Using Shared Reading for Implicit and Explicit Instruction

by Brenda Parkes

“Teachers serve as guides so that children know how to engage in purposeful self-direction.”
—Billie Askew and Irene Fountas

One of the major goals of shared reading is to help children develop a range of effective strategies for reading and understanding text. In Marie Clay's (1991) words:

In order to read with understanding we call up and use a repertoire of strategies acting upon stores of knowledge to extract messages from print. Reading and writing acquisition involves the active construction of that repertoire, with comprehending having a central role...learning of this kind depends upon children being active processors of printed information and constructive learners. (p. 326)

A great deal of teaching and learning happens every time active learners meet with a responsive teacher to read and reread shared books and to engage in discussion and analysis of texts. With ongoing assessment and the goals of the classroom literacy program in mind, teachers implicitly and explicitly model reading and writing behaviors, skills, and strategies. They carefully structure situations to engage children in problem solving on continuous text as they work through the recursive cycle of reading to and with the children, and encouraging reading by them. Each time this is done, children learn about:

- book and print conventions (through the talk that accompanies choosing a book, looking at the cover, reading the title, talking about the pictures, turning the pages, noticing letters, and identifying words)
- punctuation
- phonemes
- letter and letter sound relationships
- words
- syntax (as it is modeled)
- semantics (as it is used to predict)
- how readers read (as it is modeled)
- the joy and enlightenment that come from reading

Shared resources should be selected carefully to teach specific skills and strategies in reading and writing. Each book may be used in many different ways over a long period of time depending on the needs of the children and the teacher's purpose....
Any one book should not be overused in a short period of time for every possible teaching feature. Instead, it is more effective to use different titles for different purposes, finding books that provide just the right features for teaching at any given time, just as teachers carefully match books to readers for guided reading.

Shared reading is an ideal way to demonstrate how the three language-based sources of information—semantics, syntax, and graphophonics—work and engage children in their use. The overall goal is to teach children to orchestrate these sources of information.

**Semantic Information**

Semantics relates to the meaning system of language. Meaning is obtained from the reader’s background knowledge and experience and his or her understanding of particular concepts. Semantic knowledge allows readers to build networks they can use to figure out new information in texts and mentally organize it into long-term memory.

Meaning does not exist in individual words. Specific words have meaning only when they are embedded in language. One of the major benefits of shared book reading is that it gives the reader a complete text to work with. The reader can draw on the surrounding text to cross-check information from multiple sources and to monitor that what he or she is reading makes sense.

Ways of using semantic information are continuously modeled throughout any shared reading experience. Children are implicitly involved in meaning making as they:

- look at book covers and predict content based on information in the title and illustrations
- link prior knowledge and experience to the text
- notice details in illustrations
- make connections between books
- predict what will happen next
- visualize and discuss settings, characters, and events

Explicit mini-lessons can be used to focus children’s attention on semantic information.

In the following example the semantic knowledge of a group of kindergarteners is developed through use of the text *Who's in the Shed?* (Parkes 1986). The front cover features a cameo picture of a startled-looking group of farm animals. The story centers around predicting who is in the shed from the cumulative picture clues each animal sees as they peep through cutouts in the book that represent holes in the shed. The teacher’s introduction has to establish who the characters are, how they feel, and why.

**Teacher (pointing to the illustration):** What farm animals do you see here?

**Sarah:** A cow.

**James:** And a pig.

**Joshua:** There’s a lamb too.

**Teacher:** It could be. What other word could we use? **Megan:** Sheep. It’s a sheep.
**Teacher:** We’ll have to check the print when we read it and see which one it is.

**Sarah:** Look at the big horse.

**James (pointing):** That one’s a chicken.

**Teacher:** Could it be anything else?

**Sarah:** A hen. Maybe it’s a hen.

**Teacher (pointing to each one in turn):** Tell me the names again and the sounds each animal makes.

The children happily oblige, mooing and baaing with gusto.

**Teacher:** Now let’s look at the animals’ eyes. What do you think the illustrator wants us to notice?

**James:** They look scared.

**Joshua:** Yeah. They look frightened.

**Teacher:** Let’s read the title and see if it helps us know why they are scared. Who’s in the Shed?

**Reagan:** Maybe there’s something scary in the shed. A ghost, like at Halloween.

**Sam:** Or a big rat.

**Teacher:** It could be. Let’s read the first pages and see what clues we get. (Reads.)

“Down at the farm
one Saturday night
the animals woke
with a terrible fright.
There was howling
and growling
and roaring
and clawing…”

What could be making those noises in the shed? Do you still think it’s a ghost, Reagan?

**Reagan:** A wolf.

**Joshua:** Or maybe a dog.

**Teacher:** Let’s read and find out. You join in wherever you can.

This introduction has provided a network of clues to help the children predict and confirm the story as it unfolds. The teacher has helped the children identify the characters and the sounds they make, shown how the cover, illustrations, and title combine to convey information, and demonstrated how readers think. This effective introduction to the book has given the children a
powerful set of semantic information, which in turn will support syntax and graphophonic information.

**Syntactic, or Structural Information**

Syntactic, or structural, information comes from knowing the grammar or the ongoing flow of language. Readers use the knowledge of grammar they internalized when they learned to talk in order to predict what words are likely to appear next.

Syntactic information is modeled implicitly each time the group engages in reading. Children are immersed in authentic demonstrations of the sounds and patterns of language as they:

- read and enjoy the rhythms of songs, raps, and chants
- listen and join in with narrative and nonfiction texts
- participate in oral cloze by predicting words, story beginnings, and phrases
- take over the reading of repetitive language

In this example of an explicit syntactic lesson, the teacher, Ms. Arnold, has covered selected words in *The Fox and the Little Red Hen* (Parkes 1989) with Post-it notes to make a cloze exercise that focuses on using structure clues.

Fox made Little Red Hen so dizzy
that fell from the rafters.
Quickly he stuffed her into bag
and set off home.

Ms. Arnold: First I want you to read this to yourself silently and put words in the spaces that sound right to you.

Pearce: She goes in the first one.

Ms. Arnold: What helps you to think that?

Pearce: The little red hen’s a girl—a she.

Ms. Arnold: Who thinks it’s something else?

Marilyn: It could be her.

Ms. Arnold: Let’s read it both ways. Listen and see which way we say it. . .

Pearce: Her sounds wrong. It must be she.

Marilyn: The next one must be his because it’s talking about the fox.

Ms. Arnold: How did you figure that out?
Marilyn: See (pointing and reading), he stuffed her into his bag. The fox is a boy.

Ms. Arnold: Let’s read it. How else will we know it’s right?

James: It will sound O.K.

**Graphophonic Information**

Graphophonic information refers to the letter-sound system of language, the relationship between oral language and its graphic symbols. Graphophonic information draws on two sources of information: the phonological system and the orthographic system. The phonological system is concerned with the sounds of language and includes phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear sounds in words and to identify particular sounds. The orthographic system has to do with how written language is constructed. It includes graphemes, the letters used to represent sounds.

The ability to use graphophonic information is an important part of learning to read. The shared reading of songs, poems, raps, and charts is a delightful way to engage children in the sounds of language and to lay a strong foundation for phonemic awareness. As part of everyday reading of shared text, teachers will implicitly draw attention to print by pointing, masking, and discussing. The enlarged print supports the development of skills in context particularly well; children can focus on features of the text in the totality of a genuine reading experience. The first places where children are apt to join in the reading are those where the layout or the font draws their attention to the words and various aspects of print. The books used in shared reading are designed to enable the teacher to give explicit attention to words, parts of words, letter clusters, and individual letters as the opportunity arises in the authentic reading experience. Emergent readers will initially notice letters and their features, distinguish between letters and words, and focus on words that begin with the same letter as their name, either their first initial or other letters in their name. Early readers will tend to notice letter clusters, word parts that will enable them to problem-solve using analogy, prefixes, and affixes.

My approach to explicit phonics instruction is congruent with Margaret Moustafa’s research, which shows that teaching phonics from whole to part allows readers to capitalize on what they already know; in other words, they are taught letter-sound correspondences in words they already know. In Moustafa’s words, “Shared reading is an important part of whole to parts phonic instruction. It both demonstrates the reading process to children and establishes a basis for the phonics lessons to come, making the phonics lessons more memorable and, hence, more effective” (1999, p. 451). This view is supported by many researchers, including Marie Clay (1991), who states, “The reader/writer can most easily become articulate about phonological aspects of reading when he is already making use of them—once he is reading and writing small stretches of text” (p. 322).

Shared reading supports the learning of phonics in many ways. Because the books used in shared reading are constructed specifically to support reading and writing development, their layout is designed to capitalize on opportunities for explicit and implicit graphophonic work once the children are familiar with their content and structure.

To model how to use the graphophonic information system, for example, the teacher could cover a few words on a double-page spread (. . . the book used is Crunchy Munchy, Parkes 1997).

Pig and Goat tried to crawl under the
Cow and Horse tried to \underline{\hspace{1cm}} over the fence.

But none of them could \underline{\hspace{1cm}} the apples.

As the class reads the book, the teacher invites the children to predict each covered word. She responds to their predictions by asking, “What letter would you expect to see at the beginning of that word?” Next she uncovers the initial letter; then she asks, “What letter would you expect to see at the end of that word?” She carefully says the word, then invites the children to confirm or self-correct their prediction before uncovering the whole word, at which point the children can check the visual information.

**Recognizing High-Frequency Words**

The ability to automatically recognize many high-frequency words allows the reader to maintain a focus on meaning. Shared reading gives children exposure to high-frequency words, which helps them learn to consistently recognize and read them. After they have read a book, children’s returning to individual pages to identify and highlight known words in context reinforces recognition. Later, these words can be transferred to the classroom word wall to be used as a resource for writing.

Gay Su Pinnell and Irene Fountas (1998) have identified several broad strategies that readers and writers use to figure out words. Shared reading supports the use of these strategies for problem solving in particular, how words look, and how words connect.

**How Words Look**

As their store of instantly recognized high-frequency words grows, children can focus their attention on how words look by identifying the clusters and patterns of letters that make up words. Rhymes, poems, and songs such as “Hands, Hands, Hands” (Vaughan 1995) are an excellent starting point for explicit exploration of these features.

- Hands can plant. Hands can pick.
- Hands can sometimes do a trick.
- Hands can tug. Hands can hug.
- Hands can hold a wiggly bug.

The first three words of the rhyme are a rich source of information for children to identify the pattern \textit{an}. Willi Stix™ or highlighter tape can be used to mark the \textit{an} pattern in each of the three words. This provides a clear model as children search the rest of the rhyme, identifying and marking the pattern each time it occurs. As children explore the rhyme to find other recurring patterns, different colors can be used to mark the \textit{ick} and \textit{ug} patterns.

This can be extended to provide experience with onsets and rimes. Onsets are the consonants preceding a vowel in a syllable; rimes are the vowel and any consonant that comes after it. The word \textit{hand} consists of the onset /h/ and the rime /and/.

Collaboratively developed by the teacher and the children, word lists built by combining onsets and rimes are a valuable addition to word walls, both for reading and as a resource for writing. Magnetic letters provide further collaborative and individual exploration allowing children to build and take apart words with patterns.

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How Words Connect

Research (Goswami and Bryant 1990) indicates that readers are more able to engage effectively in problem solving when they can use the largest chunks of information available to them. The use of analogy, the ability to recognize and analyze connections in words, allows children to use familiar words to learn unknown words. For example, a reader trying to solve an unfamiliar word such as *canter* might know the first part of the word is *can* and the last part of the word ends like the known word *after*.

Through access to repeated experiences with continuous text, shared reading provides children with the opportunity to work with words and parts of words in secure, meaningful contexts. Familiar texts provide vital support: in order to use analogy, children must be able to recognize a large number of words in context. This provides both contextual and linguistic support. In Moustafa’s words, “such an approach underscores the fact that reading is a meaningful activity” (1997, p.56).

Analogy, then, is best demonstrated through shared reading, to support children’s natural ability, as shown in Goswami’s research (1990), to make use of this as a problem-solving strategy.

Onsets and rimes provide consistent visual patterns that children can use to problem-solve as well. These are found throughout shared books, in meaningful contexts.

Cloze

As a teaching procedure, cloze is an ideal vehicle to model how readers use the three sources of information in language and to engage children in active problem solving and self-monitoring. Cloze is used by leaving gaps in the flow of oral or written language and inviting children to fill the gaps with words that maintain meaning. Because they are working with continuous text that provides many sources of information, the children have every opportunity to be successful. Cloze can be used to support children in their efforts to predict, check, and confirm a word or to self-correct based on meaning, syntax, and visual information. It can also be used when they are asked to supply another word that means the same thing and to check the suitability of that word from multiple sources of information. Meaning, syntactic patterning, alternative word choices, spelling, and self-monitoring can all be tested and teased out through lively discussion and debate.

Oral Cloze

Children are initially introduced to oral cloze during oral reading of highly predictable texts. The teacher pauses momentarily while reading or falls silent, leaving the children to fill in the gaps, as shown in this example, where the teacher and children are reading *It Didn’t Frighten Me* (Goss and Harste 1995).

**Teacher:** “One pitch black, very dark night, right after dad turned out the ____”

**Children:** Light.

**Teacher:** “I looked out my window, only to see, an orange alligator up in my____”

**Children:** Tree.

**Teacher:** “But that orange ____”
Written Cloze

After many experiences with oral cloze, the teacher introduces the children to written cloze, concealing highly predictable words in the text and having the children use problem-solving strategies to predict the words and then check and confirm their choices. Through many experiences with written cloze children will be able to supply rhyming words and words that sound right and make sense in the flow of the story. In addition, they will be able to justify their choices. Post-it notes, which come in various sizes, are an ideal material to use in covering the words in this activity.

Words selected for cloze are not chosen randomly. The teacher bases the decision of what words should be covered on the particular problem-solving strategies he or she wishes to discuss and on an awareness of just how children can use the text in concert with their background knowledge and experience. During the activity, the teacher guides and challenges the children to use multiple sources of information to survey, predict, check, confirm, and self-correct.

In the following example the teacher has chosen to use a nonfiction text, *A Closer Look* (Lunis 1999). The children read the whole text together, pausing briefly at each missing word and letting their minds supply a meaningful word. Pausing and thinking, rather than having the teacher fill in the space by saying "blank," allows children to maintain their flow of meaningful thought. This emulates how oral cloze was modeled.

*A Closer Look*

You can use tools to observe things that are far away.

Binoculars make faraway things [ ] closer. Scientists use binoculars to observe animals in natural habitats.

Make your own [ ]. In each photograph, name details that binoculars could [ ] you see.

Teacher: As you read this the first time, join in if you can, or just listen. I’ll pause briefly at the missing words to let you predict them in your minds. (He reads the passage, then asks about the concealed words.) What would make sense in the first gap?

Riana: Seem.

Teacher: Yes. Seem would fit in there. Do any other words make sense there?

Bess: Look makes sense. Binoculars make things look closer.

Teacher: Let’s have a look at the first letter. (He peels the cover back to show the L.)
Children: Looks.

Teacher (uncovering the whole word): The author has used look. What did you decide for the next gap?

Jed: Their. He's talking about the animals' habitats.

Teacher: I like the way you are thinking. Let's read what we have so far.

Jed: Observations goes in the next gap.

Teacher: It could. Tell us about your thinking, Jed.

Jed: When we read “scientists use binoculars to observe” again I just changed observe into observations.

Teacher: Nice work. Sometimes it helps to read something again. It's a helpful strategy. Now what do you all think the last word is going to be?

All: Help!!!

Teacher: Let's look and see. . .

In short, the supportive context of shared reading provides a meaningful way for the teacher to:

- show genuine enjoyment in reading
- model how readers think and act
- model fluent, phrased reading
- build on the interests and abilities of the learners
- teach book and print conventions
- continually extend invitations for learners to increase their active participation
- ensure the use of various skills and strategies for reading and comprehending
- explore semantics, syntax, and graphophonics
- engage children in talk about texts
- demonstrate the relationship between reading and writing
- show how to read for different purposes
- balance implicit and explicit teaching

References


**Children’s Books**


