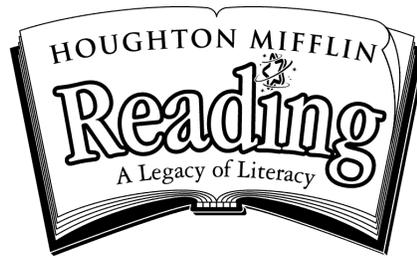


Current Research

IN READING / LANGUAGE ARTS



Using Different Types of Texts for Effective Reading Instruction

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Introduction

Teaching children to read is both exciting and challenging. It is exciting because the gratification that comes from seeing a beginning reader pick up a book and read on his/her own is like no other experience a teacher can have. It is exciting to see older students become mature and accomplished readers.

Teaching reading is challenging because there is so much knowledge that we have gained over the decades and knowing how to use this knowledge becomes critical. Teaching reading is challenging because it is controversial, especially at the beginning levels of instruction. Much of the controversy about beginning reading has focused around phonics and decoding and how these jobs of reading should be taught. Teaching reading is challenging because even with all the knowledge we have, there are *still many questions that we are unable to answer*.

In years past, an oversimplified approach was sometimes taken to reading instruction. Teachers usually had a single book that they used for most or even all their students. Sometimes teachers grouped students and had different students reading in different levels of books. However, as we have gained new knowledge it has become much clearer that in

order to meet the varying needs of students as they learn to read, we need a variety of types of texts. The use of different types of texts is most significant at the beginning levels of reading. The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss the different types of texts that are needed for effective reading instruction.

How Children Learn to Read

Children learn to read in a variety of ways. Researchers and reading specialists agree that as children develop the skill of reading, they go through a variety of developmental stages (Adams, 1990; Chall, 1983; Cooper & Kiger, 2001; Juel, 1991; Rupley, Wilson, & Nichols, 1998). As children progress from beginning reading to mature reading, there are many different strategies and skills that are learned and different tasks that are performed at each stage. For example, at the beginning reading stage, children focus heavily on learning to decode words; as Ehri (1985; 1991; 1997) notes, there are four stages in learning this process: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic (see Pikulski, Templeton, and Chard, 2000, for a full discussion). At the same time,

children are learning the basic elements of becoming effective comprehenders. Beyond the beginning reading stage, most children have mastered decoding and their focus shifts to developing the use of more strategies to help them construct meaning. Each strategy, skill, and task often calls for the use of different types of text. In fact, at any given point on the continuum from beginning reading to mature reading, several different types of texts can and should be used simultaneously. What exactly are the different types of texts that can be used for reading instruction?

Types of Texts for Reading Instruction

There are six distinctly different types of texts that can be used for reading instruction: wordless books; predictable texts; controlled high-frequency vocabulary texts; decodable texts; authentic literature; and created, easy-to-read texts. Presented in *Table 1* is a brief description with major uses for each type of text. All texts can be used at all grade levels but some are more appropriate for beginning reading instruction.

Table 1: Types of Texts for Reading Instruction

Type	Description	Major Use
Wordless Books	Text composed only of illustrations or photographs. No print is given.	A way to help children develop a concept of themselves as readers, develop oral language, and develop self-expression.
Predictable Texts	Texts that utilize a repeated pattern of some type. May be authentic literature or created text.	Used as a way to introduce children to reading through shared reading and to provide practice through repeated readings.
Controlled High-Frequency Vocabulary Texts	Text written specifically for beginning reading instruction using a core of high-frequency words that have been carefully introduced.	Provide practice in reading high-frequency words.
Decodable Texts	Text written using words that utilize decoding skills students have been taught.	Provide practice and application of phonics and structural skills that have been taught.
Authentic Literature	Stories and informational texts where no attempts have been made to control the words, patterns, or decoding elements used in the text. The text is in the original form written by the author.	Used for practice and application of reading once students have developed beginning decoding skills. Also used for shared reading and read aloud.
Created, Easy-to-Read Texts	Stories and informational texts that have been written to control the level of difficulty and some aspect of skill application.	Used for practice and application of reading skills for students who may be experiencing difficulty in certain aspects of learning to read or need practice in applying a targeted skill or strategy.

Wordless Books

Wordless books are a part of the category of children's literature identified as picture books (Norton, 1991). These are books that tell their story or present their information through illustrations or photographs without printed words on the page.

Wordless books have varying degrees of detail and complexity. Therefore, they can be used for a variety of purposes at a variety of levels.

Wordless books have been recommended for developing oral language and self-expression for all students (Strickland, 1977). They are especially useful for working with English language learners (Peregoy & Boyle, 1997). Examples of well-known wordless books include *Bobo's Dream* (Alexander, 1970), *Do You Want to Be My Friend?* (Carle, 1971), and *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick* (Van Allsburg, 1984).

Wordless books are useful for introducing students to the concept of a book. Young children can develop an understanding of what a book is and that it presents a story or information. There is no threat from print on the page and they can be fun for students. Tiedt (2000) recommends the use of wordless books for students even in the middle school. Students at the early stages of literacy development can use these books as ways to develop vocabulary, oral language, and self-expression. Second language learners can use them as a way to build the connection between their native language and English.

There are numerous places in the reading/literacy program where wordless books can be used effectively:

1. During beginning reading to develop oral language, vocabulary, concept of story, and concept of books.
2. For second language learners as they develop their foundation for English reading.
3. For older students in the elementary and middle school levels who need to develop a better understanding of being a reader or for those who need foundational skills. Tiedt (2000) suggests that older students can develop their own wordless books to share with younger readers. Students who might be good artists but dislike reading can utilize their strength in art to help them develop a more positive attitude about reading.

4. For students at all levels, wordless books can serve as a stimulus for writing.

Predictable Texts

Predictable texts are ones that have a repeated pattern of some type. Bridge et al. (1983) identified seven patterns of predictability in texts:

1. Phrase or sentence repeated (example: *The Wheels on the Bus* [Kovalski, 1990])
2. Repetitive-cumulative pattern in which a word, phrase, or sentence is repeated (example: *Moving Day* [Kalan, 1996])
3. Rhyming Patterns (example: *Mrs. McNosh Hangs Up Her Wash* [Weeks, 1998])
4. Familiar cultural sequences, cardinal and ordinal numbers (example: *Feast for Ten* [Falwell, 1993])
5. Familiar cultural sequences, alphabet (example: *Aaron and Gayla's Alphabet Book* [Greenfield, 1992])
6. Familiar cultural sequence, days, months, colors (example: *Chicken Soup with Rice* [Sendak, 1962])
7. Predictable plots (example: *If You Give a Pig a Pancake* [Numeroff, 1998])

Predictable books along with shared reading are often recommended as a way to introduce beginning learners to the feeling of being a reader (Holdaway, 1979). Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, many schools used lots of predictable books in their beginning reading programs.

Predictable texts help children very quickly come to think of themselves as readers. For example, hearing or reading aloud a book such as *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (Martin, 1967) in a shared fashion several times allows children to very quickly be able to recite the text. Often the children memorize the text and can repeat the text without even looking at it. In this way, children think of themselves as readers and have fun reading.

Too much use of predictable text can cause beginning readers to over rely on the illustrations rather than focus on the print for unlocking a new word. Brown (2000) has developed a strong case for using limited amounts of predictable texts to get children who need oral language development started in the process of reading. After students experience success with some predictable text, she would move children into what she calls transitional and decodable texts to help students develop the process of sequential decoding.

Controlled High-Frequency Vocabulary Texts

Historically, controlled high-frequency vocabulary texts were associated with beginning reading instruction (Smith, 1965). A core of high-frequency words is carefully introduced and repeated. These words are often selected from sources such as the Dolch list (Dolch, 1936), the Johnson list (Johnson, 1971), and others. The text might read something like:

Can I go?
I can go.
Can he go?
He can go.
Go! Go!

Using controlled high-frequency vocabulary texts provides children practice in recognizing those words that make up a very high proportion of the words found in beginning reading materials. Just over 100 words account for about half of the running words in texts through third grade (Adams, 1990). Knowing this important core of words should help children read not only texts being used for reading instruction, but other beginning reading texts as well.

High-frequency words can be carefully introduced and practiced in decodable text. Therefore, it is not necessary to have texts that are written exclusively to practice high-frequency words.

Decodable Texts

Decodable texts are ones that contain a high number of words that use the sound-letter relationships that children are being taught as well as a limited number of high-frequency words (Chard & Osborne, 1999). These texts may also include a limited number of “special words” or “story words.” For example, if students know the letter-sound relationships for *m /m/*, *s /s/*, *t /t/*, *p /p/*, *e /e/*, and *a /a/* and the high-frequency and special words *the*, *elephant*, *said*, *no*, and *thank you*, they can read the following story:

Pat and the Elephant

Pat met the elephant.

The elephant met Pat.

Pat sat.

The elephant sat.

The elephant sat on the mats.

The elephant sat and sat.

Pat sat and sat.

Pat said, “Elephant, pat the pets.”

The pets said, “No, thank you, Elephant.”

(Chard & Osborne, 1999)

The benefit of this type of text is that it allows students to practice sequential decoding and develop fluency and automaticity, critical parts of beginning reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000). Students are able to experience immediate success since the text is based on the instruction they have received.

The first major use of texts similar to this type occurred in the 1960s (Bloomfield & Barnhart, 1961). It was referred to as “linguistically controlled text.”

As long ago as 1967, Chall (p. 261) raised the issue that some of the control in beginning reading materials needed to result from a consideration of the phonic elements previously taught. In the example presented above, beginning readers are given an opportunity to apply their decoding skills in a real reading situation.

One of the major issues related to decodable text is the percentage of decodability (number of words that students can decode) that should be required in the text. While there is limited research suggesting

that some decodable texts should be used for beginning reading instruction (Juel & Roper/Schneider, 1985), there is little research to guide the decision about the percentage of decodability a text should have. The best rule of thumb we can follow in reading instruction today is to use decodable text until students become independent in sequential decoding. Recently, some researchers have recommended that especially for potentially low-level beginning readers, decoding should be systematically taught quickly up through about February (Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2000). Decodable texts would be used to apply the skills and strategies being taught in contextual reading. For some students independence in decoding will occur by the end of grade one and for others it may be at a later grade. At the same time, *decodable texts must be used along with other types of texts to help students continue to broaden their oral language base, develop vocabulary, and develop the use of comprehension strategies and skills.*

Selecting decodable texts carefully is very important. Chard and Osborne (1999) offer four guidelines for this process in a beginning reading program:

1. Stories that have a significant proportion of decodable words.
2. A sequence of stories, such that the sound-letter relations the children have learned are cumulatively reviewed in the words of the stories.
3. Stories that are comprehensible.
4. Words in the stories that are in the children's spoken vocabularies. (p. 113)

Even though decodable texts are most important in the beginning reading program, they may be needed in later grades for students who have not achieved independence in decoding. For example, Mrs. Jackson, a fifth-grade teacher, has a group of four students who need limited amounts of decodable text to apply basic phonic skills and strategies they are still learning.

Authentic Literature

Authentic literature (often referred to as "trade book" literature) consists of narrative and expository texts in the original form as written by the author. No editorial attempts are made to make these texts easier by rewriting them to conform to readability guidelines or given vocabulary lists. Authentic literature comes in the form of books, anthology selections, magazines, newspapers, and others.

Authentic literature is motivating for students. It captivates their attention and engages them in learning (Huck, 1989; Sanders, 1987). Authentic literature provides students with natural language texts that continually help them develop and expand their own language structures (Sawyer, 1987). Real literature is generally easy for most students to understand (Simons & Ammon, 1989).

Sometimes authentic literature is too difficult for beginning readers to read on their own. Students often lack the skills to sequentially decode the words in the texts and often do not know many of the high-frequency words included in the text because they have not been taught those words. For this reason, authentic literature needs to be used simultaneously with other types of texts.

Getting students to read authentic literature is the goal of the reading/literacy program. In beginning reading, it should be used as read alouds to develop and expand students' oral language, vocabulary, background, and prior knowledge. The listening experiences at these levels should serve as the basis for directly and systematically teaching critical comprehension strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000).

As soon as students develop some degree of independence in decoding, they should have repeated instructional and independent opportunities to read authentic literature that allows them to apply their strategies and skills to real reading. This literature should be carefully selected so that it is appropriate for the students' reading abilities.

Beyond the beginning reading levels, authentic literature should continue to be used for read alouds to expand students' vocabularies, to increase their understanding of more complex language structures, and to expand their prior knowledge. Authentic literature, both narrative and expository, should continue as the core reading material for students to help them fully develop the abilities of a skilled reader.

Created, Easy-to-Read Texts

Created, easy-to-read texts are ones that are written for students beyond the beginning level of reading to apply various skills and strategies in text below their age-appropriate level of difficulty. These texts provide students who are reading below level the opportunity to practice and apply skills and strategies they are being taught in texts that they can read.

For students who are progressing normally, these texts provide them a chance to practice and apply a particularly difficult strategy or skill in text below their level and continue to practice reading and develop fluency. Once they have mastered the use of the strategy, they can return to their age-appropriate level of text to apply the strategy.

Created, easy-to-read texts should not comprise all of a student's reading experience. These texts, like decodable texts, serve as stepping stones to get students into authentic literature.

Common Uses of All Types of Texts

All of the types of texts discussed can be used in a variety of ways. They can all be leveled or placed in a sequence of difficulty progressing from simple to more complex. This can be done using different sets of criteria depending on the age and grade level being considered (Cooper & Kiger, 2001).

Each type of text can also be used for any type of reading experience—read aloud, instructional reading, guided reading, or independent reading. Some types of texts, as discussed, are more appropriate for some purposes than others, but all texts can be used for a variety of types of reading. The important point to keep in mind is that students must have a variety of types of text in their reading instruction in order to help them become motivated, successful readers. Let's look at how two classrooms might function using different types of texts to accomplish different purposes.

Differentiating Instruction in a Beginning Reading Classroom

Using Different Types of Texts

Ms. Wuthrich has a first grade class of 18 students—10 boys and 8 girls. Four of her students are English language learners who are still speaking predominantly Spanish. Ms. Wuthrich uses a published reading program that has a variety of texts available for instruction. She also uses other resources that she has available. Here is an example of how she uses different types of texts simultaneously on a given day for different purposes:

- **Predictable, Big Book** — Ms. Wuthrich begins the morning by reading aloud a predictable big book to the whole class. Before reading it, she has them discuss the cover and then models how to make predictions. As students make their predictions, Ms. Wuthrich records them on a chart. After reading the book aloud several times, children join in. Her English language learners are also able to take part in this experience. Some children have memorized the text while others are still struggling to remember some of the words. Memorization is a normal part of learning to read. This predictable book is an authentic piece of literature. Later in the week, Ms. Wuthrich will give some children a little version of the big book for rereading.

- **Decodable Text** — As children work at centers, Ms. Wuthrich calls up a small group to read using a decodable text from their program anthology. The text for today includes only words students can sequentially decode because they have had instruction in the phonics skills and high-frequency words required to read the text. After introducing the text, Ms. Wuthrich has students read it silently to tell what happens. After silent reading, she has students read parts aloud to answer questions or prove points. As children read aloud, Ms. Wuthrich notes which children can sequentially decode words using the skills they have been taught. She provides more systematic decoding instruction for children who are experiencing difficulty with the decoding process. She always follows this instruction with practice and application, having them read additional decodable texts.

- **A Wordless Book** — While children continue center work, Ms. Wuthrich calls the English language learners and two native English speakers to participate in a lesson using a wordless book. First, she shows them the book page by page and has them name as many things as they can. She tells them a simple story using each page as a prompt. Children then retell the story to the group and to each other. Finally, Ms. Wuthrich asks children to give two or three words they used as they told their story. She records these on a chart for later use.

- **Authentic Literature** — Later in the day, Ms. Wuthrich reads aloud a story that is rich with vocabulary. Her purpose for doing this is to improve students' abilities to listen and retell a story and to increase their vocabulary. She follows the read aloud with a group discussion of the story.

Notice that on this day, Ms. Wuthrich used four different texts simultaneously for different purposes. On other days, she may use others. Each day changes according to the needs of her students.

Differentiating Instruction in the Upper Grades

Using Different Types of Texts

Mr. Salvo has a fourth grade class of 26 students—14 girls and 12 boys. Five of his students are English language learners who have transitioned into English. He also uses a published reading program plus other resources. Here is how Mr. Salvo uses different types of text simultaneously on the same day for different purposes:

- **Authentic Literature** — Mr. Salvo has his entire class read a short story from a literature anthology. The purpose of using this story is to apply the use of the strategy of summarizing which he has been teaching. In order to meet the varying needs of his students, he divides his class into small groups. Some students read the story independently and write a summary using a story map as a prompt. Another group reads the story under the teacher's direction and completes the story map as a group. They complete their summary orally.

- **Created, Easy-to-Read Texts** — There are several students in Mr. Salvo's class who are having difficulty with the summarizing strategy. Some are having difficulty because they can't read the grade level anthology and others because they have not mastered the strategy. The program that Mr. Salvo is using includes a created story that is several grade levels below the class anthology. He uses this text for guided reading with the group and directs them in completing a story map. He and the students model how to write a summary using the story map as their guide.

- **Decodable Text** — Mr. Salvo has three students who are still having difficulty with decoding. He has borrowed some decodable texts from a lower grade teacher to use for skill application for these students. Today he pulls this group to read the text; it provides application of the decoding skills he has been teaching the students. He has the students read the text silently and then read aloud places to prove points or answer questions. He is able to observe which students are able to use their skills for sequential decoding as they read aloud to prove points.

- **Authentic Literature** — Mr. Salvo has a time to read aloud a chapter from a novel he has been reading to the class. The purpose of this activity is to continue to expand oral language and vocabulary and to promote interest in reading.

Mr. Salvo used four different types of texts for different purposes. As in Ms. Wuthrich's class, a variety of different texts are used for different purposes depending on students' needs.

Conclusion

As you can tell from this discussion, the six types of texts identified can be used to accomplish different purposes to meet different students' needs. As Brown (2000) notes, "By matching text types with their students' reading development, . . . teachers are better able to support students' reading progress" (p. 305). An effective reading/literacy program requires the use of many different types of texts at all phases of literacy development. The variations in the types of text used are greatest at the beginning reading level. However, a variety of types of text are needed across all grades to meet the instructional needs of all students.

All teachers need to be knowledgeable about the different types of texts discussed in this paper and know how to use them to meet the varying needs of students. The old saying that "one size fits all" may work for some products and in some places, but it does not work for reading/literacy development. One text does not fit all students or accomplish all the needed purposes for effective reading/literacy instruction. Multiple types of texts are needed to accomplish the many different purposes of an effective literacy program.

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