Next Step Forward Guided Reading Framework and the "Science of Reading"

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Introduction

This paper will briefly review the major tenets of the "Science of Reading." It will then present the Next Step Small Group lesson framework (Scholastic, 2016) and explain how the lesson components align with current reading science and research.

What is the Science of Reading?

According to the Science of Reading Defining Guide, the Science of Reading is not a reading program, a one-size-fits-all program of instruction, or a single component of instruction. It is a "vast, unfinished, continuously growing, and evolving interdisciplinary body of scientifically based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing." Because reading science continues to evolve, the "science" of reading is subject to numerous interpretations when it's applied to reading instruction (Seidenberg, Borkenhagen, and Kearns, 2020, Afflerbach, 2022, Aukerman, 2022, Thomas, 2022).

What are the Common Models of the Reading Process?

Scientific research has yielded several models that attempt to simplify and explain the complexity of the reading process. The most commonly referenced are the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer 1986), The Reading Rope (Scarborough 2001), and the Active View of Reading (Duke and Cartwright 2021). Although these models illustrate the reading process in different ways, they each agree that beginning readers need a foundation in phonemic awareness and phonics to become skilled at decoding unfamiliar words. They also agree that language comprehension and word recognition are essential.

What is Guided Reading?

Researcher Anita Laquinta describes guided reading as one of the "most important contemporary reading instructional practices in the United States" (Fawson & Reutzel, 2000).

Informed by 40 years of research drawing from cognitive science and linguistic principles, guided reading supports all readers, including striving, advanced and English learners (Pearson 2019, Scharer 2019, Clay 2001, 2005, Fountas & Pinnell 2017). During guided reading a teacher meets with a small group of students and differentiates instruction by targeting specific learning needs, providing appropriate scaffolding, and gradually reducing support to promote independence. These three elements (differentiated instruction, scaffolding, and gradual release) are supported by research and embraced by Structured Literacy.

What is the Next Step Guided Reading Framework?

The Next Step Guided Reading framework is a research-based, comprehensive, small group lesson design that contains explicit and systematic reading instruction (Richardson, 2009, 2016). The lesson design provides targeted, differentiated instruction in phonemic awareness, alphabetics, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing—all critically important elements in a science-based reading program.

Emergent and Early Plan Levels A–I 20 minutes each day	
Day 1	**Day 2**
Sight Word Review	Sight Word Review
Introduce and Read a New Book With Prompting	Reread the Book With Prompting
Discuss and Teach	Discuss and Teach
Word Study	Guided Writing

Transitional and Fluent Plan Levels J–Z 20 minutes each day		
Day 1	**Day 2**	**Day 3**
Introduce a New Book	Read the Book With Prompting	Guided Writing
Read the Book With Prompting	Discuss and Teach	
Discuss and Teach	Word Study	

Although Next Step Guided Reading incorporates elements of the Simple View and the Reading Rope, it embraces the more recent research depicted in Duke and Cartwright's Active View of Reading (AVR). The AVR emphasizes the importance of active self-regulation, which includes motivation and engagement, executive skills, and strategy use.

A major criticism of guided reading is that the small groups are not designed to be flexible. The Next Steps Guided Reading framework, however, guides teachers in using authentic, formative assessments and daily observations to form needs-based, flexible groups that will change in composition as students progress. The framework also emphasizes using challenging texts and providing immediate feedback, which is strongly supported by scientific research (Fisher, Frey, and Hattie 2020).

Small flexible groups. CIERA (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement) investigated the practices of accomplished reading teachers. They found that "Time spent in small group instruction for reading distinguished the most effective teachers from other teachers in the study" (Taylor 2000). Small groups give teachers the opportunity to provide focused, explicit instruction in specific areas of need.

Challenging texts. During guided reading children read texts that are appropriately calibrated to their needs. Research has shown that texts used for instruction should not be too easy or too hard. As students read, errors are "expected and celebrated" because they are "opportunities for learning" (Fisher, Frey, and Hattie, 2016, p. 31). Tomlinson (2005) noted, "Our best understanding suggests that a student only learns when work is moderately challenging that student, and where there is assistance to help the student master what initially seems out of reach" (p. 22). In other words, there is a "sweet spot" for learning.

Responsive Feedback. During a Next Step Guided Reading lesson, teachers provide immediate affirmative and/or corrective feedback. The small-group context provides opportunities for teachers to observe individual students and make in-the-moment instructional decisions that help move the student's learning forward. "When students are engaged in appropriately challenging tasks, they are more likely to respond to feedback because they need that information to continue growing and learning" (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 23).

Next Step Guided Reading aligns with Reading Science

In 1997, the United States Congress convened a National Reading Panel to assess research-based approaches to teaching children how to read. The panel concluded that the best approach is one that incorporates what is commonly called the Five Pillars of Reading:

- Phonemic awareness – the ability to hear, recognize, and manipulate sounds
- Phonics – matching sounds to letters and letter patterns
- Vocabulary – understanding the meaning of words
- Fluency – the ability to read accurately and expressively
- Comprehension – the ability to understand and retain important information to create meaning from text.

Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) is often used to evaluate a reading program's alignment with reading science. The elements are background information, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge (also referred to as print concepts), phonological awareness, decoding, and sight vocabulary. These skills, as well as those identified by the Five Pillars of Reading, are explicitly and systematically taught in the Next Steps Lesson framework.

The following chart illustrates how the Next Step lesson components correlate with valid reading science.

Correlation of Next Step Lesson Components and Reading Science

Lesson Component	Description	Elements of Reading Science
Read and Discuss a New Book Day 1	After the teacher briefly introduces unfamiliar vocabulary, the students read a slightly challenging text while the teacher confers with individuals. The teacher teaches a variety of decoding strategies and prompts students to read with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.	Phonics Fluency Vocabulary Reading comprehension Language comprehension Background knowledge Language structures Verbal reasoning

	The reading is followed by a group discussion that delves into deeper levels of comprehension and vocabulary.	Literacy knowledge Word recognition Self-regulation Strategy use
Learn Sight Words Day 1	Students are engaged in multimodal activities to develop orthographic mapping of high-frequency words so that they become sight words, quickly recognized without conscious effort.	Phonics Word recognition Decoding
Word Study Day 1	Teachers use assessments to identify student needs and provide explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, spelling, vocabulary, and morphology. Phonics instruction follows an established scope and sequence (Appendix A) and includes evidence-based practices such as picture sorting, making word chains with magnetic letters, Elkonin boxes, and using familiar spelling patterns to read and write unfamiliar words.	Phonemic awareness Phonics Vocabulary
Reread Familiar Books Day 2	Students reread books to improve accuracy and fluency. The reading is followed by a group discussion that delves into deeper levels of comprehension and vocabulary.	Phonics Fluency Vocabulary Reading comprehension Language comprehension Background knowledge Language structures Verbal reasoning

		Literacy knowledge Word recognition Decoding
Guided Writing Day 2	Students extend their comprehension by writing about the book. They are encouraged to include high frequency words and/or vocabulary they have learned in previous lessons.	Phonemic awareness Phonics Vocabulary Word recognition Reading comprehension Language structures Literacy knowledge

Although writing is not specifically mentioned in the Five Pillars of Reading or Scarborough's Reading Rope, extensive research has revealed positive effects for integrating reading and writing (Lehr, 1981, Clay, 2001, Graham & Hebert, 2011). Writing about their reading helps children solidify phonemic awareness, phonics, orthography, word recognition, language structures, newly learned vocabulary, and comprehension.

Closing thoughts

The Next Steps Guided Reading is designed to support teachers as they help children become better readers. In addition to being research-based, the strongest argument for Next Steps Guided Reading is that it integrates reading, writing, and phonics. Teaching phonics and decoding words in isolation does not guarantee that children will transfer their acquired knowledge to reading and writing. As phonics expert Wiley Blevins (2019) states, "Students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skills to authentic reading and writing experiences, rather than isolated skill-and-drill work" (page 6). He recommends that at least half of phonics instruction should be applying the skills to authentic reading and writing. The Next Step Guided Reading framework teaches phonics and spelling and provides for an engaging, purposeful transfer of those skills to reading

and writing. The goal is simple: Help all students become proficient readers who just can't wait to read another book!

Appendix A: Next Steps Scope and Sequence for Teaching Phonics

Word Study Skills by Text Level and Reading Stage				
Text Level	**Reading Stage**	**Skill Focus**		
A	**Emergent**	• Initial consonants	• Long vowels	
B		• Initial and final consonants	• Short *a* and *o*	
C		• All short vowels	• CVC words	
D	**Early**	• Digraphs	• Onset-rime	
E		• Initial blends	• Onset-rime	
F		• Final blends	• Onset-rime	
G		• Initial and final blends	• Silent *e*	• Onset-rime
H		• Silent *e*	• Vowel patterns	• Inflectional endings
I		• Silent *e*	• Vowel patterns	• Inflectional endings
J–K	**Transitional**	• Silent *e* • Vowel patterns • *r*-controlled vowels	• Inflectional endings with spelling changes	• Compound words
L–M		• Vowel patterns • *r*-controlled vowels	• Inflectional endings with spelling changes • Compound words	• Prefixes • Suffixes
N–P		• Vowel patterns	• Inflectional endings with spelling changes	• Prefixes • Suffixes
Q–Z	**Fluent**	• Affixes and roots		

Richardson, J. and Dufresne, M. (2019)

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