
**SECTION FOUR:
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR READING AND WRITING**

TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SCHOOLS

Elliot Eisner, a well known curriculum theorist, talks of teaching as an artistry or craftsmanship. However teaching is much more than craftsmanship or artistry. Artists and craftspersons shape materials into new configurations. Their materials do not have minds of their own and do not make their own hypotheses about what the world is all about. The materials of the artist and craftsperson react to being shaped or molded into new patterns. The student, on the other hand, does more than react. The student, unlike the piece of clay or canvas, is also seeking patterns and meaning. The fact that someone sets out with the intent to teach does not mean that learning is ensured. Similarly, the fact that learning occurs does not mean that something was taught.

Within schools, teaching and learning operate on two separate tracks which only cross over every now and again. The teacher teaches and the learner learns. Sometimes one is ahead of the other. Sometimes one is behind the other. The optimal times in classrooms are those in which teaching and learning meet. These are the times in which what the learner wants to know and what the teacher wants to teach are matched. The Russian psychologist, Vygotsky, calls this time when the learner benefits from the guidance of another the "*zone of proximal development*". It is similar to another concept in psychology referred to as the "optimal mismatch" when the teacher is just ahead of where the learner is. For the learner this means that he or she is unable to perform the task alone but yet the learner has sufficient knowledge to perform it with the help of another person.

Although it is acknowledgably difficult to work with large groups and teach in each child's zone of proximal development, classroom arrangements can be made in which more opportunities for personalized or one-to-one interactions with the teacher can occur. These types of interactions will allow more opportunities for teaching in the zone of proximal development.

Teaching in the zone of proximal development is especially important for students experiencing difficulty because they need to feel success and they can attain this feeling if they feel their questions and hypotheses are valued. For example, in one recent reading tutorial a seven-year-old student had completed reading a story. Upon completion of the reading, his tutor was preparing to move to something else when the student said, "No, wait, wait!" and began to turn the pages back to the beginning of the story. He searched on the first page of the story, pointed to the word "into" and said, "Look, it's got in and to. How come?" The tutor explained that **into** was a compound word, explained what compound words were, gave a few examples, and had the student find some compound words around the room. For several days afterwards, the student would stop (sometimes midspeech) to comment that a certain word he had just said or read was a compound word and would prove it by stating each part.

In the above example, the student was reaching towards new insights about language. The tutor extended those insights at a time when the student was quite open to guidance. The teacher, armed with theoretical knowledge about learning, must take advantage of opportunities as they arise and must try to structure learning experiences that encourage opportunities to arise. For the teacher, the student is the ultimate guide for teaching.

CONCEPTS UNDERLYING THE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES IN THIS HANDBOOK

The instructional strategies presented in this section of the handbook are directly related to the assessment strategies outlined in the previous section. **Like the assessment strategies, the instructional strategies should be used flexibly and should be changed as you see fit.** Most of them can be used within the context of the regular classroom and some may provide suggestions for altering present classroom arrangements.

Pillars of language teaching and learning

The fundamental basis for learning is action. We do not learn to hammer nails into boards by seeing photos, reading about the process or even by observing. These activities support learning but the optimal learning experience is activity with hammers and nails.

We learn language by using it.

*We learn to read by reading and
we learn to write by writing.*

These two statements are foundational in helping children with difficulties. They may also be problematic for some who will say -- "but they can't read/write right now, so how can they learn by reading/writing? It just doesn't make sense. I have to break down the process for them." This type of view has persisted for some time and fails to give credit to children as hypotheses makers and learners.

These same children who are about to formally learn about the written language system learned to use oral language by speaking. **This does not mean that we should leave children on their own in the development of understandings about written language.** In learning oral language, children were supported by adults and older children who focused on the meaning and intent behind utterances and extended those utterances with a focus on meaning. Children did not develop oral language in a vacuum. Neither should or can they develop written language in a vacuum. Rather, adults, by valuing children's attempts at reading and writing and by building on those attempts in order to guide the children

towards convention, can help them come to understandings of the uses and power that written language holds.

Language should not be fragmented.

A focus on language use means that we do not isolate language into bits and fragments in order to teach it. In fact, the **Department of Education Program of Studies** states that "*skill instruction should be context based ...*" (p. 18), and that the once-popular approach of phonics workbooks "should NOT be used in our primary schools" (**Program of Studies**, 1989-1990, p. 19). Rather, sounds, if they are to be taught, should be taught in the context of language use. This does not mean that they are to be taught in the context of a phonics worksheet. Instead they must be taught as part of the activities of real reading and writing of signs, stories and other material that serve genuine purposes.

Real literature should be used for reading.

Writing should be functional.

Reading material that will allow students to build upon their own knowledge of oral language should form the basis of the reading instructional program. This type of material can be found in **good quality literature for children and young adolescents**. Such material does not have the artificially sounding language patterns of the old basal reading programs (and, unfortunately some of the current ones). There is a flow to the language which makes the syntax predictable and the story concepts are interesting and meaningful. By allowing students to use their knowledge of both syntax and semantics, the reliance on sampling from the graphophonic system is reduced and the focus shifts from "knowing words" to "making sense".

Writing that is functional can take many forms. Notes between students and teachers (instrumental purposes), journal writing (personal purposes), letter writing (informational/personal purposes), sign writing (regulatory purposes), story writing (imaginative purposes) and many other activities allow writing to become meaningful for the student. Again, helping the student move towards convention in writing should occur in the context of the writing activity. If the student has a purpose for writing, the problem will not be getting the student to start writing but getting the student to stop.

*Student knowledge must be built upon
and yet expanded.*

Students must feel free to take risks.

Students enter schools with a wealth of personal knowledge. They know of things that are beyond their teacher's knowledge and of things that are within their teacher's knowledge. This can be easily demonstrated by examining the journal entries for one student in a rural area of the province. Over the course of a year and a half the Grade Two student wrote approximately 2500 words in his journal. The sheer volume of work in itself is revealing. How many fill-in-the-blank pages would have had to be done to accomplish this amount of writing? However, there are even more notable qualities about this student's writing.

First of all, the student wrote about what was meaningful to him. If you thumb through the pages of the journal, you read of moose hunting, spotting rabbits on the bog, picking berries, loosing teeth, flankers from cap guns, trails for skidoos, trouting, grouse, robins, squirrels, putting up clotheslines, Bonfire night and a wealth of other topics that tell this child's personal story. These topics are interwoven with school life and make up the fabric of what the student knows. These topics can become springboards to new worlds with the teacher's guidance.

January



'I got some caps
for my cap gun
yesterday. Flankers
come from it when I
pull the trigger.

Secondly, the world of the journal is a world in which this student feels free to take risks and explore language. If the spelling development of individual words is focused on, this student clearly demonstrated a willingness to explore in his writing a gradual move towards convention. For example, the student used the word "road" seventeen times and spelled it seven different ways -

<i>road</i>	(1)
<i>rod</i>	(1)
<i>rode</i>	(2)
<i>roed</i>	(2)
<i>roode</i>	(2)
<i>rooed</i>	(8)
<i>roowe</i>	(1)

The pattern of the spelling is very revealing. The student's first use of the word was as "rod". After this point, the student appeared to have come to the realization that there were at least two vowels in this word and began to experiment with different ones. The conventional spelling of "road" occurred as the fifteenth use of the word and will likely take over as the most frequent spelling for "road". This student's hypothesis about language can be seen as an interrelated network when some of the spellings for "road" are compared with those for "snowing" (snooing, snowing). If this student had felt that he could not take a chance and spell some words wrong, then this exploration with language would not have been possible and much of this writing would be non-existent. Learning must involve exploring possibility and not finding out about the impossibilities.

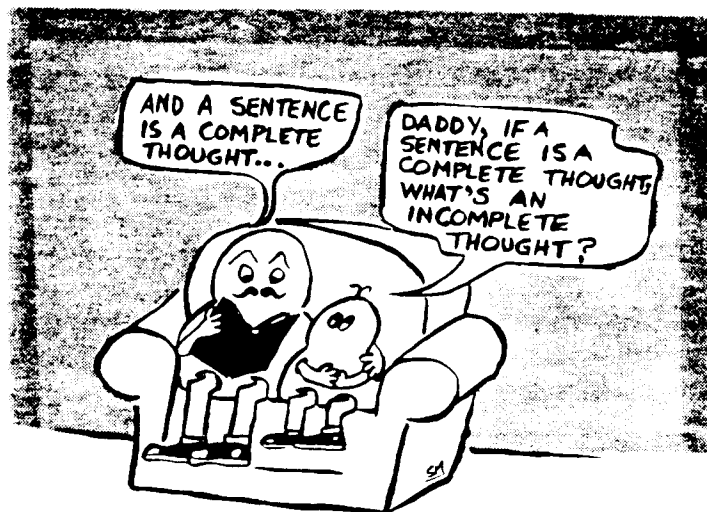
Outline for instructional strategies

The instructional strategies presented are based on the idea that teaching and learning is a cooperative process which is negotiated by the participants. Learners make hypotheses about print and teachers extend and build upon those hypotheses.

The assessment strategies that were presented could, for the most part be done in the context of day to day teaching. Gathering reading and writing samples for analysis is part of teaching. Analysis of those samples, the more detailed work in the assessment strategies, could be done outside of the context of the classroom. The assessment strategies were ways of observing and categorizing what was observed. The instructional strategies are merely extensions of the assessment strategies. They move from observation to action. In fact, many of the instructional strategies presented will seem to be obvious routes to follow as a result of the assessments.

The instructional strategies will parallel the assessment strategies section with similar strategy titles. They will be presented as instructional strategy clusters with the following format: **purpose, preparation, activity, and modifications**. Additional sources for strategies are noted where pertinent. The instructional strategies presented in this handbook are merely beginnings. Some of the strategies are very **general** while others are very **specific**. The strategies are written with the understanding that you cannot force students to understand and to make hypotheses. If you attempt to do that you will get "pseudo-learning" -- a type of learning in which students say the right things and perform the right

actions even though you know that they really do not seem to understand what it is they are doing. The overall goal of instruction is to lead students to the point where they can independently make the hypotheses about language that will make them want to go further in exploring it.



STRATEGIES AS A BASIS FOR THE INDIVIDUALIZED PROGRAM PLAN

In Section One of this handbook, a general framework for assisting students with learning difficulties was presented. As noted in that Section, if the modification of teaching strategies proves unsuccessful for a student, then that student's case is referred to the Program Planning Team (PPT) for consideration.

The work of the PPT is guided by three fundamental concerns -

ASSESSMENT CONCERNS

1. What do we know about the student's strengths and needs? [Do we need more information? If so, what persons and methods will give us the kind of information we need?]

OBJECTIVES CONCERNS

2. Given this information, what goals can we set for the student?

PROGRAM CONCERNS

3. Given the goals we have set, how do we go about achieving these goals?

One way to structure PPT meetings is to organize them clearly around these concerns. In a working meeting each team member could have each of these questions on a different sheet of paper and this would form the basis for discussion. (See following sample). Structuring discussions and findings in an open-ended manner in the working sessions can avoid some of the confining limitations that may be encountered when trying to work with pre-specified categories and spaces on forms.

If a PPT were using the resources from this handbook, the information for reading/writing from the assessment and strategies section might look like this:

1. **What do we know about the student's strengths and needs?**
 - *The student has had limited experience with books.*
 - *The student knows that books are organized with beginnings and endings but does not seem to know what function print serves in a book or how it is organized.*

[See Assessment Strategy - Book Handling Knowledge - Subsections: Purpose, What does this tell you?]

2. Given this information, what goals can we set for the student?

- *The student's bookhandling knowledge must be expanded to include the function that print serves in a book and the manner in which print is organized.*

[See Assessment Strategy - Book Handling Knowledge - Subsection: What does this tell you?]

3. Given the goals we have set, how do we go about achieving those goals?

- *To build the student's knowledge of print, the student will be involved in direct and non-direct experiences with print material. Instructional Strategies used will include: using Big Books, Shared Reading and Independent Book Handling Experiences.*

[See Instructional Strategy Cluster - Extending Book Handling Knowledge.]

Of course, the above represents only a partial description of what might be a program plan for a student since related print awareness activities such as ENVIRONMENTAL PRINT, would also be included.

Through this type of working - meeting, a student's program plan can evolve. It is interesting to note that the use of such a procedure avoids some of the limitations which accompany the use of pre-prepared IPP forms. The working notes can be copied onto forms once the working session is completed. Monitoring of the goal attainment can be conducted by reapplying the observational systems initially employed.

**RWH RECORD FORM: AN IPP WORKING GUIDE FOR THE PROGRAM
PLANNING TEAM**

Student: _____

Date of Meeting _____

Team Members _____

(If this is a full team summary report please write FULL TEAM.)

1. **What do we know about the student's strengths and needs?**

2. Given this information, what goals can we set for the student?

3. Given the goals we have set, how do we go about achieving those goals?

For general ideas relating to instructional strategies in reading and writing, please see:

Watson, D. (Ed.), (1987). Ideas and insights -- Language arts in the elementary school. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Rhodes, L. and Dudley-Marling, C. (1988). Readers and writers with a difference: A holistic approach to teaching learning disabled and remedial students. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Goodman, K. S., Brooks Smith, E., Meredith, R. and Goodman, Y. M. (1987). Language and thinking in schools: A whole-language curriculum. (3rd ed.). New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers.