information about small group instruction?**

   - Questioning Before, During and After Reading:
   - Book talks quick and simple:
     http://nancykeane.com/booktalks/

**Professional Development Activities**

**How can I get inservice credit as I learn more about the components?**

   - Learning Communities- a great way to collaboratively explore the resources listed above. These have been selected to promote professional learning in this component. Use data to determine which component your Learning Community should explore. Refer to the SLC portal for more information by typing “portal” (no www) in the SLC URL line, select PD, then Training Materials.

     - Videos about Learning Communities (Rick DuFour)
       http://www.pd360.com/index.cfm?ContentId=488
       http://www.pd360.com/index.cfm?ContentId=489
       http://www.pd360.com/index.cfm?ContentId=490


     - Action Research (Teacher Inquiry)- The above resources can be used to provide the foundational research to launch an Action Research project. Refer to the SLC portal for more information by typing “portal” (no www) in the SLC URL line, select PD, then Training Materials.

**How can I get more information?**

There are a lot of books and videos pertaining to the components available for check-out through the PD Dept. View these resources in Destiny by going to the SLC Teacher Homepage, select Destiny Learning Resources, then select PD Dept. Resources.

   - Study of what works by NSDC and NEA distills Principles for Success
6 Keys to Open Doors to Literacy

Articles and webcasts for teacher leaders and coaches:

- Coaching Isn't Just for Athletes: The Role of Teacher Leaders
- Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches
- Tolerated Failure or Missed Opportunities and Potentials for Teacher Leadership in Urban Schools?
- This research brief from the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement examines the research on teacher leadership and what it says about drawing on the skills of experienced teachers to facilitate school improvement. What Does the Research Tell Us About Teacher Leadership?

- Stay up-to-date with the Reading Rockets professional development webcast series. Listen, watch, and learn from top experts in the field of reading. Our webcasts are available anytime that's convenient for you. http://www.readingrockets.org/webcasts/1004