

Reading Best Practices for Students with Developmental Disabilities

Summary: Students with developmental disabilities need extra support when it comes to reading instruction. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, Roberta Schnorr, professor of special education at SUNY-Oswego discusses best practices for structuring reading lessons in a way that supports these students' learning.

Practical Applications

Schnorr focuses specifically on a lesson structure she terms “Structured Shared Reading” with the goal of providing “intensive, individualized reading instruction that includes continuous text instruction, even before individuals have control over early reading behaviors needed to begin guided reading.” The basic lesson structure is as follows:

- *Re-read familiar books (3-5 min.):* The teacher helps students review previously learned reading behaviors (e.g. looking at print) while students re-read books with the “lowest possible teacher support, [focusing on] enjoyment, success, fluency and ‘being readers’.”
- *Phonemic awareness, phonics, and word work (5-7 min.):* The teacher “provides brief, focused modeling and practice of skills for current goals through interactive, teacher-led activities.”
- *Shared reading of new text (15 min.):* The teacher starts by previewing the book through a “rich, interactive” introduction, including building background knowing and previewing vocabulary. Then the teacher and students read the new book together with high levels of teacher support, stopping to discuss and check for comprehension along the way. Next, the teacher and students re-read the book together with less teacher support and no stops. Lastly, the teacher and students respond to the text with the teacher modeling and support student responses.
- *Shared writing connection (5 min.):* “Students co-construct brief shared text with high teacher support related to the new book and re-read their writing with support.”

Overall, key features of a successful Structured Shared Reading lesson include:

- Routines that include “familiar steps, activities and materials.”
- Explicit teacher language including deliberate teacher talk which models many aspects of the reading process, as well as talk that prompts, invites and supports student responses.

Schnorr makes sure to point out that Structured Shared Reading is only one aspect of a comprehensive reading program, noting that these students “should also participate in a variety of rich literacy routines each day, including read-alouds; accessing interesting and age-appropriate texts and content with support, [etc.]”

Conclusion and Citation

For students with developmental disabilities, it is critical that they receive reading instruction that lets them access text and practice reading skills with appropriate supports; Structured Shared Reading is a promising method for accomplishing these goals.

Schnorr, R. “Intensive Reading Instruction for Learners with Developmental Disabilities” *The Reading Teacher*. 65.1 (2011). pp. 35-45 <http://bit.ly/nmGGrS>.