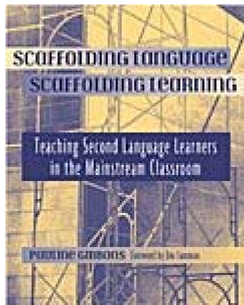

Reading in a Second Language is an excerpt from *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom* by Pauline Gibbons.

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Reading in a Second Language

Literacy in a second language develops as in the first—globally, not linearly, and in a variety of rich contexts.
Rigg and Allen, *When They Don't All Speak English: Integrating the ESL Student in the Regular Classroom*

Contributions to Reading Theory

As suggested by the following introduction—which proved very difficult to type and has caused my spell checker to light up the computer screen!—the approach taken in this chapter is that effective readers do a range of things simultaneously:

> Thr hs bn a lt of dbat ovr th pst tn yrs abt th tchng of rding. Sme see rding as th mastry of phncs, othrs as a procss of prdctn whrby the rder uss bckgrnd knwldge and knwledge of th lngge systm to prdict mning.
>
> Thees diffreing veiws haev infelunced the wya raeding has bene tuahgt. Appraochse haev vareid betwene thoes who argeu that the taeching of phoincs is the msot imprtoant elmeent of a raeding prorgam, and thoes who argeu fro a whoel-language appraohc in whchi childnre laern to raed by perdicting maenngi.
>
> But it shou_ be obvi_ to anyo_ readi_ thi_ th_ goo_ read_ use a rang_ of strateg_ to gai_ mean_ fro_ writ_ tex_.

You were probably able to read these first three paragraphs quite easily, even though they may have looked quite strange. Consider how you were able to do this. What kinds of knowledge about reading did you use? First, it is obvious that a lot more than phonics knowledge was involved. Certainly your knowledge of phonics was helpful, but phonics alone would not have enabled you to interpret the texts. After all, in the first paragraph, almost all of the vowels were omitted; in the second paragraph, all of the letters of each word were included, but they were scrambled; and in the third paragraph, only the beginning of each word was included. Yet none of these things prevented you from reading the texts—you were able to use other kinds of information to read past the gaps in the phonic information. Your background knowledge of the

subject, and your knowledge of how English works, also played an important part in enabling you to predict the words you were reading.

In his early work on reading, Goodman (1967) refers to three kinds of knowledge on which readers draw to gain meaning from text: semantic knowledge (knowledge of the world); syntactic knowledge (knowledge of the structure of the language; and graphophonic knowledge (knowledge of sound-letter relationships). The next three examples illustrate each kind of knowledge:

> *The sun rises in the East and sets in the________.*
> (Your knowledge of the world predicts that the missing word is *West*.)
>
> *This animal is a klinger. This is another klinger. There are two ________.*
> (Your knowledge of how English works allows you to predict *klingers*, using other plural words as an analogy. The word is a made-up one, so background knowledge doesn't help here!)
>
> *The flag is red, black, and y________.*
> (Here graphophonic knowledge is important. The letter *y* allows you to predict *yellow*. Without this cue you would have guessed that the missing word was a color, but not which one.)

In reality, however, readers use all three kinds of knowledge simultaneously. Indeed, effective readers draw on different kinds of knowledge depending on what they are reading and how much they know about the topic. For example, if the last sentence had read, "*The Aboriginal flag is red, black, and* ____," most Australian readers would have been able to predict the final word without any further cue. But readers from other countries, who may lack this knowledge, would need more cues from the text itself. If you reflect on your own reading, you'll be aware that you're able to read familiar material (e.g., an article on a topic about teaching) much faster than unfamiliar material (e.g., an academic paper on a topic you know nothing about).

When you are unable to bring personal knowledge and understanding of a topic to a text, you are effectively robbed of the ability to make use of a key resource for reading: what you already know. This has considerable implications for second language learners, who may not have the same cultural or world knowledge as the writer of the text. We will return to this later. For now, consider also the role that knowledge about the language system plays. If you are able to read another language yourself, but are not very fluent in the language, you will find that your reading relies much more on graphophonic cues than does your reading in English, and so you read much more slowly—the resources that are available to a fluent speaker of the language are not available to you. Many ESL children are also in this position when they read in English. Again, we will return to this point later.

Another major contribution to our knowledge of reading comes from schema theory. Originally the term was used to explain how the knowledge we have about the

world is organized into interrelated patterns based on our previous experiences and knowledge. For example, if you go into a restaurant, you have certain expectations about what it will be like. Someone will bring you a menu, ask if you want a drink, and give you a check at the end. You will have a good idea how much of a tip you are expected to leave, and you will know how to use a credit card to pay for the meal. If you go to McDonald's, on the other hand, you will order from the counter, pay before you get the food, and not leave a tip. Knowing what to expect and how to behave in these two contexts comes from your previous experiences and from being part of a particular culture and society. The amount of tip to leave, and when to tip, are examples of this kind of cultural knowledge, which varies enormously from country to country—as anyone familiar with both North America and Australia is aware! Schema theory, applied to reading, proposes that effective readers likewise draw on particular kinds of culturally acquired knowledge to guide and influence the comprehension process (see Anderson and Pearson 1984). In one well-known study, two groups of adults, white North Americans and Native Americans, were asked to read and recall two letters describing a typical wedding of each group. There were clear cross-cultural differences in the way in which the same information was interpreted and recalled by the two groups (Steffenson, Joag-Dev, and Anderson 1979).

Wallace (1992) suggests that this schematic or in-the-head knowledge may be of two types: knowledge of the "content" or topic, and knowledge of the kind of genre. Think, for example, of what you are able to predict from these headings alone:

Bank Robbers Hold Hostages
Area Manager required, permanent position
The Sly Cat and the Clever Mouse

It is easy to predict that the first is a newspaper headline for a news report, the second a job advertisement, and the third a children's story. You will probably be able to predict a good deal of the content too. The first is likely to include details of a bank robbery, where and when it occurred, who the hostages are and how many there are, and so on. The job advertisement will probably include details of the position, the company it is with, criteria for the post, salary range, a reference number, and an email or postal address for applications. The story will probably begin with an orientation telling where the story is set and about the relationship of the characters, and in the course of the narrative the bad cat will end up being fooled by the intelligent mouse!

We know all this even before we begin to read. This information is in our heads, as a result of our familiarity with reading similar genres and reading about similar topics in the past; ultimately it comes from being participants in the culture in which these texts exist. In one sense, reading simply confirms what we know: we map our already existing experiences onto what we read. But what happens if our previous experiences have not provided us with this particular schematic knowledge, or if they have provided us with different schematic knowledge? Without the predictions you were able to make with these three texts, imagine how much more difficult they would be to

comprehend. If you have ever read a newspaper from another English-speaking country, you will realize how much is taken for granted: the writer expects that you will know key people, key events, and key issues relevant to that country. Without this assumed knowledge, many newspaper stories are not easy to make sense of. And there will always be topics that we know little about and that are therefore very difficult to read about.

Even though we have the relevant knowledge, we still need to be "clued in" to what we are reading, and if we miss a clue, even our existing knowledge doesn't help us. The following text lacks a title. How much are you able to understand?

> The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient, depending on how much you have to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, then that is the next step; otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. . . . After the procedure is completed, one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they can be used once more, and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. (Adapted from Bransford and Johnson 1972)

Although you are able to read all the words, and at one level can "understand" individual sentences, you would probably find it very difficult to summarize the main points of this text. How do you know what the main points are when you don't have a sense of the overall meaning? (This places you in a similar position as ESL learners who are asked to summarize texts that contain content that is unfamiliar to them.) However, if you are told that the passage is about doing the laundry, the meaning suddenly becomes clear, and individual sentences are easily interpretable. You now have some in-the-head knowledge onto which to map the text. Yet what has changed? Certainly not the words on the page. What has changed is the nature of your interaction with the text—you are now reading about things that make sense to you and that link with your own experiences. What is clear from this example is that meaning does not reside solely in the words and structures of the text, but is constructed in the course of a transaction between the text and the reader.

Theories of Literacy Pedagogy

As a result of a range of views about what reading is, there are many theories of liter-

which method is the most appropriate; rather, each of these general approaches emphasizes particular aspects of literacy. It is not that one program affords literacy and another doesn't, but rather that different programs emphasize different "literacies." Luke and Freebody suggest that there are four components of literacy success, and that successful readers need the resources to take on four related roles as they read: the roles *of code breaker*, *text participant*, *text user,* and *text analyst*. These are briefly discussed in the next section.

Reader as Code Breaker

As a *code breaker*, a reader needs to be able to engage in the "technology" of written script—that is, with the sound-symbol relationships, left-to-right directionality, and alphabet knowledge (this is the sort of knowledge that is central to the "back to basics" movements in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia). It is true that alphabetic awareness is well-established as a significant factor in learning to read (see Ehri 1990), and children's development and ultimate success in reading may be hindered by misunderstandings or lack of knowledge about how to crack the code. A good literacy program will not ignore these elements. But as the other three roles suggest, code breaking, though necessary, is not sufficient for the successful reading of authentic texts in real social contexts—and the importance of knowing the code does not justify its teaching in contexts devoid of any real meaning.

Reader as a Text Participant

As a *text participant*, the reader connects the text with his or her own background knowledge—including knowledge of the world, cultural knowledge, and knowledge of the generic structure—in the sorts of ways discussed earlier in this chapter. Luke and Freebody cite an example of the ways in which cultural knowledge is related to reading comprehension, drawing on the work of Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey, and Anderson. In this example, a mix of eighth-grade Afro-American and Anglo-American students read a passage about "sounding," a form of verbal ritual insult predominantly found among black teenagers. While the Afro-American students correctly interpreted the text as being about verbal play, the Anglo-American students in general interpreted it as being about a physical fight. Despite the fact that their decoding skills were as good and possibly better than the Afro-American students, the Anglo-American students were unable to "read" the text in a way that matched the writer's intentions.

It is ironic, as Luke and Freebody point out, that in many standardized reading tests, the Afro-American students, in general, would probably have scored lower than their middle-class Anglo-American peers. Yet in this example, which acknowledges the role of cultural knowledge, we see that the Afro-American students in fact were the far more effective readers. Being a text participant, then, means having the resources to match text with appropriate content and cultural knowledge.

Reader as Text User

As a *text user*, a reader is able to participate in the social activities in which written text plays a major part, and to recognize what counts as successful reading in a range of social contexts. The interactions that children have around literacy events construct their understandings about how they are expected to read particular texts. For example, parents may ask particular kinds of questions as they read a book aloud with young children; teachers may model through their talk how to approach a character study in a piece of literature; or teachers may demonstrate through their questions what knowledge counts as being significant in an information text. For an interesting and readable account of how different socio-cultural groups take meaning from texts in different ways, and how they model different reader roles, see *Ways with Words* (Brice-Heath 1983).

Reader as Text Analyst

As *text analysts*, readers read a text as a crafted object, one that is written by an author who has a particular ideology or set of assumptions. An effective reader reads critically, recognizing in the text what is assumed, not said, implied, or unquestioned. Critical readers recognize that all texts, however authoritative they appear, represent a particular view of the world and that readers are positioned in a certain way when they read it. Clear examples of this reader-positioning technique are media advertisements that deliberately seek to manipulate the reader. Critical reading entails recognizing the many other ways in which texts of all sorts are written out of a particular belief system or ideology and how, though in more subtle ways than advertisements, and often less intentionally, these texts may also be manipulative. (See, for example, Cummins and Sayers 1995.)

Each of these roles foregrounds a particular aspect of reading. Because they are all integral to effective reading, a well-balanced literacy program will plan to make provision for the coherent development of each of them. But they should not be seen as representing a developmental "sequence," for each role can be developed at every level of reading. Indeed, as we have seen, there are good reasons for not simply focusing on code breaking with early readers, and, as we'll explore later, even very young readers can be shown how to read text critically.

Implications for ESL Learners

Many ESL students are effective readers who enjoy reading, and many are able to read in more than one language. As Jim Cummins (1996) has argued, being able to read in one's first language is one of the most important factors in learning to read in a second. But some children, particularly those whose first experience of learning to read is in their second language, may need particular kinds of support in learning literacy. We should also remember that most children's books are written with the assumption that

their readers will be familiar with the cultural aspects of the story and will be already fluent in the spoken language.

The earlier discussion made it clear that the knowledge readers bring to the text is critical in their ability to get meaning from it. Of course, once we become fluent readers, we read to gain new information, although, as we have seen, even in this case there must still be some match between what the reader already knows and the information in the text. But when children are *learning* to read, it is important that they develop these new and challenging skills in the context of familiar or comprehensible content. Most teachers would accept that a very basic principle of good teaching is to go from what students already know to what they don't yet know, to move from the given (already known) to the new (what is yet to be learned), and this is very much the case with the teaching of early reading.

However, this does not imply that teachers should avoid any books that contain unfamiliar content or cultural aspects. On the contrary, part of learning a language involves learning about the culture in which it is used, and if we restrict what children read to the blandness of the basal reader, we do them a disservice by presenting a reductionist and limiting curriculum. So, rather than avoiding books that carry any unfamiliar cultural material (an almost impossible task anyway), the challenge for the teacher is to *build up* the knowledge and understandings that are relevant to the text the children will read, so that by the time the reader interacts with the text, the text will not be so unfamiliar. One major implication of the earlier discussion is that what the teacher does *before* a book is read is an extremely important part of the overall plan for using it with the class. Later in this chapter we look at a range of before-reading activities.

The earlier discussion also pointed to the role that familiarity with the language itself has in learning to read. Being unfamiliar with the language makes it almost impossible to predict what will come next. Here is an example of how this may affect reading. In one classroom, a student was asked to complete this sentence: *Although the light was red, the car . . .* We would expect the sentence to end something like . . . *the car continued*, or . . . *the car kept going*. Instead, the child completed the sentence to read *the car stopped*. He had not understood the word *although*. If he met this word in his reading, he would equally have been unable to predict the kind of meaning that followed it—that is, that the car did something unexpected in that context. The cues for predicting meaning that come from knowing the language would in this context have been unavailable to him. So, giving children opportunity to gain some familiarity with the language of the book before they come to read it is also important. Again, a later part of the chapter suggests some of the ways you might do this.

Without knowledge of the topic and with limited linguistic resources, a young reader has no choice *but* to rely on graphophonic knowledge. As we said earlier, being able to use this knowledge is an important part of reading, but relying on it too heavily means that children are limited in their use of other kinds of resources and in other reader roles they will be expected to play. Children who read slowly—painfully

sounding out each letter, focusing on word by word—are often unable to carry meaning at the sentence level or across stretches of discourse, so they often lose the overall meaning of what they are reading. Ironically, however, poor readers have often been fed a diet of remedial phonics instruction, and while this may be appropriate for a few children, it is likely that for many young second language learners, this is precisely the area in which they don't need help. (Remember too that sounds and letters are very abstract concepts, particularly when the sounds don't match those children are accustomed to hearing in their mother tongue.) Rather, ESL learners need access to a linguistically and culturally rich reading environment, a range of reading strategies to bring to the process of reading, and a literacy program that aims to develop all the roles that effective readers take on.

Planning for Reading: Activities for **Before, During,** *and* **After** *Reading*

Reading activities should fulfill two major functions.

1. They should help readers understand the particular text they are reading.
2. They should help readers develop good reading strategies for reading other texts.

In other words, it's important that the instructional activities you use for helping learners comprehend a particular text also model the way effective readers read. For example, explaining all the unknown words before children read may help learners understand the text (or it may not if the learning load is too great), but it does not help them know what to do the next time they come to an unknown word. On the other hand, giving children strategies about what to do when they meet an unknown word not only helps them in that instance, but it also makes explicit strategies that can be transferred to other reading contexts.

A useful way to think about using a text with your class is to divide the planning into three sections: (1) what you will do before the reading; (2) what you and the children will do while the reading is going on: (3) and what you will do after the book has been read (see Wallace 1992). This overall plan is a useful framework that works whether you intend to read the book aloud yourself or whether you are planning for children to read by themselves or in small groups. The activities that follow are examples of what you might choose to do at each of these times. (You should select from these what is most useful and relevant for your students.)

To begin, try to predict what will be unfamiliar content or language for your students. Look for aspects of everyday life that may not be familiar to recently arrived children. Christmas, a visit to the beach, a visit to the zoo, a barbecue or picnic, an overnight stay with friends, birthday parties, school graduation, camps and excursions, surfing, watching a football match or baseball game, going to a disco, keeping pets, and many other aspects of life reflected in children's books are not taken for granted by all cultural groups. And there are considerable differences between families within any

particular ethnic or cultural group, too. (Not all of these things will be part of your everyday life either, since they contain North American, British, and Australian examples!) Also note aspects of the language that may cause difficulty for students. These may include unfamiliarity with the genre; unknown connectives and conjunctions; use of pronouns, auxiliary verbs, or tenses; long sentences; or unfamiliar vocabulary, phrases, and idioms.

Before-Reading Activities

The purpose of these activities is to prepare for linguistic, cultural, and conceptual difficulties and to activate prior knowledge. They should aim to develop knowledge in relation to the *overall* meaning of the text, not to deal with every potential difficulty. As schema theory suggests, if students come to the text with a sense of what they will be reading about, reading becomes a much easier task because they have more resources to draw on. The reader will be less dependent on the words on the page and will be able to minimize the disadvantage of having less than native-speaker proficiency in the language.

There is another advantage of well-designed before-reading activities. Because learners will have some sense of overall meaning, they are likely to be able to comprehend more linguistically challenging language than they might otherwise be able to comprehend. It has been found, for example, that ESL children who heard a story initially in their mother tongue better understood unfamiliar language structures of the story when it was later read in English. The text can therefore also serve the purpose of extending learners' linguistic abilities by providing models of new language.

Here are some examples of **before-reading activities**. They all provide a context in which the teacher can guide learners into understanding the major concepts and ideas in the text. In discussion, try to use any particular vocabulary and language patterns that occur in the text; you can do this informally simply by using them as you interact with children.

❊ *Predicting from Words*

Put a word or phrase from the text on the board and ask children to say what they think it will be about, or what words they associate with the topic. Develop a **semantic web** based on the children's suggestions. Add a few words yourself that you know occur in the text, and discuss the meaning.

❊ *Predicting from Title or First Sentence*

Write up the title of the book, or the first sentence of the text, and get children to predict what kind of text it is (e.g., a narrative or an information text) and what the text will be about. You might wish to guide the class in a way that will best help them deal with the major concepts or events in the text to be read.

❊ *Predicting from a Key Illustration*

Photocopy a key illustration from the book and give children time in pairs or groups to say what they think the topic is about, or what the story will be. For example, based on a text about earthquakes the class would later be reading, one teacher gave the class a picture of the devastation after an earthquake and asked them to guess what had happened. She then introduced some new vocabulary that would occur in the text: *tremor, Richter Scale, shocks, aftershocks*. Almost all children were quickly able to relate these to the words they knew in their first language.

❊ *Sequencing Illustrations*

Give groups of children a set of pictures relating to the story, and ask the students to put them into a possible sequence.

❊ *Reader Questions*

Give children the title of the book or a key illustration and encourage them to pose questions they would like answered. The children using the earthquake text wrote questions such as *When did it happen? Where did it occur? How many people were killed? How big was it?* The teacher posted these questions on the wall, and the children looked for answers as they read the text later. (Here is another context for students to ask questions to which they want to find answers, as well as to practice question forms.)

❊ *Storytelling*

If you are using a narrative, tell the story simply, before reading it, using the illustrations from the book or doing simple line drawings of your own on the board as you are narrating it.

❊ *Storytelling in the Mother Tongue*

Tell the story in the children's first language (or invite a parent or other caregiver to do so) before reading it in English. If you have children who speak only English in the class, the experience will be valuable for them too. It will demonstrate your respect and acceptance of other languages, position the second language learners in the class as proficient language users, and show children that all languages are a means of communication.

❊ *Sharing Existing Knowledge*

For an information text, use an information grid such as that described in Chapter 4, and ask children to fill in what they already know about the topic. This is best done in groups.

The more time you spend on these kinds of activities, the easier the reading will be, and the more likely it will be that students read for meaning. Don't be tempted to reduce before-reading work to the explanation of a few key words! Of course, if the text you are using is part of a larger unit of work, much of this knowledge building will already be occurring in an ongoing way. One of the great advantages of an integrated approach is that reading occurs in a context where students are already developing an overall schema for the topic. And comprehension is much more likely to be improved when vocabulary and language are associated with broad concepts and recur in an ongoing context, than when instruction is in terms of single words or language items (see Carrell 1988).

During-Reading Activities

The purpose of these activities is to model good reading strategies. Good readers are actively involved in the text; they constantly interrogate and interact with it, and they predict what is coming. This is largely an unconscious process for fluent readers. The aim of during-reading activities is to make explicit some of these unconscious processes and to demonstrate the interactive nature of reading.

Once students have some idea of the genre and content of what they will be reading, it is time for the reading itself. Depending on the age and reading levels of the students, the first three activities described next are recommended as regular activities to use.

❊ *Modelled Reading*

It's useful to read the text aloud to the class the first time as a reading model for the students, using appropriate pausing and expression. Try to bring the text to life—students need to see that print has meaning and is not simply a functionally empty exercise. With lower-level learners, remember that the more times something is read or heard, the more comprehension there will be. So don't read a text just once. A favorite book used in shared book time can be read again and again. As you read, encourage the children to see if their predictions were correct, but make clear that it doesn't matter if they weren't—often our predictions about things are wrong.

❊ *Skimming and Scanning the Text*

These are important reading strategies with which students need to become familiar. When readers skim a text, they read it quickly to get an idea of the general content. When they scan they also read fast, but the purpose is to look out for particular information. Searching down a telephone list, a train timetable, or a TV guide with the aim of finding a particular item are everyday examples of this. Some learners may have been trained to read in only one way—focusing on each word and every detail on the first reading. These students in particular will need practice in learning to skim and scan. It's

important that you also make explicit the contexts in which we skim and scan, and point out that we read in different ways depending on our purposes for reading.

When students are going to read the text alone, and particularly if you haven't first read it aloud yourself, ask them first to skim it quickly. Explain that the purpose of this is to get a general idea of what it's about and a sense of the main ideas. Students can also scan the text to check any predictions they made. Again, it doesn't matter if these predictions were wrong; the actual process of having made predictions will encourage them to read the text more interactively. When students go into a text with a misconception, they are more likely to take note of the information presented there, because information that runs counter to one's expectations is usually more memorable than information that simply confirms what one already thinks. While the students are skimming the text on this first reading, they can also see if they can find the answers to any questions they asked.

❊ *Rereading for Detail*

Let the students read the text again, more carefully this time. The purpose of this is to make sure they have understood the information. Get them to underline or make a note of words or phrases they don't understand. They can discuss these in pairs. Remind them of strategies they can use to work out the meaning of unknown words, and point out that three things can help us: (1) the language that surrounds the word in the text; (2) our knowledge of the topic; and (3) what we know about similar words. Also remind them that knowing the exact meaning of every word is not essential every time we read, unless it prevents us from gaining the information we need.

Encourage students to use the following strategies when they are faced with an unknown word or phrase:

- Read to the end of the sentence to see if this helps in understanding the word.
- Look at the text that comes before and after the word; the word may be easier to understand later, with other clues to meaning.
- Use pictures to help guess the meaning.
- Think about the function of the word: is it a noun, verb, adjective?
- Look for the same word somewhere else; its meaning might be clearer there.
- Look for familiar word parts, such as prefixes and suffixes.
- Use a bilingual or English-English dictionary. Note that students should turn to a dictionary as a last resort and use it in combination with the other strategies. While dictionaries are a useful resource and students should be encouraged to use them when necessary, relying too heavily on a dictionary slows up reading and works against the development of the strategies listed above. It should also be remembered that definitions often don't adequately explain a meaning in the particular context in which it is being used, and that students may often select a wrong or inappropriate meaning.

You can place a similar sort of list on a wall. Remind students about these strategies whenever they read a new text. After they have finished reading, encourage discussion about how they dealt with the unknown words they came across.

✻ *Shared Book*

With young learners, shared book (sometimes called shared reading) can be a highly effective early reading activity. It involves using a Big Book in a group or whole-class activity. Shared book models how an experienced reader reads and how reading involves getting meaning from print. This understanding is particularly important when students are at an early stage of reading development.

For shared book, introduce the book through a range of before-reading activities, and then read it aloud several times, encouraging children to join in as they remember or recognize words or phrases. In later readings, using a pointer to point to words as you read helps children link the sounds of words with their shape on the page, and demonstrates left-to-right directionality and word spacing.

✻ *Word Masking*

Once a Big Book has been read several times, mask some of the words with small pieces of paper. Ask children to predict what the word is. Allow time to discuss alternative choices. For example, if the word is *replied* and someone guesses *said*, respond positively to this and use it as a basis for discussion. Among the words you mask, include not only "content" words, but also "functional" words, such as pronouns and conjunctions. As we mentioned earlier, these functional or grammatical words are important in enabling readers to use syntactic cues.

In later rereadings you can use this activity to develop vocabulary knowledge by focusing on alternatives for some of the words. Ask questions like *What's another word we could use here? What other words instead of* said *could the writer use?* This is a good way to develop vocabulary knowledge in context, and to build up word lists that can be displayed for children to use as a resource for their own writing.

✻ *Pause and Predict*

As you are reading, stop at significant points and ask questions like *What do you think is going to happen? What's she going to do? If you were (character's name), what would you do?* The goal here is to engage learners in the process of meaning making, not to have them verbalize the "right" answers.

✻ *Shadow Reading*

Record yourself reading the text, and use this recording with small groups of children or individuals, who should listen and follow the text from their own copy. Sometimes ask children to read aloud along with the tape. While reading aloud is not the same as

"reading," shadowing is nevertheless a valuable activity because it demonstrates how meaning is made through text, and how intonation, stress, and the patterns of spoken language are related to the words on the page.

❊ *Summarizing the Text*

If students are unable to summarize what they have read, chances are strong that they have not understood the text fully, and that they are still unfamiliar with the content. (Remember how hard it was to summarize the "laundry text" when you didn't know what it was about.) Note that it isn't necessarily appropriate to summarize all kinds of texts. However, if this is something you want to focus on, here are some ways to help students practice summarizing skills.

- Get students to write a summary. Limit the maximum number of sentences or words they can use, pointing out that this means they must focus only on the most important points.
- Ask students to suggest a title for each paragraph.
- Either alone or with teacher support, have students write two or three sentences under each paragraph title and use these to write a short summary of the whole passage.
- If you are using a narrative, get students to retell it in shorter and shorter ways until it is as short as possible. Write this up on the board and then discuss with students the kind of information that is now missing.
- Have students explain the key points to someone else in less than one minute.
- Get groups of students to decide on one sentence from the text that best sums it up or is most central to the story. There will probably be some disagreement about this, but the discussion should help students sort out key points and help you see how they are interpreting the text.

❊ *Jigsaw Reading*

You need three or four different readings around the same topic. If you have varying reading levels in the class, include a simpler reading and a more challenging reading. Place students in expert/home grouping. Each group first becomes an "expert" in one of the readings and then shares the information in a mixed group. This kind of activity gives reading a real purpose, since the aim is to share what one has read with others. It is also a useful way of having readers at different levels work collaboratively (even the poorer readers will be able to contribute in the group since their reading will have information that other members in the group don't have). Finally, it provides an authentic context for developing summarizing skills, since each group of experts must decide on the key points they are later going to share with others. Depending on the level of the students, it may be useful to focus on note-making skills here, or to provide an information grid to guide students in locating key information.

✳ *Reading Aloud*

Listening to an experienced reader helps learners recognize that good readers make meaning, and it plays an important role in the development of reading competence. While this is especially important for young learners, the value of reading aloud should not be neglected with older learners. Serializing a longer book presents many opportunities for predicting what will happen. Or you may choose to simply whet children's appetites by reading only part of a book and leaving it for them to finish. It is also important to read nonfiction texts with students. This will help them get used to the more complex language patterns of transactional prose, and to familiarize them with different kinds of texts.

After-Reading Activities

These activities are based on the assumption that students are already familiar with the text, and no longer have basic comprehension difficulties in reading it. The activities use the text as a springboard, and may fulfill any of these three major purposes:

1. To use the now-familiar text as a basis for specific language study, such as to focus on a particular item of grammar, idiom, or phonic knowledge that occurs in the text.
2. To allow students an opportunity to respond creatively to what they have read, such as through art or drama activities.
3. To focus students more deeply on the information in the text, such as by using information transfer activities that represent the information in a different form (e.g., a time line or a diagram).

Well-designed after-reading activities usually require students to keep returning to the text and rereading it to check on specific information or language use.

✳ *Story Innovation*

Story innovation can be a teacher-led or small-group activity. Using the original story as a basis, key words are changed to make a new story, while retaining the underlying structure. For example, students could change the characters in the folktale *The Elephant and the Mouse* to a whale and a little fish. While the central meaning of the tale should remain the same (the weak helps the strong and they become friends), key words and events are changed to fit in with the new characters. As the changes are made, the story is written up on a large sheet of paper.

✳ *Innovating on the Ending*

Write a new ending to a story, in groups or as a whole class.

✳ *Cartoon Strip*

In groups, or individually, students turn the story into a cartoon strip, using the words of the dialogue in the original to write in the "speech bubbles."

✳ *Readers' Theatre*

In its simplest form, you provide a group of children with copies of the story. Each chooses the dialogue of one of the characters to read, while other children share the narration. This can be practiced until it is word perfect and then performed to the class. Readers' Theatre is a much better context for children reading aloud than the traditional "reading around the class," since it allows them a chance to *practice* the reading (which is what adults would do if they knew they were going to read in front of others), and it provides a meaningful purpose for the reading.

Depending on their reading and language levels, some children can write scripts based on the story. Puppets can also be used in Readers' Theatre.

✳ *Wanted Posters*

Ask students to design a wanted poster for a character in a story, incorporating as much of the information in the text as possible (who they are, their description, what events are associated with them, and so on).

✳ *Story Map*

A story map is a visual representation of the main features of a story. It can be drawn after a story is read, or it can involve an ongoing process of adding details as the story is progressing.

✳ *Time Lines*

Texts that incorporate the passage of time lend themselves to a time line. These include narratives and some information texts (e.g., those that relate to events in history, or to the description of life cycles or processes). Children can also illustrate key events on the time line.

✳ *Hot Seat*

This activity is based on a narrative text. Children are seated in a circle, with one chair being designated the "hot seat." The student in the hot seat represents a character from a book that has been shared by the class. Other students ask him or her questions to find out more about the character's life. Questions might include the following: *Where do you live? Can you tell us about some of your friends? What do you most enjoy doing? How did you feel when . . . ? What do you think of* (*another character in the book*)? Children take turns being in the hot seat. While they are free—and should be

encouraged—to invent information, they mustn't say anything that is inconsistent with the story or with what has been learned from the other hot-seaters.

After a while, play around with the time frame of the story by moving into the past or the future. Get children to stand and slowly walk counterclockwise in a circle, and as they are walking tell them they are time travelers going backward in time. Give the children a specific point in time, such as "Now it's seventy years ago and the old woman in the story is just a little girl." Continue the hot seat activity as before, constructing an earlier life for one of the characters. Later, children can move clockwise around the circle, forward in time, until young characters in the story are now old people, or perhaps they are now dead and are being remembered by others.

In this way the original story takes on a further life, and children will have a wealth of ideas for their own story writing. Rereading the original story, now that so much is "known" about the entire lives of some of the characters, also becomes a very thought-provoking and enriching reading experience.

❊ *Freeze Frames*

Freeze frames are a kind of drama activity that show a series of tableaux representing key stages in a story. Each tableau is a "still," with the students taking the role of specific characters. Simple props can be used. The audience members close their eyes while the group prepares the first tableau, and at a signal from the group, they open their eyes and look at it for about ten seconds. Then they close their eyes again while the group prepares the second tableau, and so on until the story is told. The audience thus views the actions as a series of frozen frames. Groups will need some time to prepare this. They first need to decide on what the key stages are (see the previous chapter for the overall structure of a narrative), then decide how they will represent them, and finally practice moving from one to the other as quickly as possible (otherwise the audience will not keep their eyes closed!). Since freeze frames do not require students to say anything at the presentation stage, even newly arrived children will be able to participate fully in the freeze frame. At the same time, the preparation of the frames requires students to discuss important elements of the story and make decisions about how to portray the characters and events.

❊ *Cloze*

Traditional cloze exercises, the device of deleting words from a text, can be based on the text that has been read. When you make the deletions, you should keep at least the first and last sentences intact so that students have a context in which to read the text. Encourage students first to read the cloze straight through before they attempt to fill in the gaps. To provide extra support for lower-level readers, you can give students a list of the words that have been left out.

Originally, cloze exercises were aimed at testing rather than teaching. However, in more recent years, their potential for developing learners' reading strategies has been

recognized. A well-constructed cloze can give you information about what kinds of strategies children are using to predict meaning, and it can help children think about their own reading strategies. Traditional cloze involves deleting every fifth, sixth, or seventh word, and it encourages readers to reference backward and forward in the text to work out what the missing words are likely to be. It therefore mirrors the kind of reading strategies used by proficient readers. However, cloze exercises can also be used more selectively, with only certain kinds of words deleted. For example, you can choose to delete key content vocabulary that is integral to the topic, or grammatical items such as adjectives, connectives, pronouns, past tenses, and so forth. Cloze exercises are often more successful when students work in pairs, since there will be discussion about why certain choices are made. The aim is not simply for children to get the "right" answer but to become aware of what they do when they read.

After finishing a cloze, always allow time for discussion. Children should be able to *justify* the words they have chosen and *explain* to others their rationale for their choice. To make this discussion easier for the class, put the cloze on an overhead so that it is easier to talk about the possible and most appropriate choices with the class. (Remember that while there is often a range of possible and appropriate words to fill "content" gaps, there is a much smaller range of options for grammatical items.)

❊ *Monster Cloze*

This consists of only a title and gaps. It can be based on the text the students have read, or on a summary of it. Write the *title* of the passage on the board in full. The passage itself, however, consists of only the gaps! Students guess the missing words (in any order), and the teacher writes in any correct words in the appropriate gap. After the sentences are partially completed, students should be able to predict more and more of the words of the passage by using their knowledge of the topic and of the language.

❊ *Vanishing Cloze*

This is a further variation on cloze. Select a short excerpt from the text the students have read (three or four sentences only, or a shorter section for beginners) or a summary of it. Write the excerpt on the board, and ask students to read it aloud together. Erase one word from anywhere in the text. Students read it again, putting back the missing word. Erase another word and repeat the process. Continue until all the words are removed, so that students are now "reading" from memory. It's important that after each word is removed, students repeat the reading; this requires them to replace more and more words each time. These repeated readings are especially helpful if the text contains a tricky grammatical structure or subject-specific vocabulary that the students are currently learning, since it provides a context for repetition that is both fun and challenging.

❊ *Text Reconstruction*

Cut an excerpt from the text into paragraphs or sentences. Students must put the sentences or paragraphs in the right order and explain why they have chosen that order. This is a good context for focusing on text cohesion and drawing attention to reference words and conjunctions.

❊ *Consonant Groups*

Children sort a number of small objects (e.g., a pencil, pen, paper, box, ball, lid, leaf) or pictures of objects into groups, depending on their initial sound. You can use this either as a general reading activity, or you could base the words on those in the text the children have just read. For young children, you could make up class collections of pictures that are kept in boxes labeled with their initial letter. Encourage children to bring pictures from magazines to add to the collection. These "consonant boxes" can also be used for sorting activities.

❊ *Phonic Families*

Use a familiar Big Book and the masking technique to focus on how particular sounds are represented by particular letters or clusters of letters (e.g., the sound /ai/ as represented by *igh*). Begin to build up lists of words that contain the same sound and are spelled the same way.

❊ *Jumbled Sentences*

For beginner readers, take a sentence from the text and write it on a strip of cardboard. Cut up the sentence into words. Children must reconstruct the sentence by putting the words into the right order. For very early readers, make this a simpler task by providing the model sentence on a separate strip. Children then place the cut-up words on top of the matching words on the sentence strip.

❊ *Picture and Sentence Matching*

Take about six illustrations with matching sentences from the book. Cut them up into separate pictures and sentences. Children match the pictures with the appropriate sentences.

❊ *True/False Questions*

Children decide on whether a number of statements about the text are true or false. Make sure that these involve inferential as well as literal comprehension. Literal statements can be checked directly against the information in the text, whereas the truth of inferential statements needs to be inferred from the text. Here are examples of both types.

Sentence in the text: *The earthquake struck at three o'clock in the afternoon.*
Literal statement: *The earthquake struck at three o'clock. TRUE OR FALSE?*
Inferential statement: *The earthquake struck during the daytime. TRUE OR FALSE?*

In general, inferential statements (and questions) give you a better idea of how much readers have understood, since literal questions can often be answered correctly without comprehension of meaning (for an example of this, see Gibbons 1993, 70).

❊ *Questioning the Text*

As we discussed earlier, being able to read critically is an important part of being truly literate. To alert children to the hidden messages of text, and the underlying assumptions about reality made by the writer, teachers need to ask different kinds of questions and use different kinds of activities from those normally associated with text comprehension. Here are some examples.

- Focus on the pictures and on what the characters are doing. For a book where family life is depicted, you might ask things like *What is the mother doing? What is the father doing? Do all mothers and fathers do these things? What other things do mothers and fathers do?* Seek to show children that books do not necessarily depict the "whole truth," and that other kinds of reality and role options also exist. Try to be inclusive of all children's experiences.
- Discuss with children what the characters are like. Ask: *What words are used to describe the characters? When the characters are mentioned in the text, what words can you find in the text that tell you about them?* This will focus children's attention on what the characters are doing, and how they are described. It will also require them to go back to the text to reread parts of it with a more critical perspective.
- Make lists with the children of words or ideas that are associated with key people in the text. This is an interesting activity to use with information texts, too. In one classroom, the children were comparing how a particular sports writer wrote about top male and female athletes, and what kinds of information and descriptive words were included (or omitted). They found that considerably more was written about the physical appearance of the women, including words relating to their attractiveness, than was written about the men. It was also noted that some were mothers! Conversely, much more relevant information (about their athletic prowess and previous career) was included for the men, but much less space was devoted to information about their family life. Yet until the children set out to look for these associations, or collocations, and list the kinds of information the text included, they had not noticed these differences. When helping children develop critical perspectives on what they read, remember that it is also important to look at what is *not* said.

- Have children rewrite a folktale, changing the key physical or personality characteristics of the characters.
- Talk with the children about stereotyping. In one classroom, the children were reading a story set in Fiji, which contained very stereotypical views of life on a tropical island. As one of the children in the class had recently arrived from Fiji, the teacher assigned him the role of informant, whom other children could question about everyday life in Fiji. Later, having decided that the book did not represent the Fiji they had learned about from their classmate, a group rewrote the book. They had learned a useful lesson: what you read is not necessarily "true."

A word of warning when you are helping children read critically. Taking a critical perspective may lead into discussions that are highly connected to children's lives. Be prepared for this, and treat the personal stories that may result with empathy and sensitivity. Avoid forcing children to contribute to any discussion they are not comfortable with; however, in an open and nonthreatening environment, we should try not to shy away from the issues that the books themselves present. And equally important, children should not be left feeling helpless or positioned as "victims." Positive strategies and ways of action should result from critical discussions, such as the rewriting of the book about Fiji. Other actions might include making new and more inclusive illustrations for a text, or a class letter to a newspaper editor.

Choosing Books: A Reason for Turning the Page

There is considerable evidence to suggest that, while overall language development supports reading, so too does reading support language development (Wallace 1988, 1992). Language is learned through reading; it is not simply a prerequisite for it. Given appropriate texts, learners develop their language skills in the course of reading itself, perhaps because the patterns of language are "open to notice" in written language in a way that they are not in spoken language. So the more fluently and widely that ESL students read, the more exposure to the second language they will gain.

Research also suggests that second language learners are able to determine the meanings of quite large numbers of unfamiliar English structures *if* they are presented in the context of meaningful sentences (see, for example, Elley 1984; Wallace 1988). This implies that particular language structures don't have to be in the active repertoire of learners (i.e., able to be used) to be understood in reading. As long as learners have a sense of the overall meaning of what they read, wide reading is an effective way of learning *new* language items, not simply of reinforcing or practicing old ones.

One clear implication of this view of the role of reading in language development is that the books that children read must provide a rich linguistic environment. In the past, many books used in school were written simply to "teach reading." Here is an example of the kind of language common to such books:

Page 1 See John. See Susan.
Page 2 See John and Susan run.
Page 3 Here is Rex.
Page 4 Here is the ball. See Rex run.
Page 5 Run Rex run. Run Susan run! Run John run.

It is true that a few children appear to gain some satisfaction from being able to decode such books, but we should ask ourselves what they are learning about reading if this represents their major reading diet, and whether this route to reading is the most productive for second language learners.

First, books like this are in some ways much more difficult to read than a complete story, especially for young readers, because it is almost impossible to predict what will come next. Thus learners are forced into total reliance on phonics. Because they are led to concentrate on the visual and phonic characteristics of words, they are led away from an understanding of text as coherent language. Of course, the major rationale for the choice of words in this instance is not to present authentic language, but to present a particular sound or word as frequently as possible. But as Wallace (1988) comments, "Books that set out to teach reading are frequently not so much books as strings of sentences that do not connect to build up any kind of text with a beginning, a middle and an end" (150). The pages quoted here can in fact be read backwards, putting the last sentence first, without any loss or much change of meaning! Learners are thus encouraged to think that reading is a random activity that can apparently start or stop at any point in the text, and that we read words or sentences but not continuous text. Such books also seem to assume, quite wrongly, that short words are "easier" to read. Yet we have all had experience of very young children recognizing salient words in their environment, such as the McDonald's sign or their own name. And we have also probably had children who can happily read words like *dinosaur* or *Pokemon* but balk at words like *was*, *ball*, or *toy* in basal readers.

Texts like the one shown here are also functionally empty; there is little meaning to be had and no access to the rich models of language that are so important for ESL children. And finally, as many children, their teachers, and their families know, books like this are mind-numbingly boring.

Books like this are mind-numbingly boring

We don't, of course, want learners to learn lessons like this. Rather, as Wallace (1988) succinctly puts it, "We want to give learner-readers a reason for turning the page" (151). Good readers read for pleasure, to extend their worldview, to read more about what interests them, or to find out things they want or need to know about. And these are the sorts of purposes for reading we want children to have. As I argued earlier,

children should not be restricted to the familiar, the known, and the "easy," and fed a watered-down version of written language. Rather, as the activities in this chapter aim to do, the challenge for teachers is to find ways of giving learners *access to* well-written children's literature and relevant information texts.

There are many criteria for choosing books, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss these in detail. But for beginning readers who are learning to read in their second language, books that have the following characteristics will be supportive of early reading.

- Repetitive language that becomes familiar to children so that they can begin to join in (e.g., *Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man*).
- A repetitive event that builds up into a cumulative story (e.g., *First the farmer, then his wife, then the child, then the dog, then the cat, then the mouse . . . all tried to pull up the giant turnip*). Many stories include a repetitive structure of this sort, which decreases the comprehension load on ESL children. Once they understand the event, they are able to transfer their understanding to each repetition.
- Universal themes (e.g., good triumphs over evil), universal motifs (e.g., three sons or daughters, the two eldest of whom are bad, the youngest of whom is good), and the teaching of moral behavior (e.g., kindness gets rewarded).
- Illustrations that clearly represent the meanings in the text and that can be used as cues to meaning.
- Clear print and well-laid-out pages that are not too "busy."
- Good, authentic models of language that doesn't sound contrived.
- Content and language that, while it might not be immediately accessible, can be "bridged" for ESL readers.
- Content and language that can be used to extend children's knowledge about reading and about the world.
- Content that is of interest and that will be enjoyable to read.

As this list suggests, probably one of the best ways to introduce reading to ESL children is by using fairytales. These seem to incorporate some kind of "universal schema" that children from all cultures are able to relate to. Because of their universality in terms of overall themes and motifs, they are likely to make sense to children in ways that other texts may not, and even where specific characters and settings in the stories are different, many cultures share basic stories in common.

For older learners who are reading longer factual texts, the following is also important:

- Clear overall text organization. The better organized a text is, the easier it is to understand, and the more the reader is able to engage in higher-level processes such as summarizing and inferring.

- Clear signaling devices. The structure and content of a well-organized text is highlighted by such devices as titles, headings, clear topic sentences, and text cohesion.
- Appropriate conceptual density. New concepts should be spaced, and contain sufficient elaboration to make them understandable.
- Good instructional devices, such as a logically organized table of contents, glossary, index, graphic overviews, diagrams, and summaries.

In addition, the choice of books to use with your students will be affected by a number of other factors, such as their age, interests, and overall reading abilities. It will also be affected by your purpose in using the book. Will the book be used as instructional material aimed to extend a student's reading skills, and thus be a little ahead of the student's independent reading ability? Or is the book intended as part of a wide reading program, and thus something that children should be able to read fairly independently? In terms of the overall reading program, do children have access to a range of books, and a range of genre types? As this chapter has suggested, how comprehensible a book is will also be determined by the kinds of activities you use and the kinds of interactions the children will be engaged in around the text. However, whatever the books you choose, seek to ensure that they will give children "a reason for turning the page."

In Summary

In this chapter we have seen how unfamiliarity with aspects of a text (the knowledge it assumes, the genre, or the language itself) may cause difficulties for second language readers. While in some cases this may lead you to decide not to use a book, it may be more important for learning if, instead, you find ways to build bridges into the text, through the kinds of activities you choose to do before, during, and after reading. In this way, ESL learners can gain access to a wider range of books and richer reading experiences. We have also discussed the inadequacies of approaches that see basic decoding skills as reading, and we have looked at how readers must learn to take on a number of "reader roles." These roles can be developed *simultaneously* as children progress in their reading. Finally, we have looked at the importance of choosing books that encourage children to read—and to want to go on reading.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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