

Small Group Reading Instruction

Voyage to Excellence



Student Engagement

High Expectations

Instructional Best Practices

Personal Connections

SWEGO
CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Reference Guide for Intermediate Teachers

Revised and Compiled

by

Administrative Literacy Task Force

- Laura Ryder Director of Literacy
- Julie Burger Principal Frederick Leighton School
- Dean Goewey Principal Minetto Elementary School
- Donna Simmons Principal Fitzhugh Park School
- Mary Volkomer Principal Kingsford Park School
- Dr. Randy Richards Principal Charles E. Riley School

“Learning to read is a never-ending task because there are always new goals to reach, new horizons to explore, and new interests to expand.”

~ Alberto Manguel



Table of Contents

The Importance of Small Group Instruction.....	1
Direct Explicit Reading Instruction.....	2
Essential Elements for Effective Teaching in Guided Reading.....	2
Guided vs. Traditional Reading Groups.....	3
Introducing the Text.....	4
Reading the Text.....	5
What’s Wrong with Round Robin?.....	6
The Three Reading Cueing Systems.....	7-8
Prompting for Strategy Use.....	9
Literature Level Alignment.....	10
Comprehension Strategies.....	11-12
Literacy Work Stations.....	13-14
Small Group Management.....	15
Best Practice in Teaching Balanced Literacy K-6 Non-Negotiables.....	16
Extending the Text.....	17
Word Work.....	17
Burning Questions.....	18
Resources.....	19

The Importance of Small Group Reading Instruction

The saying goes that “children learn to read in grades K-2 and read to learn in grades 3 and up.” However, teachers in grades 3 through 6 are discovering this conventional wisdom is wrong; their students have to deal with an increasingly sophisticated range of texts that require additional reading skills. Upper-elementary teachers face the difficult task of trying to offer appropriate reading instruction just as many of their students have their first experiences with textbooks, high stakes exams, and complex reading in new genres. Therefore, students need daily “direct explicit instruction” at the intermediate level because every child deserves the right to learn how to read. It is not just the responsibility of primary teachers.

Research has shown that many children who read at the third grade level in grade three will not automatically become proficient comprehenders in later grades. The nature of reading changes dramatically during the intermediate grades. The tasks that students encounter in these upper grades are also more challenging. Students are expected to answer higher-level questions, respond both critically and personally, find evidence to support their answers, make inferences about complex ideas, and connect ideas across multiple texts and contexts. Students need stamina and motivation to stick with much longer and more complex tasks.

The challenge for students at the intermediate level is that they need reading practice in level-appropriate text in order to apply new skills and strategies. This is essential to help develop reading strategies. At the same time, they need age-appropriate text and conversation. They need ample opportunities to stretch their thinking.

Small group reading instruction provides meaningful literacy experiences. It begins where the learners **are**, by addressing individual needs. Small group reading instruction includes rich tasks which promote deep understanding; allows us to teach reading *before* and *during* the reading process, (not only *after* the reading process); and allows us to adjust our teaching to meet the needs of all learners. The core of reading is the small group. In small groups everyone is engaged and everyone has a voice. Students can sometimes learn more from each other than they can from the teacher. Don't forget the social context of learning!

Direct Explicit Reading Instruction Includes:

1. Introducing the text – activating prior knowledge
2. Introducing and working with critical vocabulary
3. Reading the text
4. Revisiting and discussing the meaning of the text
5. Teaching for strategies/Teaching point(s)
6. Extending the meaning of the text
7. Working with words (when appropriate)

Essential Elements for Effective Teaching in Guided Reading

1. Bring children with similar reading ability together in small groups for direct explicit instruction.
2. Select chunks of texts at the appropriate reading level that allow children to perform reading tasks independently.
3. Provide introductions that show children how the text “works,” explain difficult words or concepts, and prepare them to read independently (scaffolding).
4. Support independent reading with brief, specific prompts to help children use the strategies you have previously demonstrated.
5. Help children revisit and reflect on the text through dialogue and higher order questioning.
6. Work explicitly on word-solving strategies such as chunking, root words, affixes.
7. Provide reading response experiences which include vocabulary development, sequencing, summarizing events, character analysis, creative thinking, synthesis and evaluation.
8. Employ comprehension strategies including these listed on pages 11 and 12.

Guided Reading Groups vs. Traditional Reading Groups

Guided Reading Groups	Traditional Reading Groups
The focus is on skills and strategies for independent reading of unfamiliar text.	The focus is on skills to read the selections in the basal text.
There are a variety of responses to reading.	Typically, workbook and worksheet exercises form the response to reading.
A combination of small trade books and the Harcourt Trophies anthology are used for reading.	Basal text is the primary book for reading.
Flexible reading groups change based on ongoing assessment as skills or strategies are learned.	Fixed reading groups usually remain together during the reading of the entire basal text.
Reading is connected to the other language arts of writing, speaking, and listening.	Reading tends to be treated as a separate subject.
Students problem solve unknown vocabulary using strategies explicitly taught.	Vocabulary is pre-taught to groups.
Instruction is focused on readers' needs through continuous assessment with a variety of assessment tools.	Instruction is focused on a systematic progression of skills in the basal text as measured by an end of the unit test.
Students read the text independently (and softly to themselves, if necessary).	Students read aloud, page by page, often in round-robin fashion.
Selection of a book by the teacher is matched to the readers' instructional needs and interests.	Selection of text focuses on reading needs as determined by the basal reader.

Introducing the Text

Purpose is Everything!

A reader's purpose affects everything about reading. It determines what's important in the text, what is remembered, and what comprehension strategy a reader uses to enhance meaning. When students read a text without a purpose they might express that they do not care about the topic and they can not stay focused. They say the words to finish quickly and they are bored. Readers behave like this when they do not have a reason for reading. A good book introduction provides students with a purpose for reading.

Suggestions:

- Use the students' background knowledge to understand the text.
- Talk and think about the book before reading.
- Arouse the students' interest.
- Predict the storyline by referring to the title and/or pictures.
- Draw on students' previous experiences and connect them to the text.

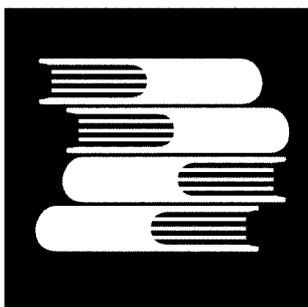
Include the Following:

1. Show the students how the book works and how it is organized.
2. Have the students predict the storyline, as well as give them any information they may require in order to read successfully.
3. Draw attention to language structures and vocabulary that children will need to use while reading the book; sometimes have them use the language.
4. Build interest in the story.
5. Help children make connections with their own background experiences and knowledge.
6. Point out new and important words.
7. Point out aspects of print or layout that are important.
8. Show how illustrations support the meaning.

Reading the Text

Following the introduction and vocabulary work, each student silently reads the entire text or predetermined portion of the text. This is **unlike** the traditional approach, known as round robin reading, where students take turns reading aloud. This time is also unlike shared reading, when students read along with the teacher or join in chorally. Students are expected to independently read at their own silent reading pace. It is clearly expected that they are actively engaging and practicing the reading strategies practiced and taught. In order to later discuss the text as a group or with a partner, students should be encouraged to use sticky notes to jot down ideas they may want to later remember. Be mindful not to interrupt the flow of reading as this is their time to read and practice.

While the students are reading, you may want to sample their reading by asking select students, one at a time, to raise their voice so you can hear them read. At this time, your role is in reinforcing productive reading strategies or correcting inaccurate or unproductive behavior. It is not necessary to reach every child in the group each day. It is important that record keeping be in place in order to sample everyone's reading routinely. This is also an opportunity to check oral reading fluency. You will begin to learn about your readers on an individual basis, and decide on teaching points for future guided reading lessons. Recording observations of students' strengths and weaknesses will inform your instruction as a reading teacher.



What's Wrong with Round Robin?

The practice of taking turns reading orally, commonly known as round robin reading, has been criticized and condemned for decades. Still, round robin reading persists in many classrooms.

Round robin reading has the potential to develop negative attitudes to reading through the anxiety developed over performance reading when it is “your turn” to read. Furthermore, the reader takes responsibility for only one section of the text and not the WHOLE text. Also, it is the teacher who is in control of who is going to read, whereas we are aiming for the reader to be independent and reading for a self-motivated purpose.

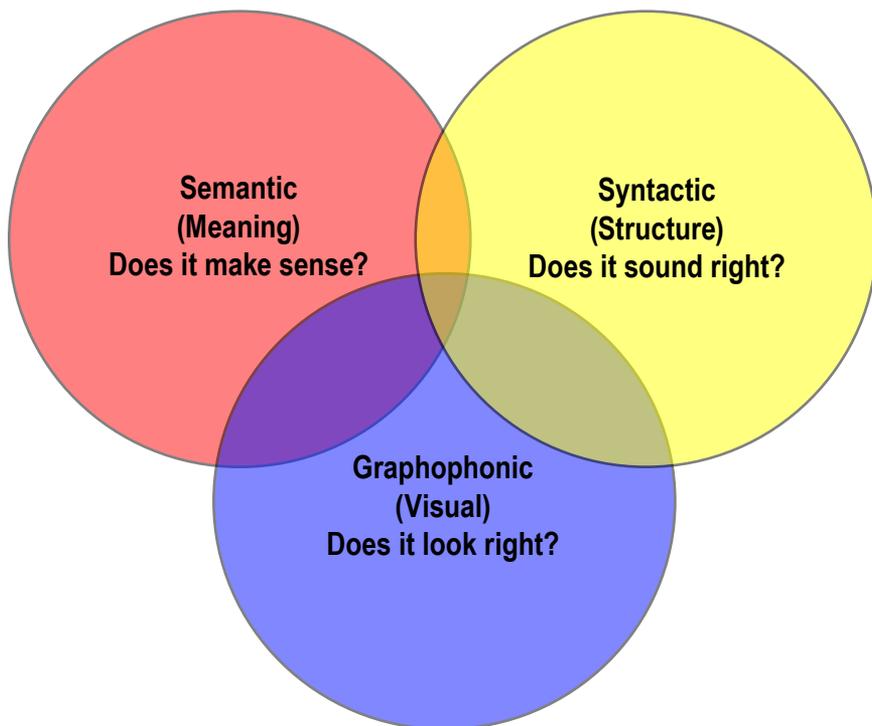
Another issue to consider is what is the rest of the group doing while one child is reading? If they are attending to the text there is a temptation for them to jump in and say the word because the reader is stumbling, thus preventing the child from processing the text by him/herself. However, they are more likely to be either thinking about what they have to read or sighing with relief that their turn is over and so not attending to the text. Yes, it is time to say goodbye to Round Robin once and for all. There are many good ways to practice oral reading, but round robin reading certainly is not one of them.

Reasons why Round Robin won't be missed:

- Gives a false idea of what oral reading sounds like
- Encourages listening while tracking (following along in a text)
- Almost guarantees off-task reading and listening behaviors
- Forces children to make their reading struggle public
- Makes oral reading more important than understanding
- Emphasizes “getting the words right” over meaning
- Encourages sub-vocalization (moving the lips)
- Can ultimately transfer to a slower silent reading rate
- Discourages the use of good reading miscues
- Tends to focus on low level feedback (correcting words)
- Wastes valuable time that could be used in other ways
- Risks committing the ultimate sin of embarrassing students!

Michael F. Opitz and Timothy V. Rasinski, *Good-Bye Round Robin: 25 Effective Oral Reading Strategies*

The Three Reading Cueing Systems



*When all three cueing systems are in balance,
a reader is employing Good Reader Strategies.*

The Three Reading Cueing Systems Continued

The goal of reading is to make meaning. Readers use information sources to make meaning. Readers break through to meaning by utilizing cueing systems known as information sources. There are three of these sources: meaning, structure, and visual. The goal is for students to be able to access all three information sources while reading independently. This is taught directly through the use of reading strategies. The strategies are broken down into the three information categories shown on the previous page.

Semantic (Meaning) Cueing System

- prior knowledge
- story sense
- text
- illustrations

Syntactic (Structure) Cueing System

- natural language
- knowledge of English
- grammatical patterns and language structures

Graphophonic (Visual) Cueing System

- sounds and symbols
- print conventions
- directionality
- words/spaces
- letters
- beginnings/endings
- punctuation

Prompting for Strategy Use

Telling a student a word they get stuck on will never help that child learn how to read words that are difficult or unknown to them. Instead, when a student is stuck on a word, the teacher can use questions, or prompts, to help students learn how to think about the different strategies they know and how to apply them when necessary. It is in strengthening this metacognition, or thinking about how one thinks, that will produce an independent reader. At the very least, students must be able to read the words on the paper and know what they mean.

As readers in the intermediate level become better at decoding, vocabulary becomes the larger issue. Readers at this level typically have the ability to word call or correctly pronounce words, but if they are not maintaining meaning, they are not reading. Below are several strategies to help students problem-solve while reading fiction or non-fiction:

- noticing and correcting errors
- analyzing words
- deriving meaning
- using multiple sources of information
- supporting reading fluency



Literature Level Alignment

DRA	Core	Grade	Pinnell
A, 1, 2	K	Kindergarten	A B
3	PP1	Grade One	
4, 6	PP2		D
8	PP3		E
10, 12	Primer		F
14, 16	1		G
18, 20, 24, 28 ..	2		Grade Two
30, 34, 38	3	Grade Three	L M N O P Q
40	4	Grade Four	R S T U V
44/50	5	Grade Five	W X Y Z
60	6	Grade Six	

Stages: Emergent Readers: Levels A-B
 Early Readers: Levels C-G
 Transitional Readers: Levels N-R
 Self-Extending Readers: Levels S-Y
 Middle School (Grades 7&8): Level Z

Comprehension Strategies

Why teach comprehension?

According to Stephanie Harvey, after many years of study and practice in reading comprehension, educators and researchers are convinced that comprehension instruction is not just one more thing to add to teachers' already overflowing plates. In fact, when it comes to reading, it's likely the most important thing. If the purpose of reading is anything other than understanding, why read at all?

Monitoring Understanding

Proficient readers monitor their comprehension during reading to know whether what they are reading makes sense. They bring their prior knowledge to the reading. They rely on a variety of strategies to correct confusion. We teach students to listen to and monitor their inner conversation.

Making Connections

Before, during, and after processing a text, readers make connections to what they already know; they connect to their personal experiences, their knowledge of the world, and the other texts they have read or experienced. Text-to-self connections are connections between the text and the reader's experiences and memories. The more experiences and memories a reader has about a topic, the easier the material is to read. Connections the reader makes between the text and what he knows about the world (facts and information) are known as text-to-world connections. Text-to-text connections are connections the reader makes between two or more types of texts. The reader may make connections relative to plot, content, structure, or style.

Asking Questions

Questions are at the heart of teaching and learning. Questions open the doors to understanding. Questioning is the strategy that propels readers forward. When readers have questions, they are less likely to abandon the text. Proficient readers ask questions before, during, and after reading.

Summarizing

Summarizing involves extracting the essential information, including the main idea and supporting details from text. When readers summarize, they figure out the most important ideas in a story and restate those ideas using their own words.

Drawing Inferences

Inferring involves merging background knowledge with text clues to come up with an idea that is not explicitly stated in the text. Inferring is the proverbial reading between the lines. An inference is a logical conclusion not directly confirmed by the author. It is based on clues from the text and personal connections made by the reader. Inferences are sometimes hard to make because the author doesn't come right out and confirm the reader's conclusions. When we make inferences, we are using clues from the seen text (words, pictures, charts, graphs, visual cues) as well as the unseen text (ideas, opinions, essential background knowledge.)

Synthesizing

Synthesizing is the merging of new information with prior background knowledge to create an original idea. Strategic readers stop periodically while reading to digest what they have read and what it means before continuing. This process allows readers to form opinions and combine separate pieces of knowledge to come up with knowledge that is new, at least new to the person doing the thinking.

Visualizing

Visualizing is all about inferring meaning. When readers visualize, they are actually constructing meaning by creating mental images. When we visualize, we create pictures in our minds that belong to us and no one else.

Determining Importance

What we determine to be important in a text depends on our purpose for reading it. When reading fiction, if the reader has had experiences similar to those of the main character, the reader is likely to enjoy a richer, more fulfilling reading experience. When we read nonfiction, we are reading to learn and remember information. We need to focus on important information and merge it with what we already know to expand our understanding of the topic.

Literacy Work Stations

What Is a Literacy Work Station?

Isn't this like centers? I thought they were for kindergarten. There's no time for this in the upper grades. I have too much to teach! These are comments I've heard from teachers in grades 3-6 as they've pondered using literacy work stations. What is a literacy work station?

I define a literacy work station as "an area within the classroom where students work alone or interact with one another, using instructional materials to explore and expand their literacy. It is a place where a variety of activities reinforce and/or extend learning, often without the assistance of the classroom teacher. It is a time for students to practice reading, writing, speaking, listening, and working with letters and words: (Diller 2003)

Practice with Purpose, Literacy Work Stations for Grades 3-6 by Debbie Diller offers guidance on establishing routines for independent reading and response writing, as well as step-by-step instructions on how to set up and manage a variety of hands-on literacy work stations appropriate for intermediate students. Each chapter includes:

- how to introduce the station
- innovative ways to use materials
- what to model to guarantee independence
- how to troubleshoot
- assessment and accountability ideas
- how the station supports student achievement on state tests
- reflection questions for professional development

The book contains an extensive appendix that includes time-saving tools such as management board icons, graphic organizers, task cards, and recommended websites and children's literature.

Examples of Literacy Work Stations

Classroom Library Work Station

Listening Work Station

Writing Work Station

Word Study/Spelling Work Station

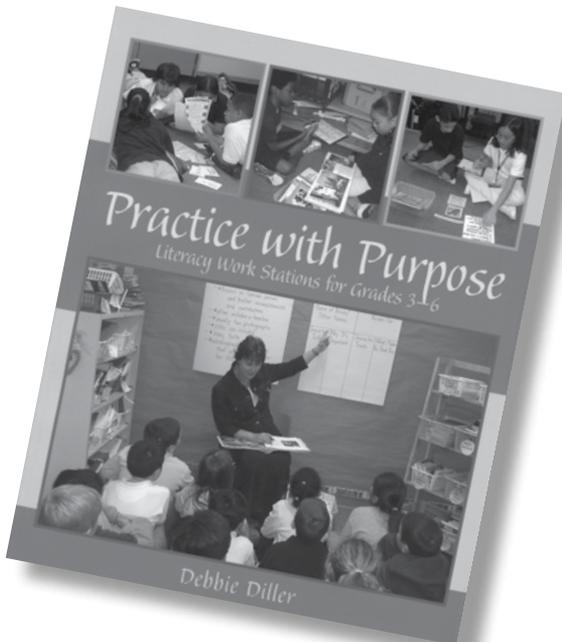
Drama/Reader's Theater Work Station

Poetry Work Station

Overhead Work Station

Content-Area Work Station (Science)

Content-Area Work Station (Social Studies)



Small Group Management

What are the other kids doing?

In order to form small groups and use small-group instruction effectively, students must be able to work independently over sustained periods on significant reading and writing tasks, not busywork. Teachers must instruct students in the skills needed to sustain independent engagement, such as how to choose an appropriate book, how to manage writing projects, how to confer with a peer, and how to write a response to literature. Generally, it's a good idea to spend the first two to four weeks of school showing students **how** to be members of productive and literate communities. It is important to plan carefully and allow enough time to really establish habits and routines.

The best way to guarantee success is through plenty of modeling, with teachers gradually releasing more responsibility to the students.

Teaching students in grades 3 to 6 is challenging work. Very little else will matter if classroom focus, management, and organization are not in place. When we organize so that every day includes literacy teaching, student reading, small-group instruction, and a focus on productive work, good things happen. It is not necessary to do everything all at once. Begin by organizing to do something new, and little by little it's possible to add new things. It's always possible to change your structures and plans once the students are more adept and you feel more comfortable (in fact it's inevitable).



Best Practice in Teaching Balanced Literacy (K-6) Non-Negotiables

- 90 minute uninterrupted reading block.
- Use of Harcourt reading series (scope and sequence).
- Whole group and small group instruction.
- Screening, progress monitoring and diagnostic assessments used for informing instruction.
- Teachers use flexible grouping based on data and student needs.
- Teachers progress monitor their own students.
- Students with the greatest needs are given additional small group classroom teaching time and are grouped with no more than 4-6 students.
- The classroom teacher is responsible for teaching all the children in the classroom in small group even though another teacher is working with that student during an intervention time.
- Walk-throughs by principal and Director of Literacy will happen on a regular basis.
- Literacy Coaches' responsibilities include providing support to teachers through modeling in classrooms, coaching teachers and providing professional development opportunities. They are non-evaluative.
- Classrooms should include at least 2 centers that are differentiated and include an accountability piece either as a product or teacher check off. Two centers that should be included are a Listening/Fluency center and a Word/Work/Vocabulary center.

Extending the Text

Extending the meaning of the text can help readers think deeper about their reading as they reflect on it afterwards. At this point in the guided reading lesson, it is a great time to introduce your students to story elements and literary devices: plot, characters, setting, metaphor, and symbolism, to name a few. Taking advantage of A.I.M. structures as they relate to the genre you are working with is a worthwhile activity to extend understanding of the text. While the students are with you in the group, much of this happens orally. The written follow-up work would happen at an independent time or later work station. Review of the written work could be the kick-off for the next time you meet with that particular group. Let it be said that not every lesson needs to have written follow-up work, however, it is critical to have students respond to what they read and to do it in many different ways.

Word Work

When appropriate, the teacher would take only a minute or two, at the beginning or end of a small group reading lesson, to further explore working with words. These activities would center on “how words work” and are geared towards helping children gain knowledge that will help them search words more efficiently at their current instructional level. You could ask the students to play with words or help them discover how words work by writing several examples on a chart, chalkboard, or dry-erase board. For students who are having difficulty learning about print, it is sometimes helpful to use multicolored individual magnetic letters that can be manipulated for kinesthetic stimulation. Using words without the cueing systems of meaning or syntax, students must rely only on visual information in order to learn how to recognize parts and patterns; they learn how to be flexible in using print information while reading text. Working with words in small groups gives the teacher the opportunity to engage children with similar needs at the same time. It could also be used to intensify the large group or grade level word study portion of your program. For example, if your class is working on prefixes, a struggling group could use a minute or two of additional practice at the end of small group lesson in order to give them an instructional boost.

Burning Questions

How many different small groups should I have?

Form groups carefully and thoughtfully – 4 groups are ideal, that way you do not have the high/average/low groups. For those of you new to this way of teaching, starting small with 3 groups is okay. Remember that the main idea of small group teaching is to meet individual needs, in high quality, appropriate text.

How many times per week should I teach small group reading?

At the intermediate level, 4 days per week is ideal, being sure that you see your lowest group of readers every day you meet with groups. Their need for accelerated reading growth will only happen when they are guided to read at their instructional level, with text appropriate for them.

How many groups will I see per day?

You should meet with two groups each day. As indicated above, it is important to meet every day with the most struggling students; alternate the other groups every other day.

Resources

- Patricia M. Cunningham and Richard L. Allington, *Classrooms That Work: They Can ALL Read and Write*, 3rd ed., Boston: Allyn & Bacon 2003.
- Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, *The Daily Five: Fostering Literacy Independence in the Elementary Grades*, Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2006.
- Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell,, *Guided Readers and Writers Grades 3 to 6: Teaching Comprehension*, Genre and Content Literacy, Portsmouth, NY: Heinemann, 2000.
- Cris Tovani. Portland, *I Read It, But I Don't Get It: Comprehension Strategies for Adolescent Readers*, ME: Stenhouse, 2000.
- Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann, *Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction*, 2nd ed., Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2007.
- Debbie Diller. Portland, *Practice with Purpose: Literacy Work Stations for Grades 3-6*, ME: Stenhouse, 2005.
- Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, *Strategies that Work*, 2nd ed., Portland, ME: Stenhouse, 2007.
- Marjorie Y. Lipson, *Teaching Reading Beyond the Primary Grades*, New York: Scholastic, 2007.
- Richard Allington, *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs*, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2000.
- Donald Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnson, *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Spelling, and Vocabulary Development*, 3rd ed., Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Michael F. Opitz and Timothy V. Rasinski, *Good-Bye Round Robin: 25 Effective Oral Reading Strategies*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998.
- Lisa Craig and Heather Silva, *Small Group Reading Instruction*, West Genesee School District, NY.