

## CHAPTER 5

# Interactive Reading Activities

## Shared Reading

In *The Foundations of Literacy*, Don Holdaway (1979) introduced and developed the important activity of *shared book experience*. In recent years this activity has become known as *shared reading* (Smith & Elley, 1994), but the nature of the activity remains. The adult demonstrates the reading process with a Big Book or with other print in an enlarged format, and the children contribute to the activity by reading some of the print, making comments, and asking questions. It is a literacy activity that is used frequently in classrooms with young children—and for good reason.

The important difference between read-alouds and shared reading relates to the visibility of the print. The print used for a shared reading is sufficiently large so that it can be “seen, shared and discussed” (Holdaway, 1979, p. 64). The book may be held or placed on a stand. Teachers should place themselves in a position that does not obscure the children’s vision.

During shared reading, the teacher is likely to make more comments about the print and to draw from the children’s comments and questions about the print. This replicates the one-on-one read-aloud experience the children may have at home with an adult, when they can see the print easily. In addition, shared reading provides additional opportunities for the class to discuss characters, events, and story meanings.

In an example of a shared reading as it was first developed, Holdaway (1979) describes the reading and the questions the teacher asks. The blanks indicate where the children joined in.

Teacher: *One day she met a frog.*

*She said — — —:*

“Who is she talking to?”

“How many words?”

*“Frog, frog,  
please play with me  
I’m all by myself  
As you can see.”*

A repetitive section suitable for chiming in.

*“Yes,” said the frog,  
“I will — — —,  
We will play at j——.”*

“What does she want him to do?”  
Perhaps discuss names beginning with *j*.

(Holdaway, 1979, p. 69)

In this short example, the teacher encourages thinking about the text and the print. For instance, just as in a read-aloud, the children are encouraged to join in with the repetitive section of the story. Then the teacher’s question “What does she want him to do?” prompts the children to consider the events of the story. The teacher may also use the story’s letters and letter sounds to link the word *jumping* with children’s names beginning with *j*. This helps them consider letters and sounds within the context of the story.

Slaughter (1992) also provides an extended discussion and examples of shared book experiences. Like Holdaway, she argues that the use of Big Books enables the classroom teacher to “simulate the bedtime story experience” (p. 16). Slaughter also notes a wide range of activities that could follow from the reading of the text, and indicates a number of simple but key practical points for the classroom teacher.

To select books for shared reading, teachers should use the same criteria as they do for read-aloud selection. Books should include the predictable features of repetition, rhyme, and rhythm (Rhodes, 1981). In some instances, a particularly appropriate book may not have been produced in Big Book format. In that case, the teacher may decide to create a Big Book from that text. In addition, other printed material may be produced for shared reading. Nursery rhymes, songs, poems, and notices can all be generated in large print for use in shared reading.

Shared reading also provides a good opportunity for the teacher to read from a range of nonfiction texts, including dictionaries (Goodwin & Redfern, 2000). As teachers read passages from science and social

science texts, they can encourage the students to notice the use of layout, headings, numbered sections, bold print, contents, index, and glossary. Such discussions help young children understand the differences between narrative and informative texts. This understanding further supports the children's own reading and writing of different genres.

In another kindergarten classroom, the teacher selected the Big Book of *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1987) for shared reading. During the first reading, the emphasis was on the sheer enjoyment of the text. At the same time, the teacher very clearly followed the print with a pointer as she read. During the second reading, she talked about some of that print:

Teacher: Can you remember what this first page says?

*Rosie the*

Children: *hen went for a walk*

Teacher: Yes. *Rosie the hen went for a walk*. So where does it say *hen*? You come and show me, Brian.

[Brian points to the word *hen* with the pointer.]

Teacher: Yes, that's right. How many letters are there in *hen*?

Anna: Three.

Teacher: Yes, that's right. What are the letters?

Tina: *h-e-n*.

Teacher: Yes, *h-e-n*.

Later in this shared reading, the children commented on the other main character in the story:

Sam: It doesn't say *fox* anywhere.

Teacher: No, it doesn't, but we know the fox is in the story don't we?

Michelle: We can see the picture.

Teacher: Yes, that's right, the fox is always there. What is the first letter for *fox*?

Sam: *f*

Teacher: Yes, the letter *f*.

Jane: And it's got an *x*.

Teacher: It has, but there is another letter in between. I'll write *f* and *x*, but what else do we need for *fox*? [She places an emphasis on the *o*.]

With the children's assistance, the teacher continued to talk about the three letters of *fox*. This excerpt shows how the enjoyment of the story was followed by a consideration of the writing concerning the two main characters. Even though *fox* is not written in the text, it became a word of interest.

*Rosie's Walk* is also featured in Slaughter's (1992) work with a first-grade class. After the teacher read the story, the class spent a week engaged in a variety of activities based on the text. In terms of print features, the letters *R* and *H* formed a major focus. On the Tuesday, a group of children looked through the book to find words beginning with *R* or *H*. Then they determined which children in the class had names that started with one of those letters. The class worked on charts of words that begin with each letter. In addition to the words they found in *Rosie's Walk*, the children added other words beginning with those letters. In all, they produced 11 words for each chart. In addition, they followed the story by writing, making puppets, and listening to other stories by Pat Hutchins.

Teachers do not have to choose between a read-aloud and shared reading. Both have a part to play in children's literacy development. The daily read-aloud is about the story and sometimes the activities that flow naturally from it and from the children's interest in the story. The shared reading allows for a more detailed consideration of the print, although many activities also can flow from this reading. In both instances, the teacher will be aware that the enjoyment of the text is important. The nature of these literacy activities must not be allowed to become so analytic that the children lose interest in the stories, books, and reading.

## Sustained Silent Reading

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is a natural activity to follow the read-aloud. When young children are given the opportunity to engage in SSR, it gives them a chance to act out reading-like behaviors. It also provides them with the opportunity to read a well-loved read-aloud book on their own, using the model that has been provided by the adult through numerous read-alouds and shared readings. For some this

activity may not yet be silent. The youngest children will vocalize as they read, and some children will need to comment on a picture or the relationship of the text to their own life. However, these children are moving toward silent reading individually.

In many classrooms, other acronyms have been used to describe SSR. Among the more frequently used are Sustained Quiet Un-Interrupted Reading Time (SQUIRT) and Drop Everything and Read (DEAR). In one Grade 1 classroom, the children had an allocated time for BE A Reader (BEAR). Capitalizing on this title, the teacher encouraged an exploration of books about bears. Pictures, models, toys, and the children's own writing about Winnie the Pooh, Paddington, and other bears added to the excitement and interest in this period of reading.

Typically, teachers use a short daily period for SSR. For ease of organization, this usually occurs immediately before or after a recess. Trelease (1995) describes a classroom where the children selected a book before going to lunch and left it on their desk. Then the first 10 minutes after lunch provided a time for SSR. The teacher noted that this short period of reading totals almost an hour of concentrated reading each week.

The children select their own books during this period of reading, and there is no requirement for the children to report on their reading. Trelease (1995) stresses that the teacher or other adults in the room must also read during this time, which provides a strong model of reading for the children. However, Hart-Hewins and Wells (1990) suggest that the teacher may want to use SSR as a time to hold individual reading conferences. Campbell and Scrivens (1995) consider those differing views and note that the best course of action might depend on the overall ethos of the classroom. In classrooms where there is a dynamic literacy program in place, with an enthusiastic teacher who supports the literacy activities, then modeling during SSR is not essential. When there is less emphasis on literacy, modeling appears to be required to keep the children reading. The real issue may be to ensure that SSR is organized so that the young children are aware of the process of this worthwhile activity.

## **Individual Reading**

The individual reading activity can be viewed in a number of ways. First, it might be considered as a one-to-one interaction with the adult reading to the child. This type of interaction is especially important for

children who have not had the opportunity to be part of read-alouds before entering school, even when there are daily read-alouds and shared reading in the classroom. These individual read-alouds allow the teacher or other adult to ensure that the child is involved in the story, is making contributions, and is beginning to pick up on print features.

Second, the individual reading activity can be seen as a time for individual reading conferences. During these conferences, especially in the later grades, it is the child who might read to the teacher. Holdaway (1979) argues that the shared book experience leads to individual reading as a child rereads a book previously read by the teacher. After the child's reading, the adult and child can discuss the content and consider various aspects of print.

To see how this works, I studied 6-year-old Leah's individual reading of *Good-Night Owl* (Hutchins, 1972) with her Grade 1 teacher (Campbell, 1990, pp. 47–53). In the following transcript, the original text appears in parentheses after her miscues:

- Leah:        *The starlings chittered,*  
              *tweet-tweet (twit-twit) tweet-tweet (twit-twit)*  
              *and owl tried to sleep.*  
              *The jays screamed,*  
              *ark ark,*  
              *and owl tried to sleep.*  
              *The cuckoo croaked (called)*
- Teacher:    *The cuckoo*
- Leah:        *called*

Leah was able to read substantial amounts of this book, partly because of her memory of the text, and also because she paid attention to the print. The teacher had to determine when to mediate in the reading. She ignored the miscue of *tweet-tweet (twit-twit)*, but she did support Leah's reading when the child read *croaked* for *called*. Using the simple strategy of starting the sentence again, the teacher gave Leah time to reflect, to consider the word in context, and to self-correct.

Later, when the entire book had been read, the teacher developed a dialogue with Leah that emphasized meaning:

- Teacher:    Why couldn't he sleep?
- Leah:        Because they were all making a noise.

Teacher: Why do you think they were all making a noise? Mmh?  
Leah: Because it's still-umh...  
Teacher: In when?  
Leah: Because it's not night yet.  
Teacher: It isn't night time. And what do owls do at night time?  
Leah: They—They don't—umh—They don't sleep in night and they wake up....

It was evident that Leah knew about the story even though some of her attempts at an explanation were hesitant. Throughout the individual reading, the child was able to achieve a sustained involvement with the text, with support available from the teacher. Individual reading activities build children's confidence and enable them to behave like readers.

## **Buddy Reading**

Everyday classroom demands limit the time available for the teacher and other adults to work alongside a young child with a book. Therefore, in a number of schools, schemes such as buddy reading are being initiated (Cunningham & Allington, 1999). This activity involves pairing an older child, perhaps a fourth or fifth grader, with a younger child. Once a week, the older child goes to another classroom to read a book with the younger child.

There are a number of benefits to such an activity. First, the older child must practice reading the picture book to ensure that it is read well for the younger child. For some 9- and 10-year-olds, that practice can be important. As Cunningham and Allington indicate, it "legitimizes the reading and rereading of very easy books" (p. 38). Further, the important teaching role helps the older children with their own reading development, and it does much for their self-esteem. At the same time, the younger buddies benefit from the interactive experience of the read-aloud.

In addition, the buddy system gives the younger children positive role models. In particular, young boys may benefit from the presence of successful male readers, especially because many classrooms for young children are staffed by females. As Cunningham and Allington remind us, "most elementary teachers are women and...most poor readers are boys" (p. 37). Some schools even extend buddy reading to include adults from the community as readers to work alongside the child with a book.

## Paired Reading

In addition to buddy reading, the children can work together in their own classroom to read a book. So paired reading (also called *partner reading*) can operate with two 5-year-old kindergarten students or two 6-year-old Grade 1 children helping each other to read a book. Cunningham and Allington (1999) suggest that the teacher can designate a number of different activities to create some variety for paired reading:

During a “take turn day,” the two children read alternate pages. They also help each other as the need arises. This is likely to be the most frequently used form of paired reading; the children soon become familiar with the approach and are able to use it successfully.

An “ask question day” requires both children to read each page silently and ask each other a question about the text before proceeding. In some first- and second-grade classrooms, the teacher may encourage the children to ask questions about features of the print on one day and to encourage a greater attention to the story content on another day.

Another day might be used as a “sticky note day.” The teacher gives the children a limited number of sticky notes to mark what interests them. Alternately, the children can concentrate on what they consider to be important or aspects they find confusing.

A “you decide day” permits the children to make their own decision as to how they will operate the paired reading on that day.

As Cunningham and Allington note, these different forms of paired reading create variety, encourage the children to engage in both silent and oral reading, and lead them to reflect on what they have read.

## Guided Reading

In a typical guided reading time, the teacher will work with a small group of children. Six is often suggested as an ideal size for a group. All the children will have a copy of a book they can enjoy and manage. With younger children, the management of the text is supported when the book has been read aloud previously to the class. Mooney (1990) indicates that the purpose of guided reading is to “develop independent

readers who question, consider alternatives, and make informed choices as they seek meaning” (p. 47). She argues that the teacher role during this literacy activity is to guide the children to predict as they read, to sample the features of print necessary to confirm expectations, to confirm that meaning has been maintained, and to self-correct using other strategies when necessary to regain meaning.

The teacher then guides the children with their reading of a specific text, but this is done in a way that helps the children to read other texts independently in the future. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) provide very detailed information on this activity that many teachers find useful. Chomsky-Higgins (1998) provides an example in which she selects a book that enables the children to be successful but offers some challenges. If the children have not encountered the story previously, she tells them the title, and together they go through the book to get an idea of the meaning. She asks the children to read a few specific words at this time. After this supportive introduction, the children read the book aloud as she moves around the group to listen in and guide when necessary. A brief discussion may follow that reading.

## Literature Circles

As Short (1999) notes, young children also need reading to help them make sense of life. She argues that children should not have to wait until they’ve developed extended reading strategies to find out that reading involves critique and inquiry. In literature circles, as in guided reading, the teacher works with a small group of children who each have copies of the same book. During literature circles, however, the primary interest centers on thinking about the story and discussing its aspects.

When quality picture books are read aloud, children will want to discuss what they see and hear. Roser and Martinez (1995) demonstrate that young children are keen to express their thoughts and feelings about the books that are read to them or that they have read in small groups. Initially, the teacher will have to prompt and guide the children, but eventually the children will provide comments with very little guidance.

The children’s participation in literature circles is not surprising, because even younger children at home respond reflectively to stories that have been read aloud. For instance, I read *The Very Lonely Firefly* (Carle,

1995) to my granddaughter Alice when she was 3 years, 11 months old, and she immediately requested a repeat reading. However, within a few pages of that second reading, as the lonely firefly searches for other fireflies, Alice interrupted me to comment on the story: “It will find the other fireflies on the last page. Then it won’t be lonely anymore.”

The last page, with its illustrations of flashing lights, is a particular attraction of this book. Alice returned to her theme when we reached the final page. She said at once, “There’s all its friends” (Campbell, 1999, pp. 89–90). Both comments show Alice’s involvement with the story and her empathy for the firefly as it searched for others.

Teachers can encourage the children’s responses to reading at home and in the classroom as they read aloud to children. The responses can then be developed further in literature circles as the children progress through the primary years.

The children’s learning from read-alouds provides a strong footing for their work during other interactive reading activities. In addition, as Chapter 1 showed, read-alouds can also serve as the foundation for interactive writing activities. This subject is covered in more detail in Chapter 6.