What Matters Most in Literacy Teaching and Learning

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Questions to Guide our Inquiry Today

1. What Matters Most: How do we balance fluency and comprehension instruction, K - 5?

2. What does effective comprehension strategy instruction look like?

3. What does a week look like in our classrooms? How do we incorporate the CCSS?
**Literacy Learning: What’s Essential**

1. **Living a Literate Life: Rigor, Inquiry and Intimacy in the Classroom**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers:</th>
<th>Students:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create a predictable daily schedule (workshop) that ensures abundant time</td>
<td>Read and write independently for extended and growing periods of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>for independent reading and writing - a Literacy Studio</td>
<td>each day - actively engage in all 4 components of the Literacy Studio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a culture conducive to in-depth study of a variety of books, genres,</td>
<td>Select books, topics, authors appropriately for level, challenge,</td>
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<td>topics, authors, writer’s tools and comprehension strategies</td>
<td>interest; engage in book discussions; share recommendations and insights</td>
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<td>with other readers, see to understand the insights of others</td>
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<td>Create a visible climate that encourages serious, but joyful work on</td>
<td>Fully utilize the resources available and move independently in the</td>
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<td>authentic tasks through the use of several different types of learning</td>
<td>classroom - work within the classroom with the knowledge that it is an</td>
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<td>spaces - use alternative lighting, room configuration, rugs, bookshelves</td>
<td>honored place of scholarship and inquiry, a place to indulge</td>
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<tr>
<td>and decorative items to create intimate spaces</td>
<td>learning passions and curiosity</td>
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<td>Focus on helping children create models to share their thinking - display</td>
<td>Understand and use options for oral, artistic, dramatic, and written means</td>
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<td>their work, create anchor charts to describe the group’s thinking</td>
<td>to show thinking and respond to text</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teach and respond with civility and respect, modeling sophisticated and</td>
<td>Use oral language precisely to describe their thinking during reading and</td>
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<tr>
<td>scholarly oral language for children</td>
<td>writing - use that language to apply strategies and writer’s tools</td>
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<td>independently</td>
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<td>Create an unseen culture of rigor, inquiry and intimacy by continually</td>
<td>Understand and engage in the processes, procedures and rituals of a</td>
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<td>expecting more, probing ideas further and pressing children to explore</td>
<td>learning community</td>
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<td>their intellect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teach a few concepts of great import, in real depth, over a long period</td>
<td>Apply concepts of great import in a wide variety of texts and contexts</td>
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<tr>
<td>of time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use 5 key instructional strategies: think-aloud, modeling, conferring,</td>
<td>Become independent, flexible and adaptive in using surface and deep</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstration and sharing to ensure retention and reapplication of</td>
<td>structure systems including word identification, fluent reading,</td>
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<tr>
<td>concepts learned - use the strategies to focus on essential deep and</td>
<td>comprehension strategies, writer’s tools, syntax, text structure and</td>
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<tr>
<td>surface structure systems, simultaneously, K - 12</td>
<td>conventions - share and teach other readers and writers</td>
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3
2. COGNITIVE STRATEGIES (CONTENT - ongoing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Surface Structure Systems</th>
<th>Deep Structure Systems:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identifying words, reading fluently</td>
<td>Comprehend literally to get the gist of the story, comprehend deeply and probe ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grapho-Phonic System</strong></td>
<td><strong>Semantic System</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter/sound knowledge, alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, decoding</td>
<td>Understanding word meanings from literal to subtle, discuss and write about experiences/associations related to words, precision and word choice in writing</td>
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<td><strong>Lexical System</strong></td>
<td><strong>Schematic System</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual word recognition based on frequent visual exposure to words</td>
<td>Constructing meaning at the whole text level; understanding themes, ideas and concepts, storing and retrieving relevant knowledge, connecting the new to the known</td>
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<td>Visual memory for <em>all</em> words</td>
<td><strong>Pragmatic System</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Syntactic System</strong></td>
<td>Multiple experiences with ideas we've read or learned; sharing and applying meaning; constructing meaning through oral, written, artistic, and dramatic means; writing for specific purposes and audiences; revising thinking based on interactions with others; adopting the habits and mores of readers and writers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding of language structures at the word, sentence, paragraph and whole text level (usually auditory -- see more under #4 Text Structures/Elements)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What children know and are able to do when using surface structure systems</th>
<th>What children know and are able to do when using deep structure systems</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use decoding strategies such as identifying word families, chunking, point and slide, cross check across systems (does the word make sense, sound like language, do the letters match the sounds), etc.</td>
<td>Demonstrate increasingly sophisticated vocabulary in oral and written communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognize sight words and other words in environment visually - repeated use of recognized words</td>
<td>Use Comprehension Strategies:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use word analysis strategies such as identifying affixes, compound words and derivations</td>
<td>- Monitor for Meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use text management strategies such as rereading/reading ahead, deep reading, skimming/scanning, using text features such as bold print, italics, etc.</td>
<td>- Activate and Create Schema</td>
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<td>- Ask Questions</td>
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<td>- Use Sensory and Emotional Images</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Infer</td>
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<td>- Synthesize</td>
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<td>- Determine Importance</td>
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<td>Engage in meaningful discourse about books to develop deeper understanding</td>
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<td>Write to develop deeper understanding</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use art and/or drama to develop deeper understanding</td>
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<td>Reflect on own growth as a reader/writer</td>
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3. Use a Variety of Text Genres and Levels (Resources and Materials)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distinguish Among Genres</th>
<th>Use Different Level Texts for Different Purposes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study genre characteristics, read and write in that genre</td>
<td>Vary the text difficulty depending on the task</td>
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- Biography
- Historical Fiction
- Textbooks
- Reference Texts
- Websites
- Persuasion
- Realistic Fiction
- Poetry
- Memoir/Autobiography
- Science Fiction
- Mystery
- Journalism
- Opinion/Editorial
- Tests
- Expository texts - narrative
- Picture Books
- Photo Essay
- Promotional
- Materials/Advertising
- Fantasy/Science Fiction

**Work in instructional level text for:**
- practice in decoding
- practice in word recognition
- practice in oral reading fluency
- practice in word analysis

**Work in more challenging texts** (including read alouds, wordless picture books and texts that have been read aloud multiple times) for:
- application of comprehension strategies
- study of writer’s tools
- analysis of text structures
- book club discussions
- reading with a partner
- reading to learn new content (especially when there are text features such as graphs, charts, bold print and/or with familiarity for text structures)
### 4. TEXT STRUCTURE (CONTENT - Intermittent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Structure - Narrative (whole text)</th>
<th>Text Structure - Expository (paragraph/section)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understand and use:</td>
<td>Cause/Effect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Compare/Contrast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Chronological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Problem/Solution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plot Structure</td>
<td>Descriptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Character, setting,</td>
<td>Enumerable</td>
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<tr>
<td>conflict, rising action,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>climax, sequence of events,</td>
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<tr>
<td>resolution</td>
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#### Narrative Writing Technique

Development of characters, setting and conflict through:
- Exposition
- Action
- Dialogue
- Description

Create believable characters, settings, conflicts and events through use of writers tools and voice including
- theme
- foreshadowing
- parallel plot structures
- flashback and fast forward
- style or tone (voice)
- character motivation
- symbolism

Effective use of
- word choice
- diction
- phrasing

#### Hurdles for readers of expository texts

Word Hurdles
Anaphora
Vocabulary Load
Text Hurdles
Insufficient schema for content and/or text structures
Inefficient Predicting
Naïve Conceptions
Staccato Reading
Concept Load
Pacing Demands

#### Expository Writing Technique

Elaborating/developing and grouping ideas/themes

Organizing ideas with a discernable, but not blatant, structure

Laying out and defending a position based on fact and/or opinion

Writing to persuade based on fact and/or opinion

Writing compelling leads and conclusions
What are the comprehension strategies?

Comprehension Strategies

**Monitoring for Meaning**
Knowing when, as a reader, you fully understand
Knowing when, as a reader, you don’t understand
Knowing what you need to understand
Knowing a wide range of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension

**Use Schema**
Relate the new to the known - activate prior knowledge to help understand new information
Make connections between texts, portions of the same text, the text and broader knowledge and the text and the reader
Create schema using in a variety of ways if, as a reader, you realize that you lack necessary schema to understand a text or concept

**Infer**
**Predict**
Make independent decisions about inexplicit meanings
Create meaning to fill in gaps in the text
Form opinions and defend them
Draw conclusions and defend them

**Ask Questions**
Generate questions before, during and after reading
Use questions to focus on one aspect of the text, delve more deeply into its meaning and extrapolate to insights within and beyond the text

**Create Images**
Use images that emanate from all five senses to understand more vividly, more deeply
Use images that emanate from the emotions to understand more vividly, more deeply

**Determine Importance**
Make decisions about which ideas and/or concepts are most important in a text
Articulate why those ideas are most important and what influenced you, as a reader, to focus on them
Identify key themes and series of events in text
Extrapolate to less explicit meaning or larger ideas within and beyond the text

**Synthesize**
Be aware of the evolution of thought during reading - how your thinking changes as you read
Create a cogent expression of key points after reading - this expression may contain information from a variety of sources outside the current text
Why Teach Strategies?

Comprehension strategy instruction:

1. Causes us to become more reflective about our own reading.
2. Creates a common language between teachers and kids.
3. Increases the amount of time spent teaching comprehension.
5. Helps teachers raise expectations for all children.
6. Makes it acceptable to read slowly with depth and focus.
7. Focuses our instruction on the reader, not just the text.
8. Helps children build a vast bank of content area knowledge because they use strategies.

How do we best teach comprehension strategies?

Key ideas

- Select a strategy - questions about hierarchy and order
- Study the key points related to the comprehension strategy - what will you teach during the strategy study?
- Read adult text; scrutinize your own use of the strategy
- Consult the gradual release of responsibility continuum for early phase preparation
- Select texts from which to think aloud - become very familiar with the text
- Begin thinking aloud, gradually inviting the children to participate through turn and talk and trio share
- Encourage the children to immediately apply the strategy in independent reading
- Confer to assess progress in using the strategy and to set new goals - use the book the child is reading or the book used in the think aloud
- Continue thinking aloud; use more difficult texts and new genres
ENGAGED READING AND WRITING
A Process to try with students

Key Ideas
* Reading and Writing must go hand in hand in CCSS-based classrooms
* Choice is still critical; engagement comes from reading and writing topics about which we are passionate
* Explore a piece first from the reader’s point of view, examine what the reader considers important, how the reader approaches the text before moving on to author-based importance.
* Take your time and include multiple readings and time to discuss the reading and writing portions of the process.
* Think about using this process with narrative, expository and argumentative types of texts.

The Process (can be spread over 3 - 5 days)
1. Students read a piece that they have chosen from a group of three appropriate text choices (can be narrative, expository or argumentative).
2. Students read and annotate the piece focused on reader-based importance -- what is important or compelling, memorable or interesting to them. They also note ways that they approached the piece - what did they do/think about to make the piece understandable?
3. Students share their thinking with a partner with a focus on what they found compelling, important or moving.
4. Students re-read the piece using the same process outlined above and sharing new insights with their partners.
5. Now students read the text with an eye to the author (author-based importance) - they annotate the text to focus on what the author most wanted them to think about and remember - tell them, “if the author was in the room, what would he/she want you to think about, take away from your reading?”
6. They discuss with the same partner, if possible, focused on how their reading approach differed than when they read for reader-based importance?
7. Students re-read the piece using the same process outlined, this time focused on author-based importance - if the author were here, what might he/she say is important for us to understand and remember.

8. Share new insights with partners. What new details and ideas stood out based on the reading from an author-based importance point of view?

9. This time, ask them to choose one or two key ideas from the text to talk to a partner about and to focus on why they selected that idea(s)? They can be asked to consider what the author did to persuade them that the idea was important. They can discuss what other ideas they considered.

10. As a class discuss ways in which their second reading (author-based importance) key ideas synch (or not!) with their initial reading key ideas?

11. Create an anchor chart to show how their reactions differed based on reader-based importance and author-based importance.

Variations and whole class discussions
- Ask the students to write about what they consider to be the most important ideas in the piece following step 3 and/or 4, 6, 7 and 8.
- Ask the students to complete the process in two different genres.
- Discuss their approach to the text - did they approach the reading differently based on reader-based importance compared to author-based importance?
- Discuss the differing approaches they had in different genre.

Writing about a close reading
* Students spend 10 minutes writing about the idea they selected as most important after reading with both (reader and author) perspectives.
* Initially, encourage them to include anything that comes to mind, any associations with the ideas, anything the author may have had in mind, any questions they had, any images or inferences they may have had - just encourage them to write!

* Discuss the writing so far with a partner.

* Ask students to review what they’ve written and focus on the key idea, theme, through-line. Share key themes/ideas with the same partner. Encourage them to tell their partner what you understand based on sharing earlier and the piece you wrote

* Go back to the piece to revise into a narrative, argumentative or expository piece.

Planning with CCSS

Some background:

- Teams using CCSS to plan should remember that they do not prescribe instructional practices, texts nor do they include everything you may want to teach in a year.

- Many of the best practices incorporated into a Literacy Studio or Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop support instruction in CCSS. The Studio provides an important daily structure for work on standards and helps teachers ensure that standards instruction is provided in a meaningful context. The fundamental elements of a Literacy Studio, time, ownership and response remain vital to maintaining authenticity and relevance in CCSS instruction.

- CCSS do not include adequate focus on informational text in a narrative structure which tends to be the more readable and interesting to students.

- CCSS do not include specific comprehension strategies or writer’s tools; planning teams must build those in.
• Teams may consider a broad, backward design process for planning beginning with quarterly or trimester-based plans, working toward weekly and daily planning that is responsive to children’s demonstrated progress. It is understood that plans will change frequently to accommodate students’ individual and group needs.

• Quarterly plans should be a broad overview of how reading/writing standards, genre study, foundational skills (surface structure skills) and comprehension strategy instruction may be laid out over a nine week period. Teams line up particular reading, writing and genre goals so that students can be asked to learn new strategies and skills in the context of meaningful independent work in reading and writing.

• Teams should consider developmental appropriateness, CCSS grade level expectations and district priorities as well as instruction in rituals and routines for the Literacy Studio, in-depth comprehension strategy instruction and integration of other content area material.

• Generally there is an expectations of consistency across the district with respect to the curriculum goals and when the larger units of study are taught so teachers will have an opportunity to collaborate and plan together around the goals.

• The quarterly plans cannot address the needs of individual students. It is understood that, through conferences and small group instruction, teachers will differentiate for individual students based on observed need.

• The quarterly plans do not prescribe instructional practices nor do they rely on any particular materials. Teachers should use existing resources, texts and a wide range of instructional strategies as they support children’s progress toward the goals.

• The standards are the same throughout the grade spectrum. Kindergarten teachers focus on determining importance (including key ideas and details) as do fifth grade teachers. They differentiate through the use of increasingly complex text.
Teaching Tactics:  
Day to Day Instruction in Comprehension

What are the most effective instructional strategies for teaching deep structure systems?

Thinking Aloud  
*How do readers and writers think?*

Teachers read aloud, pausing to make their thinking explicit;

Teachers are clear about how the strategy they’re using helps them comprehend more than they would have comprehended without the strategy;

Teachers work to ensure precision in their think alouds, focusing on the most far-reaching use of the strategy, resisting the urge to think aloud about the most obvious content or new vocabulary in the text;

Teachers are clear in describing how students can apply the strategy independently.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic think aloud</th>
<th>Higher level think aloud</th>
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| *After reading to page 2 where Nikolai first poses his three big questions*  
I’m inferring that Nikolai is a serious kind of boy interested in important questions in the world. | *After reading to page 2*  
When I first start to read about Nikolai, I realize that he has certain qualities that I wish I had. When I read about how serious and pensive he is, how focused on trying to understand the most important questions in life at such an early age, I realize that there is something in his serious manner that we might all learn from as we try to understand the world. |
| *After reading to page 7 where Nikolai’s three friends generate answers to his questions based on what is happening to them in the here and now*  
I’m inferring that Nikolai and his friends Gogol, Pushkin and Sonya have been friends for a long time and trust each other. | *After reading to page 7*  
When I read about Nikolai’s friends’ hasty responses to his important questions, I conclude that, even though we have good friends whom we trust, that sometimes the answers to the most important questions in our lives come from ourselves. I infer that the reason Nikolai is dissatisfied with their responses, is that he knows that the answers to questions as important as these should come from himself and his experiences rather than from his friends, no matter how much they mean to him. |
After reading to page 13 just before Nikolai rescues the panda
I’m predicting (a type of inference) that Nikolai will be the one to save the panda and her baby and that he will begin to think about the answers to his questions when he does.

After reading to page 17 after the panda and her baby are reunited in Leo’s home
I’m predicting that because Nikolai played such an important role in the rescue of the panda and her baby that he will begin to realize that his questions may be unanswerable or that, if there are answers, they will have to come from him thinking about his own actions and how those actions helped him to understand When is the best time to do things, Who is the most important one and What is the right thing to do? I also infer that, though our questions may be different than Nikolai’s, that this author and Leo Tolstoy, the author of the story that inspired this book are trying to tell us that it is very important that we have big questions about how the world works and that it is one of our jobs in life to consider the elusive answers to those questions. I think that when we ask those questions and seek the answers, we may be more able to help others, just in the way that Nikolai did.
Modeling

*How do readers and writers behave?*

Teachers describe their lives as readers and writers - where and when they like to read, how they choose books, what they prefer in relation to author’s style, content and genre;

Teachers help students develop and describe their own preferences;

Teachers create a classroom environment conducive to in-depth learning - there are spaces conducive to group work, independent work and small group discussion, books are accessible and records of children’s thinking and group ideas line the walls;

Teachers ensure that learning experiences are authentic—that what they ask students to do in class is actually something readers might choose to do outside of school.

Demonstration

*How can kids show each other how readers and writers interact?*

Students demonstrate or teach other students how readers deepen comprehension via oral, written, artistic or dramatic means;

Teachers set up “walk through” demonstrations in which students actually enact the processes of obtaining resources and materials (i.e. book selection) in the classroom or transition from one activity to another;

Teachers walk students through demonstrations showing how book clubs, think-pair-share, turn and talk and other interactive sequences work in the classroom;

Teachers show through “fish bowl” types of demonstrations how students can build on other students’ thoughts in discussion, how they can use “open forum” in which the whole group converses about a book or an idea.
Conferring

*How do readers and writers reach beyond their current work?*

Teachers ensure ample time every day to confer with students during composing (independent work) time;

Teachers make decisions about which children need shorter, more frequent conferences and which will benefit from less frequent, more in-depth conferences;

Teachers ask each student to reflect on their growth as a reader in each conference;

Teachers build on each child’s strengths and progress and go the next step to make clear, well-documented decisions about what to teach next in the context of the conference;

Teachers are explicit about how the strategy or skill discussed in a conference can be generalized beyond the current context.

Teachers invite students to share new insights during reflecting sessions.

Managing Sharing Opportunities

*How do readers and writers teach others?*

Teachers encourage students to not only share, but to teach others what they have attempted in their reading - these sessions can be in pairs, trios, small or large groups and are often called reflection sessions;

Students who wish to share actually prepare a lesson and consider ways to teach in a way that all learners needs will be met;

Students reflect on their own learning and set new goals in the context of reflection sessions;

Students use a wide variety of learning strategies to share and focus not on retelling or summarizing a text, but on making their thinking about that text public;

Students may use written, oral, artistic, or dramatic means to share their thinking.
CHOOSING TEXT
A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS

WHAT MAKES TEXT READABLE?
A “level” is most often determined by average sentence length (sometimes known as m.l.u. and vocabulary “level”). The notion of which vocabulary word is a, for example “third grade” word is, of course, arbitrary. In considering what makes a text “readable”, we need to think beyond sentence length and vocabulary.

Text is readable when students have:
- Schema for the text content
- Schema for the author’s style, preferences, and/or other books written by the author;
- Schema for text format, print style, layout, density, illustrations and graphs and presence (or lack thereof) of photographs which make expository text much more comprehensible;
- Current work focused on a comprehension strategy they can use to better understand the text;
- Pre-reading experiences such as hearing a read aloud from the text and/or discussion about the text content or format
- A need/desire to comprehend
- A history/passion for reading

VARIETY IS CRITICAL
Variety means more than title and author . . .
- Students need to read in a variety of genre including web-based reading and not excluding genres such as graphic novel, comic books, etc. ;
- However, a steady diet is not helpful either - students need to practice writing in the genre and study a wide variety of texts that make up the genre to identify characteristics and qualities unique to that genre (see below for genre study guidelines);
- Students need to read text that challenges them in different ways, in both surface and deep structure learning;
- Students need to keep track of their choices to ensure variety.

SOME KEY POINTS
There are some things only the teacher can know . . .
- Quality text is essential;
- Students need to gradually assume responsibility for selecting appropriate text -- teachers continue to interact with students about their selections throughout the year;
- Text sets help students make important connections between authors, themes, genres;

- Modeling is critical -- teachers need to model ways in which they select and recommend books;
- Students need to “field test” text -- try a page or two, a section; think aloud, apply the five finger rule, etc.
Their hands were tied or handcuffed, yet their fingers danced, flew, drew words. The prisoners were hooded, but leaning back they could see a bit, just a bit, down below. Although they were forbidden to speak, they spoke with their hands. Pinio Ungerfeld taught me the finger alphabet which he had learned in prison without a teacher:

“Some of us had bad handwriting,” he told me. “Others were masters of calligraphy.”

The Uruguayan dictatorship wanted everyone to stand alone, everyone to be no one: in prisons and in barracks and throughout the country, communication was a crime.

Some prisoners spent more than ten years buried in solitary cells the size of coffins, hearing nothing but clanging bars or footsteps in the corridors. Fernandez Huidobro and Mauricio Rosencof, thus condemned survived because they could talk to each other by tapping on the wall. In that way, they told of dreams and memories, fallings in and out of love; they discussed, embraced, fought; they shared beliefs and beauties, doubts and guilts, and those questions that have no answer.

When it is genuine, when it is born of the need to speak, no one can stop the human voice. When denied a mouth, it speaks with the hands or the eyes, or the pores, or anything at all. Because every single one of us has something to say to others, something that deserves to be celebrated or forgiven, by others.

Eduardo Galleano
The Book of Embraces