

# **COMPLETING THE CIRCLE CURRICULUM**

## **TEACHING GUIDE**

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# TEACHING GUIDE

## I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to introduce and describe briefly some of the instructional practices and strategies used through the Completing the Circle Curriculum. The Guide does not give a comprehensive overview of the teaching of reading, writing or assessment.

We believe that teachers need to be lifelong learners. Beyond their initial credentialing programs, they need to continue to read and learn in professional contexts. We respect the professionalism of the teachers who will use this curriculum. Undoubtedly some of the strategies and practices included are already familiar to teachers. What may be new is using them with relevant Native American literature. Teachers should and will rightfully adapt this curriculum and the strategies to the needs and strengths of their particular students. They know that “one size does not fit all,” that prepackaged programs don’t provide all the answers. Finally they will want to explore some of the strategies in more depth. For that reason, we have provided a fairly extensive bibliography of excellent professional books at the end of sections of the Guide.

We all teach and learn based on our beliefs and theoretical assumptions, whether or not we are consciously aware of our assumptions. We, the authors of the Completing the Circle Curriculum, came to this project with years of experience and research background in literacy from many sources. We have spent a good deal of time examining recent findings from the National Reading Panel Report and from the National Research Council Report. We’ve considered research on educating diverse students from the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence and from a number of studies on reading and Native American Children specifically. We explained some of those theoretical perspectives in the introduction section of the curriculum.

A few further basic assumptions about teaching and learning underlie the curriculum we have created:

- The foundations of literacy laid at home are diverse. Those literacies must be valued as strengths and foundations as teachers build bridges to further literacies at school. Biliteracy is a strength, not a deficit.
- Meaning is always paramount in teaching and learning literacy.
- Children learn language by using it in meaningful contexts to communicate with people they care about.
- A balanced approach to literacy is most useful in achieving a variety of desired learning outcomes and in meeting children’s individual differences.
- Children will learn to read best by reading texts that are relevant and meaningful.
- We need to choose literacy programs based on sound theoretical frameworks that are regularly critiqued in light of ongoing research and practice.

Currently two paradigms of teaching and learning seem to be at odds. It is our belief that we do not need to take an either/or approach. We don't need to choose between a behaviorist perspective in which the learner is passive and an extreme organic approach in which the child guides his or her own learning. A third alternative, a transactional approach, would assume that the learner is indeed active and constructs (rather than simply receives) knowledge by actively transacting with his or her environment. The teacher is also active, not passive. She or he provides explicit demonstrations of what she wants children to do and skillfully scaffolds learners' experiences as children move from guided practice to independence.

## **II. BALANCED LITERACY**

A balanced approach to literacy builds on many years of literacy research that stresses the synergistic interrelationships of all aspects of literacy: speaking or talking, listening, reading and writing. Learning to read involves more than simply decoding and understanding words on the printed page. The Completing the Circle Curriculum clearly emphasizes this interrelationship and addresses the complexity of reading.

When we focus on the reading portion of a literacy block (keeping in mind that talking, listening and writing are interwoven throughout), there is a further need for balance. Different reading contexts allow the teacher to use both direct explicit instruction (demonstration/modeling) and the provision of varying amounts of scaffolding to children in small groups or individually as they practice and master skills and strategies, eventually applying them independently. A balanced reading program includes read alouds, shared reading, guided reading with flexible groups, independent reading, and some form of word work or word study. (The writing components of a balanced literacy program are modeled, shared and independent writing.)

A number of successful programs are built around this balance, e.g. First Steps, Four Blocks and so on. The balance is also built into (to varying degrees) most comprehensive core reading programs. It is not our purpose here to dictate how teachers organize their literacy block except to say that we believe it is essential that there be a serious balance. The Completing the Circle Curriculum can be used to extend or enrich most of the components of a balanced program. The main emphasis, however, is on comprehension and vocabulary development, with additional emphasis on fluency, writing, and oral language development.

### **A. Read Alouds**

It is important to read to children every day, usually more than once. Read alouds have many benefits. The teacher models his/her own joy in and purposes for reading. The teacher models what proficient, fluent reading sounds like. Children develop an advanced "listening vocabulary" beyond their daily oral language and the often simplified language of their initial reading texts. Children hear and learn to predict the more complex syntactic structures of written language. Children experience and develop schema for a wide range of text structures as well as developing background knowledge in content areas.

In the Completing the Circle Curriculum, the stories or texts are usually presented first as read alouds. First readings are generally read straight through using effective read aloud strategies. We especially like the suggestions given by Joseph Bruchac in any of his *Keepers* series of books for story telling and effective read aloud strategies. Note that read alouds may or may not be preceded by various pre-reading strategies such as KWL, ETR, and so on. (See Comprehension).

## **B. Shared Reading**

Often (and in the Completing the Circle Curriculum) books read initially as read alouds become shared reading texts. In shared reading, the teacher uses the story to teach and children are invited to interact with the reading in a variety of ways. Shared reading is used for some of the following purposes:

1. The teacher can use the shared reading as an opportunity for modeling comprehension strategies as in “think alouds.”
2. The teacher can use the text for direct instruction in a wide range of other skills and strategies, e.g. directionality, word substitution, sequence of ideas or events, word endings and beginnings, interesting words and phrases, and so on. It is important to be selective, choosing one or two teaching points per lesson only. In the curriculum we have focused largely on comprehension and vocabulary teaching points rather than some of the emergent reading skills and strategies which we expect will be taught during the guided reading portion of the literacy block.
3. Shared reading provides all children with the opportunity to interact with interesting challenging texts. All children can use comprehension strategies as they engage in discussions about the texts, regardless of whether they could initially read the text independently. Children have a safe environment in which to listen, to observe or to ask questions about text features or unknown vocabulary. All children can safely “have a go” at predicting or interpreting.
4. Shared reading can create a community of inquiry as it builds schema around an important theme, concept, or topic. In the curriculum, for example, themes are often introduced through a shared reading. Children go on to reread the shared texts in small groups given specific purposes such as retelling. In other cases, small groups go on to read texts with a similar theme. The shared text helps build schema which supports the small groups in reading their extended texts more independently.

For shared reading, it is important that the children actually see the text well enough to read for themselves. This means using big books, using multiple copies of the text, or making the text available on an overhead, on charts, or through the use of wall stories. Classes may create their own big books with the teacher providing the text and the children illustrating. Sometimes teachers will create individual books providing the text on each page and having children illustrate their own books. Sometimes the teacher uses the text as a read aloud (which the children can’t necessarily all see) but then uses a small set of the books in shared/guided reading groups. The point is to use shared reading even if the ideal materials are not available (big books or multiple copies for every child).

**An important caution for shared, whole class reading or guided reading is do not use Round Robin reading to get the text read out loud. This is a detrimental practice, not supported by research, yet still used by many well meaning teachers.**

### **C. Guided Reading**

Guided reading in small groups enables teachers to ensure that every child can participate in discussions and response, something that is not always possible in whole class reading contexts. In a small group, teachers are also better able to individualize their instruction by providing the differing amounts of support or differing strategies needed by individual children.

Many times guided reading refers to gathering children of similar abilities in small groups to read texts that match their instructional levels. Current approaches to guided reading usually avoid many of the detrimental aspects (well documented in research) of traditional “reading groups.” Current advocates of homogeneous groupings stress careful, ongoing assessment and re-grouping in order to avoid permanent placements in groups.

### **Flexible grouping**

We advocate “flexible grouping,” using mainly heterogeneous groups although we support the use of homogeneous grouping for small group work based on the particular needs of groups of children at times. We believe there are important gains to be made in grouping children heterogeneously. We hope teachers will consider adding more opportunities for heterogeneous grouping to their current guided reading practices.

Cautions about ability grouping:

- Children placed in lower groups spend more time on assignments and interactions with teachers and peers, which research shows are the least effective. These include more oral, round robin reading, more worksheets and drills, less wait time, and less focus on comprehension and higher order strategies.
- The results are often lowered expectations on the part of both teachers and children, lower self esteem, learned helplessness and apathy, and often permanent placement in lower groups as the gaps widen over the years.

Advantages of flexible grouping: (Remember flexible grouping does not exclude working with children who need similar skills at times):

- All children feel part of a community
- All children experience connected text.
- All children are more likely to understand a text by being given opportunities to paraphrase, explain, and elaborate. The teacher is less tempted to use less effective practices with any of the children.
- Children are more involved in discussion.
- Children often have comprehension skills and rich experiences that exceed their ability to decode text. Heterogeneous grouping ensures that they do not lose these abilities while they are becoming more fluent readers.
- All children receive the message that constructing meaning is the central purpose for reading, not just getting the words right.

How to lead heterogeneous groups:

- Use more open-ended questions and assignments. For example, all children can respond in reading logs or journals, even children whose spelling is not as developed or whose sentences are less complex.
- Ensure that children receive appropriate scaffolding for actually reading the text, depending on their level of development as independent readers. For example, children can listen to tapes of the text ahead of reading, read texts with a support teacher/aide, be paired with a more experienced reader, listen to the teacher read the text the first time before reading and discussing the text in small heterogeneous groups, and so on.
- Strategies such as literature circles described below help children develop schema for a theme, concept, or text type through a shared experience with text. Children then read quality literature (though of different levels of difficulty) based on the same concept or theme. (See Literature Circles described below.)

For homogeneous groupings, particularly those focused on skills for emergent readers, see *Guided Reading* by Fountas and Pinnell listed in the bibliography or use those structured in the core reading program. In the *Completing the Circle Curriculum*, we use primarily heterogeneous groupings where the focus is on comprehension and discussion.

#### **D. Independent Reading**

Independent reading builds “reading mileage” which correlates strongly with later academic achievement in reading. Extensive reading helps children build vocabulary. Children can apply their growing strategies, skills, and knowledge of reading. Children integrate and practice the several cueing systems (grapho/phonics, syntactic, and semantic) to the level of automaticity so important to ongoing growth in reading. They also practice their growing comprehension skills.

For independent reading to actually accomplish all this, it is critical that children are engaged, not just going through the motions of reading. For real engagement, children need to read books in which they are interested (which means real choice). At the same time it is important that they read “just right” books, not too hard and not too easy. Some teachers use the Goldilocks story as a way to make this idea concrete to children.

In independent reading, children should be choosing mainly books at their independent reading level, which is somewhat easier than the instructional level. As a rough rule of thumb, they should know 95% or more of the words they encounter in the text. The teacher is an important facilitator in helping children learn to choose “just right” books considering reading levels and their interests. Eventually children will internalize how to choose their own books. Many teachers and children collaboratively determine the characteristics of “just right” books. One example of a co-constructed rubric follows:

What does a Just Right Book feel like?

- pretty smooth
- only some of the words are tricky
- you can get through the tricky spots
- it feels quiet and calm, not nervous
- you really understand

(Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*, p. 123)

Classrooms need to have a wide range of interesting books at varying levels of difficulty available. Having children check out books from the school library is not sufficient. Some experts recommend classroom libraries of between 600 and 1000 books. In addition, sufficient time must be allowed in the curriculum. Although inexperienced readers may need to start with small blocks of time (10-15 minutes) and work up gradually, at least 30 minutes a day should be allowed for independent reading time. Although reading as homework is valuable, it is not sufficient.

Teachers can use this time to model themselves as readers. But the bulk of the independent reading time should be used to work with children individually or in small groups. Teachers use this block of time for formal and informal assessments such as running records or miscue analysis. Through instructional conversations, teachers support growing comprehension strategies and a wide range of “fix up” strategies when comprehension breaks down.

### **E. Reading Workshop**

Some teachers call the independent reading block “Reading Workshop,” paralleling the similar structure for independent writing called “Writing Workshop.” Principles underlying each are the same and involve choice, predictable structures, and dependable times. Workshops often begin with mini lessons, e.g. how do we choose “just right” books. Workshops often close with a time for children to share the books they are reading or the strategies they are using. Children set goals and collect evidence of their growth as independent readers in the form of lists of books read (showing increasing challenge and range), bookmarks showing strategies like noticing words or asking questions, and reflections on reading and the reading process through dialogue journals or letters to the teacher.

**F. Word Study** (see Vocabulary, section V below, for more information about specific concepts and activities.)

Working with words is an important aspect of teaching reading and part of a balanced literacy block. As with all the elements of literacy, teachers use whole class instruction as an opportunity for direct instruction or demonstration. Whole class instruction quickly becomes interactive as the teacher leads discussion and encourages children to “have a go” at the word challenges posed. Children move to small groups to problem solve a variety of word study tasks. Teachers move among groups, assessing and supporting as much as needed. Finally the groups report back to the class for a whole class debriefing. Eventually, word study can move to one of the learning activity centers described later.

As we explain in several places in this curriculum, our focus is not on phonics and phonemic awareness, which are important elements in learning to read. These elements are usually dealt with in sufficient depth in the comprehensive core reading programs or through specially adopted phonics programs. It is important that attention to phonics does not take up an excessive amount of time in the literacy block, however.

Our focus in word study is on building vocabulary. We do this through some word attack skills such as developing strategies for decoding multi-syllabic words, but also through careful teaching of other strategies (e.g. developing knowledge of root words, prefixes and suffixes) and other special aspects of vocabulary development (e.g. understanding figurative language or understanding the different connotations of synonyms).

### **G. Learning Activity Centers (LACs)**

Learning Activity Centers are called by different names and organized in varying ways by different programs. For example, some programs call these centers “workshops.” We have used the label “centers” as being more familiar to teachers and to avoid confusion with Reading and Writing Workshops which are contexts in which the whole class works on either reading or writing, using individually chosen texts (to be written or read) in a carefully structured, predictable environment. What matters is not so much the name but rather that a structure is designed so that children are engaged in meaningful work while the teacher is freed up to work with small groups or individual children more effectively.

Along with CREDE we agree that the centers should not simply provide low level, worksheet-type activities in disguise. Centers should integrate the CREDE principles discussed in the introduction to this curriculum. Children should be building on prior knowledge, focused on relevant challenging tasks, and working in contexts that involve their active participation through extended conversations with partners or small groups. Children may also use this time to finish or extend independent work in reading or writing from other parts of the literacy block. CREDE’s guide to learning activity centers (listed in the bibliography) provides a valuable resource for ideas about planning, supporting and assessing the effectiveness of your learning centers. The guide also contains rubrics to assess whether the centers utilize the CREDE principles.

Teachers create centers for a wide range of literacy activities but also as ways to structure explorations or inquiry in the content areas, e.g. math, science, or social studies. Some teachers believe it is important to use only literacy focused centers during literacy time. Other centers are designed for use during other parts of the daily schedule. Because of the thematic approach of the curriculum, teachers may want to use centers to further inquiry into science or social studies during the literacy block rather than limiting themselves to literacy activities. Examples of literacy centers include the following:

- Listening centers

- Library for further independent reading

- Working with literature circle/book club group in either reading the text in a variety of formats (buddy, small group etc.), discussing independently of teacher, or working on book projects

- Poems

- Projects (writing, art, drama) growing out of shared reading or literature circles
- Book boxes
- Big books
- Word study
- Buddy reading
- Writing (work continued from writing workshop or whole class writing time)
- Writing in response to literature

Teachers need to spend some time monitoring, assessing, and/or supporting the work of the children in the centers in order to ensure that they are regularly lifting the level of the work. Having a shared class discussion about the work accomplished in the centers, both accomplishments and challenges, at the end of this block of time will also ensure that centers remain more than busy work.

## **H. Literature Circles**

Literature Circles may also be called Literature Study Groups, Reading Study Groups or other titles. They provide one way to structure heterogeneous, small group work in which the children apply, with varying amounts of support from the teacher, the comprehension strategies they have learned through shared reading and other guided reading experiences.

Use literature circles after an extended period of time in which a variety of comprehension strategies have been taught. Teachers introduce literature circles through a common text, having the children work in small heterogeneous groups to carry out their own discussions of the same text. They circulate among the groups, listening in, taking anecdotal notes about how the groups are interacting, about strategies being applied, and about the actual meanings derived from the text. These observations become the basis for whole class discussion at the end of each day's group work. Teachers will probably want to spend at least some time with each group facilitating the discussion.

Eventually the teacher selects a set of texts, in the case of the Completing the Circle curriculum, organized thematically. These texts should be of high quality but should provide variation in terms of readability and represent a range of possibilities around the theme. Children select their first, second, and third choices. The teacher organizes heterogeneous reading groups keeping in mind the children's choices and interests, building on what is already known about both their reading strengths and challenges, and about potential working social relationships within groups.

The teacher may wish to begin with a structured approach such as that described by Harvey Daniels in which each child in the group is assigned different responsibilities based on differing important comprehension strategies. The teacher may initially set timelines as well. While the children learn to work in these small groups, teachers participate in at least some of the discussion meetings, working as a facilitator as much as possible rather than expert. Taking anecdotal notes during their discussion is one way teachers keep from dominating the conversation too much and allows them to gently help the children make connections with each others' contributions or to highlight and name for the children the strategies they are using, thus developing their metacognitive awareness.

Gradually children take over more of the responsibilities for discussions, setting timelines, and deciding on book projects. The discussions may depend less on assigned roles as children are comfortable working together and using a variety of comprehension strategies more flexibly. Teachers continue to participate in groups some of the time, ensuring that discussions continue to move to higher levels of complexity. However, the children need to see that they are capable of discussing books in meaningful ways on their own.

Teachers integrate literature circles in varying ways with their ongoing literacy programs. Sometimes they suspend their normal literacy block to pursue lit circles for a block of time, a week or two. At other times they continue a balanced program but lit circles become the guided reading portion of the daily literacy block. Some teachers do their comprehensive core reading program three days a week and literature circles for two days a week. Some teachers use literature circles during the block of time set aside for English language development (ELD) because it enables them to support students still needing to read and discuss in their first language, others reading and discussing in English, and still others reading at various levels between.

In the bibliography are resources that describe in more depth variations in the ways teachers approach literature circles and how their approaches change as both they and the children gain more experience. Approaches also depend in some cases on external requirements of the school and/or district.

### **III. COMPREHENSION**

Comprehension, or reading for understanding, should be central to any definition of reading. Improving comprehension is one of the central purposes of this particular curriculum. Not only will improved comprehension increase academic achievement (countering the widely recognized drop in reading scores at fourth grade), but comprehension, common sense should tell us, is also important in motivating children (or indeed any human being) to read. Who wants to read text that is meaningless? If we can foster motivation for reading, children will read more. Reading “mileage” in turn contributes to reading achievement, accounting for increased vocabulary, fluency, flexible and efficient integration of strategies, and an increasing breadth of background knowledge.

There is widespread research agreement with regard to important comprehension strategies. There is sometimes, however, less attention to the richness and complexity involved in the way the strategies are taught. It is our belief that most of the published reading “programs” do not provide teachers with the deep understandings necessary to impact children significantly. While there are a number of effective approaches, e.g. “reciprocal teaching” which focuses on questioning, clarifying, summarizing and predicting, we have chosen to focus on the strategies suggested by the Denver-based Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC). The strategies on which they focus are based firmly in research, have been implemented successfully not only in Colorado but nationally, and have been demonstrated and written about at length in exceptional professional books and videos listed at the end of this section. In addition the work of Roland Tharpe and others at CREDE has also influenced the way the comprehension strategies are embedded in the curriculum. The two bodies of work are complementary.

## A. General Structures for Use in Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Both the PEBC and CREDE approaches follow a pattern in which teachers do the following:

- explicitly model or demonstrate strategies through “think alouds.”
- follow with shared demonstrations in which children collaborate in developing understandings with the teacher through instructional conversation.
- follow further with guided practice individually and/or in small groups with the teacher monitoring and supporting alongside.
- provide opportunities for sharing in which children articulate the strategies explicitly as they share with others.
- assess and regularly remind children to apply strategies in their independent reading.
- use “traces of thinking” to support extended conversations, revisiting and reflecting on previous thinking and application of strategies.

Both approaches advocate the use of extended **instructional conversations**. Both emphasize the need for focusing on the strategies over extended periods of time. Teachers might spend several weeks emphasizing a particular strategy, giving the students plenty of time to master the strategy. They might then introduce a second strategy, focusing on it for a period of time but gradually integrating the two strategies.

**Think alouds** involve a teacher modeling her own reading by sharing the strategies she/he is using out loud as she/he reads. The teacher generally models a single strategy when introducing an extended study of that strategy. But the teacher also models the natural intertwining of strategies used by proficient readers.

**Traces of thinking.** The teacher should make liberal use of charts for recording strategies. These charts are returned to (and added to) on an ongoing basis. This models for the children the importance of keeping track of thinking over time in writing so that understandings can grow and change. They will be expected to keep track of their thinking through sticky notes, bookmarks, and/or reading logs/journals of various sorts.

Teachers will recognize long time teaching practices such as predicting or having children identify the beginning, middle, and end of stories. But they will go far beyond the sometimes simplistic ways these have often been taught. They will discover that even in kindergarten children can understand the big ideas, can ask sophisticated questions, can infer and synthesize. Doing this will depend, however, on teachers taking the time themselves to understand in depth the richness and complexity involved in the strategies.

**Texts for teaching comprehension.** Teaching comprehension well will also depend on using texts that are worth reading. There will not be a lot to comprehend in decodable texts or many of the texts used for guided reading. We are not saying that those texts should not be used as needed for a portion of the reading program. But from kindergarten on, children need opportunities every day to engage with texts worth discussing and comprehending.

## **B. Research-based Comprehension Strategies**

Here we briefly describe strategies that are used in the curriculum. Hopefully these brief descriptions will get teachers started. We strongly recommend that teachers go to the professional books and resources such as videos and web sites listed at the end of this section to read and learn about the different strategies in more depth. We also recommend that teachers form study groups to read and to discuss the implementation of these strategies over time.

### **1. Making connections**

We all bring to reading our prior understandings of the world. This background knowledge is organized cognitively in patterns called **schema**. We need to help children activate their schema and consciously use schema to understand their reading. Children can make connections to personal experiences: a character who reminds them of themselves or someone they know, an experience that is similar, and so on. **(text to self)**

Children can make connections with other texts (which may include movies, songs, and so on), which share similarities, e.g. another story about a grandmother, another story about a trickster, and so on. **(text to text)** Children can make connections with knowledge of the world, e.g. they have experienced blizzards or drought and can bring that knowledge to reading books in the weather units. **(text to world)**

Additionally children make connections to genres they know, e.g. poems use words musically. **(text to genre)** Or finally, children learn to make connections to authors or illustrators they know, e.g. George Littlechild draws brightly colored, fanciful illustrations. **(text to author)**

It is important to help children understand that their responsibility is to share and use the connections that help them understand the story better. As always, the teacher should model the difference between a peripheral connection and one that is connected to the emerging meaning of the text being read.

### **Experience – Text – Relationship (ETR - making connections explicit)**

Without explicit instruction, many children don't understand that what they already know can help them understand a text. This is why it is critical to go beyond simply asking children to make predictions. In fact, they need to go beyond simply stopping to note whether or not their predictions were accurate. They need to look back and be able to articulate the background experiences upon which they based the prediction and look forward to see how their experience propels them forward in the text in a continuous process. Tharpe calls this **ETR – experience, text, relationship**. Teachers often take care to activate prior knowledge and even have children focus on the text but don't take the time to teach children explicitly about the connections between the two. We recommend that when a teacher decides to have children make predictions prior to reading a story, they write the predictions on a chart. They add the child's initials or names, enabling each child to return to that particular prediction after reading the text. This can be time consuming and does not have to happen with every story. But it needs to happen until children are aware that the reading process actually involves a relationship to prior knowledge.

## **2. Questioning**

Like predicting, questioning is a strategy that drives reading forward and is essential to comprehension. Questioning occurs before, during and after reading texts. Readers use questions to construct meaning, find answers, clarify confusions, and deepen understanding. Good questions are as important as answers. Children will learn the difference between thick and thin questions, literal and inferential questions. Some questions are never answered but are still worth asking and reflecting on.

## **3. Visualizing**

Proficient readers create pictures in their mind when they read. In visualizing, readers make the words concrete and real. Visualization also personalizes reading and makes it more enjoyable, thus helping ensure engagement. When children draw what they have visualized, they are able to see concretely that every reader draws on different pictures in their minds' eyes, different experiences, and subsequently different interpretations of their reading. Finally visualizing is particularly important to comprehend in information text genres.

## **4. Making inferences**

Inferential thinking occurs when readers use implicit information in the text, their prior knowledge, and questions to hypothesize about or reach a conclusion concerning an idea or event in the text. Without inference, it is not possible to get to the deeper meanings in text. Inferring thus pulls together several other strategies: predicting, making connections, questioning, visualizing and reading/rereading the text itself.

## **5. Determining importance in text**

Determining importance operates at a number of different levels in reading. Children learn how to understand some parts of the text as detail, contributing to but not equal to the important or big ideas of the text. The important ideas are the ones we most want to remember – this of course depending on our purpose for reading in the first place. Children need to distinguish what is important from what is interesting, to see and be able to talk about themes or big ideas or the most important information. Again as with inferences they need to draw on a number of other strategies such as making inferences and summarizing. This is not to say that details are not important. For example, what would a poem be without detailed images.

## **6. Synthesizing**

Synthesizing is the culmination of all the thinking, strategies and reflection that go into reading a text. It exists on a continuum from taking stock at various points in the reading – “here is what I think at this point” – to entirely new ideas and insights. Readers take their prior knowledge, their questions, inferences, images, big ideas and put them all together to determine what they finally take from the reading. In a way, it comes full circle back to the reader. The text itself and the process of reading it have changed the reader. Old perspectives are refined or revised or transformed. Concepts are finally understood in depth. All of us have experienced finding new information, insights, understandings – even noticing previously unnoticed details – when we read a book for the second time.

That is because in synthesizing, we are changed by our first reading. This important comprehension strategy underlies one of the patterns you will find in the curriculum, the emphasis on repeated readings. We expect that, given a rich meaningful text, the children will discover more with each reading.

### **C. Strategies as Applied in the Completing the Circle Curriculum**

In most cases, we have not linked specific comprehension strategies with specific stories because we will not know where you and your students are in the process of introducing them gradually through the year. Strategies are recommended specifically in a few cases such as the various strategies for activating or using background knowledge to predict, e.g. KWL and ETR. In several units, the strategies are taught specifically as an introduction to literature circles. However, using the strategies is expected throughout the shared reading cycle.

#### **Repeated readings**

There are several important reasons why stories should be read several times. Repeated readings will enable children to deepen their understanding. They will also help children learn new vocabulary in context through repeated exposure and gain fluency. However, the focus and purpose for each reading varies.

#### **First reading**

We suggest several variations for the first reading. At times, the first reading is preceded by experiences intended to tap the background knowledge and experience of the students. At other times, the story simply begins. At this point we most often recommend reading the story straight through, using the **story telling** strategies recommended by Bruchac and Caduto in their **Keepers** series of books. Attention to **read aloud** strategies will help children engage in an aesthetic first response to the story. Note that this is not always the case with informational texts, which may not always be read straight through the first time, depending on their complexity and format.

Children's first responses to the story should be free. They will naturally make connections, ask questions, share feelings, or comment on aspects of the story that they find interesting. These responses will provide important information for the teacher in determining children's interest level and engagement, understanding, interpretations that may be pursued in further readings and so on. Of course, if the children are familiar with previously taught comprehension strategies and if they are accustomed to authentic instructional conversations, these first responses can move very quickly to deeper levels. Let the children dominate these initial responses, acknowledging their contributions, writing them down as anecdotal notes and/or noting them on chart paper to return to later. Sometimes it is at this point that the teacher will go back to initial predictions and have the children reflect on the basis for their predictions and determine how those predictions helped them engage with and understand the story (ETR). This step can be left until a later rereading.

## Second reading

We usually suggest that the second reading gives children the opportunity to listen to the story in a different way than their initial aesthetic (or “lived through”) response. During the second reading they will be listening in order to be sure they understand the elements of the story. Who are the characters? Where is the story happening? What is the problem? What events took place and in what order? How did the story get resolved?

The teacher should not resort to asking direct questions of individual children after the second reading, but rather should invite the children to share their own **retellings** of the story, guiding as necessary. Most often this will be done collaboratively with all the children participating. The teacher should act as a moderator, reminding children of what they have already said, asking probing questions, e.g. “So what came next?” or “Did that come first?” or “Who can look back and see where that happened?” At this point the conversation is focused on the basic story structure, not necessarily on interpretations of the meaning of the story. The emphasis may be fairly literal at this stage, although again, with increasing sophistication, certainly with increasing focus on the theme of the unit, many children will interweave the lessons or big ideas in the story.

Depending on the students, the complexity of the text, and plans for later responses, the teacher can provide scaffolding in the form of writing down the children’s words (**language experience**) on charts or poster paper. Various other supports can contribute as memory devices so that children at different levels can then take turns retelling more independently. These can take the form of **illustrations, flannel board cut outs, puppets, story boards**, and so on. Children can act out the story informally. Or they can act the story using **readers theater** scripts – using actual dialogue lifted from the story.

The number of retellings depends on the complexity and challenge level of the text for the children. Retellings do not always need to be developed more formally. More formal retellings such as **wall stories** or **readers theater** generally occur when final productions are going to be used to celebrate the unit at the end. They are also used to help children who are emergent readers learn to read independently. Finally they are used to build fluency.

Retellings serve another important purpose. They provide an opportunity for children to find answers to some of their more concrete questions and to clarify understandings and/or misconceptions. Children will often get the meanings of words they don’t understand informally clarified at this point. Retellings give all children the opportunity to reach a level playing field before going on to discuss the story’s important meanings/information.

One comprehension strategy that might get attention at this second reading is to begin to separate important ideas from supporting details. For narrative texts, this means figuring out with the children the most important events of the story. The teacher might use strategies like **storyboards** or **story maps** (see below for further explanation) here. For information texts, they teacher may work through sections of the text to have children come to summary statements about the important ideas in each section. Of course, this may also merge into the third reading.

### **Third reading**

The third reading is generally focused on applying further comprehension strategies in order to interpret the text beyond a literal level. **Instructional conversations** are at their richest. The teacher should start with an open question: “So what did we learn from this story?” She/he should be prepared with several other open-ended, related questions in case she needs to move the conversation forward. Teachers generally find that by this reading, children engage eagerly in discussion. For example children might want to talk about what they learned about working together in communities from a particular story. They will also at this point want to go back to organizing devices like **KWHL** charts to note what they’ve learned and to see if they’ve answered the questions they’ve posed. **Matrixes**, story or informational, need to be filled in and then discussed as ways of organizing and making information available for deeper discussion.

### **Children take on responsibility for repeated readings**

Depending on the challenge level of the text and the stage of development of the children, they can take on the responsibility for second and third readings. (Of course multiple copies of the book need to be available.) The teacher would assign children to read in pairs or small groups for specific purposes. For example, groups could create their own story boards to retell what they believe are the most important events of a story. Although with enough experience, children may be able to work in groups without teacher guidance. Teachers will want to support group work through **instructional conversations** as needed. Remember that working in small groups allows the teacher to observe the progress and support the involvement of each and every child in the conversation, something that is not usually possible in whole class conversations. The teacher can also provide the academic language that the children need to acquire gradually, e.g. “You used your *schema* and your *visualization strategy* to figure out what that might look like.”

### **Flexible use of the repeated readings structure**

TEACHERS SHOULD USE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR STUDENTS AND THEIR OWN JUDGMENT IN ADJUSTING THE SUGGESTED SEQUENCE AND NUMBER OF READING AND REREADINGS IN THE UNITS. Many times students can move more quickly through the sequence, especially if it’s later in the school year (or later in the unit) and they have been introduced to comprehension strategies all along. We have, however, found that in general reading a rich text several times results in deeper and more sophisticated language and understandings for the students.

### **D. Retelling**

Retelling is both a comprehension strategy (determining importance in text/summarizing) in itself as well as an important method for assessing comprehension. When teachers ask children to retell rather than simply answer questions about the story, children know that they are responsible for understanding what they read, both the parts and the whole.

Children need to learn how to retell well, just as they learn any other strategy. The teacher first models and talks about why retelling is an important strategy. She shares with the children what is expected in a good retelling. Then she provides guided practice in that strategy. Retelling usually occurs first during shared reading and involves the

collaboration of the whole class. Later children engage in retelling activities in small groups. Eventually they are expected to retell individually. Depending on the reading levels of the children and the complexity of the text, the teacher provides various amounts of support, orally and/or through the use of varying retelling support strategies described below.

Retellings generally include the following for narrative texts and children will learn to include the following in comprehensive retellings:

- Introduce the story.
- Provide information about time and setting.
- Include and describe in varying amounts of detail all the characters.
- Present the problem.
- Include all relevant story episodes.
- Present story events or episodes in a reasonable sequence.
- Possibly indicate that the theme or point of the story has been appreciated.
- Use language or stylistic devices that reflect the original story.

In the units we have stressed whole class collaborative retellings with various supports. In some cases, we suggest small group retellings. Teachers should feel free to move to retelling as a small group experience when their students are ready. It is also important that children eventually get some experience with writing a retelling or summary. Children can use the various supports described below that can act as preliminary organizing strategies and go on to write summaries. (See Brian Cambourne and Hazel Brown's book, *Read and Retell*. Though aimed at third through sixth grades, this book still provides excellent strategies for the teacher in helping children get more and more skillful with their retellings, especially written retellings.)

### **Oral retelling**

The story may be simple enough (or the children already have spent much time on retellings in that particular unit) to simply retell through oral discussion. Your judgment is important here. Whether or not to stop here depends on whether or not the children are easily understanding the story.

### **Dramatization**

Dramatization ranges from informal acting out to more formal readers theater to formal plays. We do not include in this curriculum formal plays as they involve costumes, props, memorization of lines and so on. Although they may be appropriate for celebrations and culminating activities, and children love them, they generally take a good deal of time. They do not result in extended reading opportunities and it is difficult to give all children equal opportunity.

Informal dramatization Children are assigned parts. Children simply make up appropriate dialogue. The teacher can act as narrator helping children pull the threads of the retelling together as necessary. As children are more experienced, children can take over narrator role. Let all children participate by retelling several times with different "casts."

Informal readers theater Teacher can “lift” lines from the story on sentence strips. Children again are assigned parts but are expected to actually read their lines (after some practice!) Or children can take turns reading lines from the language experience charts or wall stories.

Readers theater The teacher can write a script ahead and/or create the script collaboratively with the class. Again children are assigned parts to actually read. Props are kept to a minimum. Children are expected to practice and read their lines with expression. They also have to pay attention to the sequencing in order to read their parts at the appropriate time.

### **Dramatization with props:**

Flannel boards The teacher can cut out flannel board characters and objects representing settings, characters, and elements important to the action or plot. Children use the flannel board individually or in small groups to retell. This makes a good center activity. Note that generic flannel board materials and figures are available for purchase and do not need to be re-created for every story.

Puppets These can range from simple cut out faces on popsicle sticks to more elaborate puppets. Again these can be used for retellings. Often children feel safer with a prop. It is their character talking, not themselves.

**Writing/reading-language experience.** The teacher encourages retelling in the discussion. She/he captures the children’s words in sentences, which are recorded. The children are expected to recall the setting, characters and so on. The language is often simpler than the text itself. The children are able to read the words they themselves have produced orally. This strategy is especially effective for emergent readers.

The words are recorded on large posters or chart paper. Children can illustrate in small groups turning the posters into a **wall story**. This can be used as a backdrop for further retellings - informal to more formal. The words can also be recorded and duplicated in **individual books** that the children can illustrate. These books can be used for reading individually and in small groups. The children can later take the books home to read to families.

**Visual retellings-story maps.** After teaching children story elements (which usually include the setting, characters, problem, events, and resolution), have the children create story maps on 12 x 18 construction paper or chart paper. Children first discuss these elements orally, perhaps taking notes about what they want to include. Children then use drawing, symbols, colors, and words to convey the story elements. They are thus retelling the story visually. Be sure to model this strategy first. (Note that you may want to cut out smaller rectangles or squares to be glued onto the larger paper so children can divide up the responsibilities for the story map rather than all having to wrestle with a single piece of paper.)

**Story boards.** This strategy pulls out the events of the story – the narrative – rather than focusing on the story elements. The children determine first the most important events of the story. Again they may want to take notes. They then draw pictures for each event. Characters and setting are of course interwoven naturally through the illustrations of the events. The end result looks something like a comic book. Teachers may begin by assigning three parts – beginning, middle, and end. They should move quickly to assigning 4 –8 frames so the children understand that they are responsible for deciding main events, not just picking any thing from beginning, middle, end. Eventually the children can make their own decisions about how many frames they need to use, given their particular story.

For both of the above strategies, children should explain their rationales for choosing the main events and for the various ways they choose to illustrate. Teachers will eventually want to use these last two strategies as heuristic (or planning) strategies for children in writing their own stories as real authors and playwrights actually do. See for example Bill Peet’s autobiography in which he describes using story boards to plan his writing.

### **Retellings with information texts**

These retellings generally involve careful comprehension work on understanding how to distinguish the difference between main ideas and supporting details in information texts.

### **Semantic maps**

Teachers should have the children contribute what they believe are the big ideas. These ideas should be listed. The teacher should then have the children make decisions about which ideas actually tell more about another idea listed which is the “bigger” idea. Using a semantic map with spokes for the big ideas and branches for the important details works well in making these relationships visual.

The teacher should note that the details are also important depending on the purpose for reading, for example in developing an elaborated report on a topic. The details are what make the big idea more concrete. Responses to information texts described below can help children organize the details in ways such that the big ideas emerge more clearly.

Note that currently published writers are using a much wider range of genres to carry information, for example poems or narratives that don’t necessarily tell a story in the sense of having characters and problems and resolutions. These will need to be discussed as they arise. See the discussion of **Genre** below.

## **E. Instructional Conversations**

Instructional conversations are critical contexts for developing children’s language and complex thinking according to Tharpe and the CREDE principles. In these conversations, teachers and students both contribute, co-constructing meaning as they work with challenging, relevant, rich texts, concepts, and ideas. The teacher assures that children are prepared for the conversation through reading and rereading relevant materials, through having access to needed vocabulary (posting word collections throughout a thematic unit), and through prior or current hands-on experiences.

The teacher constantly assesses the ongoing conversation and responds in ways that scaffold student participation. The dialogue is conversational in the sense that the teacher finds ways for every child to contribute and responds to each child. It is balanced in the sense that the teacher is not always the center of the dialogue. Instead of the typical “teacher-child-teacher” discourse pattern, children often initiate the dialogue and children expect to direct their contributions to each other and not just the teacher. The result is co-constructed (rather than transmitted) knowledge.

The teacher models responses to children that promote connected turn taking. The teacher can teach this initially by also using role playing or fish bowl opportunities. In fish bowls, a small group of students sits in the center of the classroom while other students gather around to watch and observe. The observers are responsible for noticing when children respond to each other’s contributions by building on another’s response or acknowledging an idea and taking a different position, and so on.

Thematic units provide an exceptionally rich focus for goal-directed dialogues. The teacher activates background knowledge or schema. For example many stories are initiated through predictions (See ETR strategy described above) or KWHL charts in which children take what they know and make predictions or ask questions about what they would like to know or expect to find out.

Necessary skills are taught directly when needed through quick sketches or explanations and providing vocabulary informally as needed. Children regularly collect related words that are posted on charts. Modeling (or direct instruction) can be interwoven throughout with mini lessons and think alouds.

The teacher invites children to expand or elaborate their contributions, for example, a pertinent text to world connection. The teacher asks the children to tell more, to elaborate their responses, “Tell me more...” The teacher asks children to support their answers by going back to the text or illustrations or to explain more fully their reasoning. The teacher uses academic language and points out instances when the children are using particular strategies or using academic language. The teacher moves the conversation forward, when necessary, by using open-ended questions rather than questions with right/wrong or literal answers.

Finally, of course, the teacher provides a non-threatening environment with the expectation that the students will expect challenge but also will expect the opportunity to negotiate contributions. Children can always expect and give respect. (See Tharpe’s book and CREDE website and materials for more information on instructional conversations.)

## **F. Other Responses to Reading**

### **Written responses**

Along with instructional conversations, writing provides one of the most powerful tools to help children in deepening, expanding, refining, or transforming their thinking about reading. The strategies described briefly here will be elaborated in the Writing Guide.

### **Reading logs//reading journals**

Children may be asked to respond initially in reading logs or dialectical journals. This may be a response to a story read aloud during shared reading or a story read individually or in a small group. The teacher uses open-ended questions, connected usually to the comprehension strategies described above. Children may be asked to make connections, ask questions, share feelings, visualize (using drawing and/or words in their journals), or make predictions as related to the story at hand. Teachers should also provide opportunities to make free choice response.

Sample questions might include the following:

1. Explain what you think is happening.
2. Ask questions. Say what confuses you. I wonder why....
3. Explain why you think a person, object or event might be important.
4. Predict what you think might happen next.
5. Make a text to self connection  
    With a character. Do you know someone like this or is this character like you in some way?  
    With a situation. Have you had a similar experience?
6. Make a text to text connection. Does this story remind you of another story?
7. How does the story make you feel?
8. Are there words that paint pictures in your mind?

Teachers would not expect children to deal with all these questions at once but could eventually develop such a list as the various comprehension strategies are taught. Other questions might relate more specifically to the particular story. For example, why do you think a particular character felt that way?

### **Dialectical journals**

Dialectical journals do much the same but also have the children write words or sentence(s) from the text itself in the left hand column and responses (as in reading journals above) in the right hand column.

Both types of journals provide a space for individual reflection before coming to share with a partner, group, or whole class. Two important considerations: First, these should be considered first draft writing without excessive concern for spelling, grammar and so on. Second, the journals should serve authentic purposes rather than simply be used as a tool to check on reading. They can be used to support oral (as in instructional conversations) or written dialogues (as in getting response from the teacher in writing).

### **Dialogue Journals**

Dialogue journals are described more fully in the Writing Guide but are characterized by asking children to make personal connections to a story or information text. Children draw first, then use their drawing to support their writing. They get feedback from the teacher or other children in the form of written questions, which are then responded to in writing as well. For example, draw a picture and write about a time when your grandfather or another elder taught you an important lesson.

### **Retellings using symbols/pictographs**

This activity is modeled first by the teacher. The teacher provides useful symbols or pictographs for the children but they are free to draw on their own ideas as well. The symbols are cut out and arranged in the desired sequence. Children then retell the story using the symbols as a memory support. They go on to write the story based on their oral retelling. This approach can also be used to support original writing.

Other written responses can include summaries, book reviews and/or story variations such as creating new endings, writing in the style of, writing letters to characters, writing letters to research a topic, observations, ABC books, and so on. These various writing possibilities are described in more depth in the Writing Guide.

### **Transmediation**

Transmediation refers to the process by which we move information from one medium of communication to another. In the context of this curriculum, it is the process of moving information from words (spoken or written) to **visual arts, drama, movement, and music**. Using the expressive arts in this way helps children process, deepen, and expand their understandings. This process can be especially useful in supporting students learning a second language and differently abled students.

**Drama** supports higher order thinking, problem solving, language and visualization. Various approaches to drama have already been described above under the section on retelling. A particularly effective sequence is to read, then dramatize, then write. The process of transmediation, particularly through one of the expressive arts, can lead to much richer writing. See **informal drama, readers theater**, various **be-the-character** enactments ranging from **dramatic monologues** or **talk show** take offs, and so on.

**Movement** can be a subset of drama or effective by itself as in **dance**. Children can create more abstract movements (as opposed to realistic acting) to express ideas or feelings expressed in the reading.

The **visual arts** draw on both the affective and cognitive domains to analyze events and feelings. Interpretations can run the gamut of art projects from purely expressive to realistic to the use of graphics and symbols to express meaning. See **story maps, story boards, posters or visuals, illustrations**, or purely visual interpretations using various media. A story can be retold using **symbols** (or **pictographs**).

**Music**. Understanding can also be enhanced by turning texts into music. Words can be used or music used alone to express understandings more abstractly. Drums or other percussion instruments for example could interpret the changing feeling tones in a story or provide accompaniment to a choral reading. Music is a particularly powerful tool in helping children remember.

**Changing textual genres.** Children can transmediate from one text genre to another. For example, a story could be changed to a poem or a news article. See the Writing Guide for more ideas.

With any of these experiences, it is important to provide time for children to explain their thought processes and interpretations. In other words, they are transmediating back into words. It is also important to provide a risk free environment. In the interest of time, responses during reading are considered first draft responses, not finished products. Only a few responses would be revised and polished as final products to be used in culminating activities such as museums and celebrations of various sorts. Be sure children understand that with first drafts, it is the thinking and ideas that matter most, not the artistry.

### **Graphic Organizers**

Graphic organizers are connected to visual responses but are used more as tools to organize and clarify information and thinking. Like transmediations, however, they also are of particular support to second language learners and differently abled students because they provide visual information in addition to words alone.

#### **Venn diagrams**

Venn diagrams are designed to help children compare and contrast information. Most often used to compare two items (two stories, two characters), the traits or elements they share in common are placed in the middle where the two circles overlap. Sometimes teachers use three overlapping circles. Generally when more than two or three things are being compared, a matrix or organized chart is used.

#### **T Charts**

A T Chart is similar to a Venn diagram using a T design with the two items to be compared written at the top on each side of the cross bar. The details being compared are written side by side down. Points in common probably don't stand out as clearly with this organizer.

#### **Story or content matrixes, sometimes called organized charts.**

Matrixes are useful when comparing numerous items. These might include stories that share a similar theme or pattern such as trickster tales. These might include a study of various animals or habitats. The items to be compared are written either horizontally or vertically. The points of contrast or similarity are written on the opposite axis.

### **Extended Inquiry/Research**

Readings can always be expanded and extended through further inquiry. Children can read other related books. They can interview "experts" or knowledgeable others. They can search other media. They can explore and observe the natural world.

## **IV: FLUENCY**

Lack of fluency is one observable behavior by which we might identify children who are struggling with reading. Problems with fluency may be accompanied by a slower than normal reading rate, finger pointing, lack of phrasing and appropriate intonation, and sometimes by frequent rereading. Lack of fluency can be caused by a variety of factors: lack of familiarity with the topic, lack of vocabulary, or even a poorly written or organized text.

All readers experience a lack of fluency with some texts. And beginning readers nearly all go through a phase of word-by-word reading as their attention turns more intently to the grapho/phonic cueing system. Eventually they integrate this cueing system with the other cueing systems more effectively and move on to more fluent reading. It is important to remember that lack of fluency does not necessarily mean serious trouble! It is also important to know that the exact relationship between comprehension and fluency has not been fully mapped by research. The best hypothesis is that they are reciprocally interrelated. Fluency can support comprehension and comprehension supports fluency.

What this means in practice is that simply training children to read faster will not necessarily increase comprehension. On the other hand, there are instructional practices that can increase fluency in a way that validates the need for comprehension. Reading faster does have implications for the quantity of reading possible. We know extensive reading matters. So as long as children are in fact comprehending, and not just speeding their way through by decoding quickly, reading faster has positive benefits.

### **Average Reading Rates**

It is important to have a sense of adequate reading rates by grade level before determining whether or not children have a serious problem with fluency. The following is taken from the research of Harris and Sipay (1990) and summarized in Allington (2001).

Grade 1	60 - 90	WPM (words per minute)
Grade 2	85 - 120	WPM
Grade 3	115 - 140	WPM

### **What research says:**

#### **Poor fluency**

- Poor fluency may be a learned behavior that results when teachers require children to read orally more often, interrupt children more often, and suggest sounding out as the first and sometimes only strategy.
- It may also be the result of constantly being required to read out loud in texts which are too difficult.
- It may be a developmental stage.

### **Strategies that help:**

- Model reading with fluency as an experienced reader (small positive effect).
- Give children opportunities for repeated re-readings (more effective than word drills or listening to tapes).
- Provide opportunities for repeated rereading for different purposes. Use a variety of social contexts and academic purposes.
- Teach children strategies (such as phrasing) explicitly. For example give a mini lesson on trying out “different voices” while reading.
- Have children tape their own reading, self critique, and reread, charting their progress.
- Make sure children are reading in texts of the appropriate level.
- Have children practice with easier books to use with younger “book buddies.”
- Choral reading
- Echo reading
- Readers theater

### **Overall implications**

Overall, as always with strategies for other purposes, teach the strategies explicitly. Then give children opportunity for guided and independent practice. Be sure children understand the purpose. Whenever possible, make the purposes authentic and interesting. For example, why not practice with choral readings of real poetry rather than boring texts created strictly for practice. Fluency is reading at a rate that is comfortable and expressive and that ensures comprehension. It doesn’t mean just reading fast. Also be sure that children understand that they can read far faster silently than out loud. Most reading that they do – in school and out – should be done silently once they are past the emergent reading stage.

### **Repeated Readings**

We have incorporated repeated reading in a variety of formats and contexts with almost every book in the curriculum. Stories are read aloud by the teacher with expression. Stories are reread several times for several different kinds of response through instructional conversation. Suggestions are given for echo reading, partner reading, small group reading, choral reading and readers theater. Children can reread at home. And the stories are available for rereading during reading workshop (independent reading time).

### **Choral Reading**

In choral reading, children read in unison, like a chorus in a musical production. Reading in unison requires practice and close attention to the text. It requires reading text in meaningful phrases and with appropriate intonation patterns. Choral reading may be done as a whole class shared event at any time! Or you may want to create more complex choral reading presentations:

1. Pick a poem with interesting possibilities for using voices in creative ways.
2. Teacher reads the poem – twice.
3. Let children respond to the poem freely.
4. Have the children read the poem together as a chorus – once or twice as needed.
5. Assign parts to groups.

6. Give children time to collaborate on how they want to use their voices within their own group. They may decide to do some lines solo or as duets or as a whole group. They may want to use their voices in different ways: high/low; loud/soft, etc.
7. Perform poem as a whole with groups contributing their parts.
8. Pick another poem. Let groups create their own choral versions of the entire poem.
9. Afterwards compare and contrast different versions.
10. If possible, video tape presentations so children can self evaluate and set goals for better and better performances
11. Eventually, children can present poems of their own choosing. Or the teacher may want to have children pick from a selection chosen to extend a particular theme.
12. Have children perform for important audiences: other classes, families, communities.

### Readers Theater

Readers theater is based on stories meant to be performed as plays. However, these “reading” performances are not accompanied by sets, props, and costumes. Children are not expected to memorize lines. They are expected to practice their lines and read with such excellent expression that the performance is compelling.

Because children engage in extensive rereading as well as give attention to reading with expression, their fluency increases. Because they do not require all the work and time required for an actual play, they can be used more often in the classroom. All students can participate. Finally, when children themselves create the scripts, they develop problem solving and higher order thinking skills.

Teachers will want to give children the experience of creating their own scripts but will also want to use ready made scripts much of the time if fluency is one of the main purposes. Teachers can create scripts from the stories they are actually using in the thematic unit. Scripts are available commercially and from several web sites listed in the resources at the end of the Reading Guide. Note that not all stories make good readers theater. A lot of dialogue helps.

• Copy the story for an overhead projector. Read the story and determine the number of characters.
• Use different color pens to highlight each character’s dialogue.
• Determine if some of the text could be deleted or restated in shorter ways to reduce the narrator’s part(s).
• Determine if more than one narrator could be used to provide more interest.
• As children become more sophisticated, they may be able to infer what characters might say and creatively add further dialogue.

Have children go on to create their own scripts in groups. Practice, practice, practice. Have real audiences in mind. Using masks or puppets can help children build courage.

## **V. VOCABULARY (WORD STUDY)**

Research on reading and Native American students and current data analysis on reading achievement from schools both indicate that vocabulary development is a significant need. Further the relationship between vocabulary and comprehension is unequivocal. Children cannot comprehend a text when they do not recognize a large number of words. Simply learning to decode the words makes little difference if the words are not in the child's listening vocabulary.

### **Ineffective approaches to vocabulary development**

We know that at least some traditional approaches to vocabulary are not effective. These ineffective approaches include the following:

- Looking up definitions as a single source of word knowledge
- Asking students to write sentences for new words before they've had the opportunity to study the words in depth
- Expecting students to identify or produce single definitions (especially single words (synonyms) on assessments.
- Using drill and practice routines

### **Effective approaches to vocabulary development**

Effective approaches include the following:

- Provide extended time for reading.
- Use rich and varied text so children are exposed to a wide range of words.
- Provide opportunities for students to hear words in natural sentence contexts.
- Use concrete contexts when possible (pictures, artifacts-items, actions).
- Provide opportunities for students to use words in meaningful ways.
- Provide opportunities for students to connect new words/concepts to those already known.
- Study concepts and make explicit the relationships of vocabulary within those concepts rather than study single, unrelated words.
- Use explicit instruction in concepts plus incidental encounters with words.
- Teach strategies leading to independent word learning.
- Find the word(s) or concept(s) that will have the biggest impact on comprehension rather than "covering" many words superficially.
- Provide opportunities for students to use inference in figuring out new words.

### **Levels of vocabulary acquisition and subsequent teaching strategies**

Vocabulary is not an all or nothing proposition. Children can learn words incidentally through association as they read. The largest source for vocabulary is from extensive reading. Hence the significance of ensuring independent reading time, including the direct teaching of strategies important for making this time effective in the curriculum.

The sheer volume of vocabulary needed by children to read increasingly challenging texts as they move through school and to pass the range of gate-keeping tests means that all necessary vocabulary cannot be taught directly through weekly word lists and testing!

### **Importance of teaching strategies**

Children need to be and can be explicitly taught strategies for unlocking the meanings of words they encounter incidentally in their reading. This is vocabulary development.

### **Teaching key concept vocabulary in depth**

Finally, it is important to identify and teach explicitly key concept words in the depth they deserve. Children can explore synonyms and antonyms for key vocabulary and many examples of what the word is and is not. Graphic organizers can be useful in teaching relationships within and among key concept vocabulary.

### **How thematic teaching supports vocabulary development**

The thematic approach and overall structure of the curriculum promotes all three approaches to developing vocabulary: incidental learning, explicit teaching of strategies, and in-depth development of vocabulary connected to key concepts.

Themes generate not only large quantities of vocabulary, but by virtue of the thematic underpinnings, the vocabulary is usually interrelated in meaningful ways. Because the themes in this curriculum have been selected as relevant to the lives and prior experiences of the children, the vocabulary is subsequently more meaningful and more easily acquired. Repeated readings of each text and reading multiple texts on the same theme ensures extensive repetition of the vocabulary in natural contexts. Instructional conversations and writing activities related to the themes ensure that the vocabulary words are actually used multiple times.

### **Identifying and teaching key vocabulary**

We recommend that you examine each text carefully to identify no more than two or three vocabulary words related to important concepts to be developed through the text (and usually related as well to the overall theme). Place a word like “home” or “family,” for example, at the center of a chart or overhead. (Another example might be the word “prairie” or “desert” from one of the animal or plant units.) Ask the children to brainstorm all the words and ideas that come into their minds when they hear this word. Accept all answers. Discuss the words, letting children ask questions informally about words they don’t know. Follow by asking the children to work in small groups, identifying words that cluster together. Each group can then present their own cluster map to the whole class. Discuss the larger and smaller sub categories. For example, large categories might include family, celebrations, foods and so on. Return to the chart throughout the unit as concepts are developed and vocabulary becomes even more elaborated. Later in a word study activity children might work on the key word(s) by exploring all aspects of a word: synonyms, antonyms, examples which illustrate its meaning, various definitions, connections to other related words, connotations versus denotations of the word and so on. In another word study activity, children can sort and categorize words, justifying their choices.

Use the texts of each theme to identify words that could be used to teach important vocabulary strategies. These might include the following:

- Figuring out words from context at the sentence or a larger chunk of text level. There should also be discussion about when just having a general “associational” meaning of the word is enough to go on and when it is important to gather more specific information about a word.
- Figuring out words by using word parts: these include root words, prefixes and suffixes. Children can go on to create poster collections of other examples of words with the same prefixes, suffixes or roots. For example, as they learn about the word “breathless” in a poem on the Plains (home to the Lakota and other Northern tribes), children learn about the suffix –less and how it means “without” when added to a root word. Children collect other examples of words ending in –less. An interesting variation is to take a core or root word and create an organized chart showing the various suffixes that might be added to either change the meaning slightly and/or to change the part of speech and thus the way the word is used in a sentence. For example, the word work can add –s, -ed, -ing, -er. Rich conversations can ensue in which children learn that nouns can be used as verbs and sometimes become adjectives and so on. Children should learn that they can infer a meaning when they know the word “medicine” and don’t recognize the word “medical.” Of course these inferences don’t always work. They will still have to find out more about a particular word if it appears to be critical to understanding a text. Again they learn to make strategic choices depending on the overall text.
- Learning that synonyms may have the same denotation or literal meaning but may have very different connotations. For example, in the trickster unit children will want to consider carefully the difference between words like intelligent, smart, shrewd, and crafty used to describe one character trait of a trickster.
- Learning about figurative language and using it in their writing: Includes metaphors, similes, and personification.
- Creating word collections organized around words used to describe the senses. Other collections could focus on more concrete words choices for “said” or “walk.”
- Reflect on the differences in vocabulary in two different languages. Examples might be exploring the words for home or family in depth in both languages.
- Using a dictionary, thesaurus, and/or glossary.

Finally, you should not try to predetermine or teach all the words in a text that children may not know. Teach a few concept words which will probably – in turn – elicit other vocabulary words that are likely to occur. Answer questions about vocabulary informally as they come up when children ask.

Have the children develop word collections for the various words related to the theme of the unit. For example, for the theme on horses they can gather words to describe horses, names of different breeds of horses, different family names such as colt and filly and so on including the same words for all these categories in their native language. Make these charts available throughout the thematic unit so the children can use the words in their talk and writing.

Have the children take responsibility for the words they want or need to know more about on an individual basis. In a given week, some teachers have children choose two words (from their shared reading) that they either don't know or think were used in an interesting way. Children have to figure out the meaning of the word (using any of the strategies above or others) and create an illustration that would enable other children to guess the word without the definition. Some words involve actions and can be acted out. Children can share the illustrations and dramatizations throughout the week. Illustrated words can be posted around the room. At the end of the week, illustrations go into a class big book dictionary of (insert title of book) to be made available in the classroom library.

Finally help children get excited about words. You might create a bulletin board titled "Wondrous Words and Marvelous Metaphors." (Thanks to Greg Denham for this idea in his books on teaching poetry.) Model your enthusiasm through your own favorites (being sure to include some examples of words the children have actually used in their writing, for example, or your own favorite word from a story). Encourage children to add their favorites on bright slips of colored paper. Illustrations should be welcome. Words can come from their independent reading or writing as well.

It is not necessary to give vocabulary tests. It is important to assess whether or not the children are using the words in their talk and their writing. Discuss this with the children. Sometimes it is useful to give a test every so often just so the children can actually see that they are in fact learning vocabulary without tests. If you have to give tests, be sure not to use multiple choice, matching questions or fill in the blank tests. Have the children demonstrate their understandings by using the words in sentences, telling about the meaning of the word in their own words, or drawing a picture.

## **VI. WAYS TO READ TEXT**

Silent reading is the key to effective reading. There are however good reasons to use oral reading in the reading program. Michael Opitz and Timothy Razinski provide the pros and cons of oral reading in their book *Good-bye Round Robin*. **They do not advocate Round Robin reading in any case.** The book provides many effective strategies for oral reading. With thanks to the authors, the following pros and cons are presented.

### **Good reasons for oral reading:**

1. To whet students' appetites for reading as in read alouds
2. To share or perform as in readers' theater or to support an interpretation by reading from the appropriate part of the text

3. To help beginning readers understand how speaking is related to the other language arts and their lives
4. To develop listening comprehension and vocabulary
5. To assist students in developing skills associated with reading such as fluency and expression.
6. To promote language learning for students whose first language is not English
7. To build confidence
8. To further comprehension
9. To determine the strategies a child is using or needs to begin using
10. To provide a means of sharing reading progress
11. To provide children with additional reading time
12. To address standards

### **Why not Round Robin reading?**

1. It gives students an inaccurate view of reading, which is seldom out loud. It can also cause an overemphasis on accuracy: reading is saying the words right.
2. It can cause faulty reading habits for children trying to follow along.
3. It can cause unnecessary sub-vocalizations.
4. It can cause inattentive behaviors on the part of other children who are listening to the reader.
5. It can work against all students developing their full potential. Struggling students are often corrected rather than being given time to problem solve, at least in part because the teacher is concerned about the rest of the class hearing fluent reading.
6. It consumes valuable class time while not really adding reading time of significance for the individual children actually reading. Note that listening time is not actually reading time, even when children follow along in their own texts.
7. It can be a source of anxiety and embarrassment.
8. It can hamper listening comprehension as students often begin preparing for their own turn reading.

### **Some options for getting a text read**

- Teacher reads aloud
- Individual reading aloud – preferably not in a round robin situation but can be appropriate in pairs, small group, or one-on-one with teacher.
- Silent reading
- Partner reading. Pair a stronger and weaker reader. First teach effective strategies for helping when a student gets to a word he/she doesn't know.
- Reciprocal reading. Student leader and partner are assigned roles involving questioning, clarifying, summarizing and predicting. They reverse roles in the next reading event.
- Dialogue reading. Children are assigned character parts to read aloud. Teacher can act as narrator or choose an experienced reader to be narrator.
- Ear-to-ear reading. Students sit back to back. One reads while the partner listens. They then reverse roles.

- Echo reading. Teacher or experienced reader reads a sentence. Child or small group read the same line in turn.
- Choral reading . One child reads along with teacher who can pull away voice as child takes on reading. Same can happen in a small reading group with whole group reading chorally. Children can also read chorally as part of a performance without the teacher.
- Jigsaw reading. Children individually, in partners, or in small groups are asked to read small portions of a larger text.

## VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Titles marked by \* are good beginning titles for each section.

### OVERALL RESEARCH

\**What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs* by Richard Allington. Allington summarizes research on the most critical components of a reading program for struggling readers. He does not advocate for particular strategies or programs but rather underscores the idea that children need to read a lot (worksheets don't count and even many more authentic meaning making strategies don't count either for reading mileage though they may support metacognition and discussion); they need to read "just right" books; they need explicit demonstrations and explanations of important strategies and opportunity to apply those strategies with guidance; they need to develop fluency, which is much more than simply speed. Allington agrees that children need phonics and phonemic awareness but doesn't deal with those elements in this book.

*Teaching Transformed* by Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, and Yamauchi. This book provides an overview of approaches researched and developed by CREDE. Further CREDE sources are listed below in the bibliography on reading research and Native American children.

### READING IN GENERAL

\**The Art of Teaching Reading* by Lucy Calkins. Practical and inspiring.

*Reading Process and Practice* by Connie Weaver. Most comprehensive with plenty of references to related research.

*Classrooms that Work: They Can All Read and Write* by Patricia Cunningham & Richard Allington.

The next 5 books are written by teachers and describe the various strategies as and experiences as applied in the contexts of their individual classrooms at the various grade levels. Often this is the clearest way to get a concrete picture of what the reading program actually looks like with examples from real children. Of the group, Taberski's book is probably the most comprehensive and gives excellent explanations of how she uses running records, retellings and much, much more.

- \**On Solid Ground: Teaching Reading K-3* by Sharon Taberski  
See excellent videos as well from her own classrooms
- Joyful learning* by Bobbi Fisher (a kindergarten teacher's year)
- With a Light Touch* by Carol Avery (a first grade teacher's year)
- Inventing a Classroom: Life in a Bilingual Whole Language Learning Community* (3<sup>rd</sup> grade) by Whitmore and Crowell
- In the Company of Children* by Joanne Hindley (a third grade teacher's year)
- \**Good-bye Round Robin: 25 Effective Oral Reading Strategies* by Michael Opitz and Timothy Rasinski

## COMPREHENSION

*Mosaic of Thought* by Keene and Zimmerman. Good introduction to this approach to comprehension.

- \**Strategies that Work* by Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis  
[See accompanying excellent videos – through Stenhouse Publisher]  
Complete discussion of strategies with many examples of practical ideas for teaching the strategies across the grade levels.
- \**Reading for Meaning* by Debbie Miller  
[See accompanying excellent videos through Stenhouse publisher]  
Debbie takes the reader through a whole year as she sets up the classroom as a learning community and introduces strategies. Lots of samples of student work – both writing and through anecdotal notes. Very readable, accessible.

The next two books contain mostly ideas and reproducibles to support the above comprehension strategies:

- Snapshots: Literacy Mini lessons Up Close* by Linda Hoyt
- Revisit, Reflect, Retell: Strategies for Improving Comprehension* by Linda Hoyt

- \**Make it Real : Strategies for Success with Informational Texts*. Excellent for teaching skills and strategies for using information text.

## Literature Circles:

- Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels. Use this book especially if you want to assign comprehension roles as a structured way to introduce literature circles.
- \**Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine Noe and Nancy Johnson. This book is the clearest for beginners at using literature circles.
- Literature Circles and Response* by Hill and Noe. Stories by teachers at various grade levels about the ways they implemented literature circles.
- Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Hill, Noe, & Johnson. Contains tools for student reflection, self assessment, rubrics for various aspects of literature circles and an extended bibliography of books to use in organized by themes
- Sketching Stories, Stretching Minds: Responding Visually to Literature* by Phyllis Whitin. Ideas for implementing visualization as a comprehension strategy.

## •FLUENCY

\*The best source is the chapter in the Richard Allington book above.

\*See *Good-bye Round Robin* above for choral reading, readers theater, etc.

You don't need fluency programs!!!

## COMPONENTS OF BALANCED CURRICULUM

*Perspectives on Shared Reading: Planning and Practice* by Fisher & Medvic

*Creating and Managing Learning Centers* by Phoebe Ingraham

\*See Crede Website for info on setting up research-based activity learning centers

\**Flexible Grouping in Reading* by Michael Opitz

\**Guided Reading* by Fountas and Pinnell

## WORD STUDY: PHONICS/PHONEMIC AWARENESS

\**Rethinking Phonics: Making the Best Teaching Decisions* by Dahl, Scharer, Lawson, and Grogan

*Phonics They Use: Words for Reading and Writing* by Patricia Cunningham

*Making Words and Making Big Words* by Patricia Cunningham

\**Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston

*Words Matter* by Pinnell and Fountas

*Month by Month Phonics: Systematic, Multilevel Instruction* (order by grade level) by Patricia Cunningham and Dorothy Hall

*Rhymes and Reasons: Literature and Language Play for Phonological Awareness* by Michael Opitz

## WORD STUDY: VOCABULARY

*Words, words, words* by Janet Allen (grades 4-12 but a good source for research and some ideas applicable for lower grades as well)

\**Words Their Way* by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton and Johnston

*Word Matters* by Pinnell & Fountas

*Phonics They Use* by Patricia Cunningham. Ideas for vocabulary development are included beyond phonics.

## •SPECIAL EDUCATION

\**Reading with the Troubled Reader* by Margaret Phinney. Short and practical guide to strategies that help struggling readers in four categories that are not really special education issues. Then also meaningful for working with the small percentage of students who probably have very real learning disabilities.

*Variation, not Disability: Struggling Readers in a Workshop Classroom* by Cathy Roller. Explains why workshop approaches are especially effective for special education students.

*Readers and Writers with a Difference* by Dudley-Marling and Rhodes. A comprehensive theory with practical strategies on how to support special education students who struggle with reading and writing.

## **Research on Teaching Reading and Native American Children**

### CREDE

Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence. [www.crede.ucsc.edu](http://www.crede.ucsc.edu)

Use the website to download many excellent materials for teaching and planning curriculum as well as official reports.

*Teaching Transformed: Achieving Excellence, Fairness, Inclusion, and Harmony.* Roland Tharp, et. al. Westview Press. 2000 (book – see also Rousing Minds by Tharp)

Five Standards and Student Achievement. To be published.

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Research Evidence: Five Standards for Effective Pedagogy and Student Outcomes. Technical Report No, G1. March 2002

\* Designing Effective Activity Centers for Diverse Learners. CREDE

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Successful Transition into Mainstream English: Effective Strategies for Studying Literature. Educational Practice Report 2.

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol: A Tool for Teacher-Research Collaboration and Professional Development. Educational Practice Report 3.

### CREDE ERIC Documents

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Instructional Conversations in Native American Classrooms, December 1994

### OTHER SOURCES

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2000.-Exploring Children's Written Literacy: Two Young Voices from a Native American Community. Elba Reyes.

-Literacy and American Indian Students: Meaning Making Through Multiple Sign Systems. Elizabeth Noll

## ERIC

Supporting Emergent Literacy among Young American Indian Students. William Ross. 2001 ED319581

\*Teaching Reading to American Indian/Alaska Native Students. Jon Reyhner. 2001.

Preparing Teachers to Support American Indian and Alaska Native Student Success and Cultural Heritage. Don Jacobs and Jon Reyhner. January 2002

Schooling for Self-Determination: Research on the Effects of Including Native Language and Culture in the Schools. Jerry Lipka. January 2002.

## Research Summaries

Reading and the Native American Learner: Research Report. Bergeson, Griffin, Hurtado. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Washington State. June 2000. Contact Curriculum and Assessment, 360/753-3449, TTY 360/664-3631.

American Indian and Alaska Native Education Research Agenda, 2001. U.S. Department of Education. OIEP.

## OTHER SOURCES SUPPORTING THE ABOVE RESEARCH

Authentic Intellectual Work and Standardized Tests: Conflict or Coexistence? Newman, Bryk, and Nagaoka, January 2001. Consortium on Chicago School Research. 1313 East 60<sup>th</sup> Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637. 773-702-3364. Research shows that students engaged in authentic intellectual literacy work achieve more even on standardized tests. The definition of authentic intellectual work describes the expectations of the Completing the Circle curriculum and the culturally relevant pedagogy advocated by CREDE.

Allington, Richard. *What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Effective Research-based Reading Programs*. Allington's emphasis on the big, most important underlying issues is complementary to the CC Curriculum and the work of CREDE.

## Websites:

- In the Classroom: A Toolkit for Effective Instruction of English Learners [www.ncela.gwu.edu/classroom/toolkit/lessons](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/classroom/toolkit/lessons) (found ideas on dialogue journals here)
- <http://ncte.org> - ideas from national council teachers of English – content standards, assessment standards and so on as well as teaching ideas
- McCracken for spelling, phonics, and other emergent literacy lessons - [http://www. Mccrackened.com](http://www.Mccrackened.com)
- Readers Theater Editions free scripts - <http://www.aaronshp.com/rt/RTE.html>
- Mosaics of Thought for useful tools (like rubrics), books that are being used to teach particular strategies, and for a great list serve in which teachers at various levels of learning to teach comprehension share their successes and challenges. [U46teachers.org/mosaic/index.htm](http://U46teachers.org/mosaic/index.htm) or do a google search for “mosaics.”

## WRITING GUIDE

### I. Introduction

Writing is a developmental skill that begins when children first notice print and other symbols in their environment and/or they see adults (or older children) around them reading and writing. Children begin to experiment with and use a wide range of meaning making systems to communicate. They often begin by drawing their stories or messages. Scribbles and letter-like symbols begin to appear. Children as young as two years of age have distinguished scribble which is drawing from scribble that is writing. Gradually children approximate more conventional symbols (alphabet letters and numerals). They grow from partial sound print matching (beginning usually with initial consonants) through a series of predictable elaborations, again gradually approximating conventional spellings over time. Finally children also develop the content of their writing and the complexity of their sentence structures and other rhetorical devices over time.

One way to understand this growth is to think about children as composers and comprehenders rather than simply writers and readers. Composing can include writing but it can also include talk and the visual arts and other meaning making systems. We want children to continue to develop as composers while they are learning to capture the intricacies of the alphabetic system. We know from years of research that children who are confident and motivated in their composing will actually give more effort to form in the long run than children who are asked to start with mastery of the forms of writing first before they can compose the messages and stories they want to communicate. Form then has a purpose, to enhance communication. In our teaching, form should follow purpose and function, not the reverse.

A large body of research since the 1970s has provided a detailed description of the writing process. Writers generally plan, draft, confer, revise, edit, and prepare their written texts for audiences. Not every piece of writing goes through every step. Some writing, particularly writing to learn as in learning logs, stays in first draft form. Its purpose is to promote thinking and reflection, not to result in a finished piece of writing.

The so-called steps in the writing process are not necessarily sequential. Rather, writing tends to be recursive with editing occurring during drafting, conferring for response during planning and so on. Teachers as early as kindergarten need to begin teaching children these various aspects of the writing process. Again, children develop in their sophistication with these processes over time. At first, planning might take place during the active process of drawing. Revision may begin initially by simply adding a word or maybe even a sentence. Early on, children may believe editing means revision. We know, of course, that eventually children need to learn that revision means much more than simply fixing the spelling and copying over!

Brian Cambourne describes important components of a writing pedagogy this way:

- **Immerse** children in meaningful literacy (writing) work. Have children write for authentic purposes.
- **Demonstrate** (explicitly) the strategies, skills, or behaviors needed.
- **Expect** that all children can and will learn if we begin where they are and give them appropriate support. We don't worry, for example, that children won't learn to talk. We expect that they will and they do!
- Give children **responsibility** for their own writing choices. Real ownership of learning does not occur without that responsibility and children know it.
- Give children plenty of opportunity to **use** their new learning, first with support and then more and more independently.
- Accept **approximations** that will, with appropriate response and support, reach desired goals or standards in time. We know that complex learning proceeds through a gradual series of approximations.

Some additional beliefs underlying the specific strategies of the Completing the Circle curriculum are as follows:

- Children need to write regularly and for extended periods of time.
- Children need to read rich, interesting texts which act as models and inspiration for their writing.
- Writing helps children grow as readers. Developmental spelling, for example, supports children's growing knowledge of the grapho/phonics system. Learning to write more complex sentences helps children read and understand more complex sentences. Writing in particular genres helps children understand better how to read those genres.
- Response to children's writing is critical. Teachers should not assign writing which will not be responded to in some way.
- Children deserve response to what they are trying to communicate before they need response to conventions. They need both but we need to remember that form follows purpose. Editing comes at the end of the writing process, not the beginning.
- Children need to develop healthy definitions of what it means to be a writer. Writing doesn't equal spelling the words right and using neat handwriting. Of course the conventions and mechanics of writing matter. But they are not more important than having something worthwhile to say and saying it well.

This **Writing Guide** will not attempt to give a comprehensive overview of an entire writing curriculum. Rather we want to explain in more depth some of the strategies suggested in the curriculum. Our main focus in the curriculum as a whole is on developing reading comprehension and vocabulary. Where writing is included, it is often to support reading. As with the **Reading Guide**, we provide some excellent references in the bibliography which can help you develop a comprehensive writing program.

## **II. Balanced Writing**

Like reading, there should be a balanced approach to the writing curriculum. That balance includes explicit demonstrations, shared writing, guided writing, and independent writing. There should be a balance between student choice and student assigned topics, balanced attention to a variety of writing genres, and finally, balanced attention to various elements of the writing process.

How teachers actually structure the writing curriculum within the literacy block will undoubtedly vary, but the same care needs to be taken to provide balance as with the reading curriculum. Too often teachers simply use journals as their one approach or assign writing as one of their learning activity centers without attention to the needed balance.

### **A. Modeled Writing**

The teacher can model writing through morning messages, dialogue journals, or mini lessons preceding writing workshops. Teachers use large chart paper, overheads, or the chalk/white boards and think aloud as they write. Various elements of the writing process can be modeled. For example, teachers might model how they think of a topic or talk about why they are writing in a specific genre for a specific purpose. Teachers might model how they use “magic lines” when they get stuck on the spelling of a word as well as the strategies they might use later to find that spelling.

Finally, teachers might highlight the way other writers (from the published books the children are reading) handle a particular aspect of writing such as choosing vivid words to describe or using dialogue to make a character come alive. Here the modeling comes from both the teacher and the reading texts.

### **B. Shared Writing**

Modeled writing can easily turn into shared writing as teachers invite children to contribute their ideas. In dialogue journals, interactive writing, or language experience activities, children can give suggestions, ask questions, or even actually “share the pen.” Remember that shared writing occurs with the whole class so they teacher doesn’t have the opportunity to interact with every student. On the other hand, shared writing does allow children to safely observe new strategies before actually “having a go” themselves.

### **C. Guided Writing**

Guided writing happens more often in one-to-one conferences than in small groups. However, some teachers get their classes started on independent writing and then pull together small guided writing groups. This tends to happen with emergent writers (whose actual writing products tend to be quite short) as they work on dialogue journals for example. With older writers, it may be that several children are beginning to use dialogue and the teacher asks them to bring their writing and work together with her guidance to apply this new strategy. Children might be gathered in small groups to choose a favorite journal entry and edit it with the teacher’s support for a class or individual book. Children benefit from listening in to the teacher’s response to their peers.

#### D. Independent Writing

Independent writing occurs in a variety of contexts: daily journals, writing workshop, or learning activity centers. Regardless, children should have significant blocks of writing time on a regular basis (hopefully every day). Predictable time and structures are important. The structure must also build in opportunity for teacher response. This means that primary writing time cannot occur while the teacher is tied up with other small group work such as guided reading.

#### E. Choice and Required Writing

As we stated above, children need opportunity to pursue writing of their own choice. Children who have not previously had choice may at first claim helplessness. It is the teacher's responsibility to support them in discovering their ideas and purposes through modeling and mini lessons and so on. It is vitally important that children internalize the understanding that writing is a wonderful tool to communicate their own ideas and purposes in the world. It is a wonderful tool to support thinking and learning. Children will probably not learn this without the opportunity to make their own choices at some point.

At the same time, it is important that children be given the opportunity to expand their range of choices with regard to ideas, genres, and purposes. It is clearly legitimate to have the children learn to write a letter or gather research on a topic under study and compose a piece of informational writing. These are writing genres they will need in the future in school and life. Teachers will want to model and provide strategies for going about new kinds of writing. In fact, direct instruction and/or "required" writing go hand-in-hand with choice. For example if all the children write their own poems of thanksgiving in response to reading Bruchac's *Circle of Thanks*, then writing a poem becomes one of the genres they might choose later in their writing workshop. The teacher should keep lists of writing possibilities posted and add to those regularly. Children can keep personal lists of possible topics and genres in their writing folders.

Children need both explicit teaching to expand their range of options and choice to discover their own purposes. Teachers sometimes intermingle choice and assigned writing together in one writing block. Others help make the separation clear by reserving writing workshop time for individual exploration and choice. Required writing takes place in other parts of the literacy block. For example, children might learn about letter writing as they respond to a character in a story or write to a favorite author for advice. The explicit instruction happens with the whole class. Children work on the assignment independently in a learning activity center while the teacher works with guided reading groups. The class as a whole can return to the assigned writing later, either to continue revising and improving, or to share their accomplishments.

#### **F. Writing Workshop**

Many teachers establish a writing workshop model in their classrooms for independent writing time. The idea behind a workshop approach is to create the kind of environment needed by writers in the world outside of school. Writers need time to write on a regular basis. They need time to reflect, revise, and finally polish. They need time to confer and

get feedback. Each piece of writing demands its own time and schedule. A workshop structure allows the teacher to support children working on different topics, working with different genre, working at different paces through the writing process.

Writing workshop is generally an extended period of time, ranging from perhaps 30 minutes initially and quickly becoming 45 minutes to an hour as children become engaged writers. Writing every day is important. At minimum, children need several days a week with a regular schedule for writing. The point is to accomplish significant work in writing, not just finish a task.

The teacher sets up careful structures so that children know what they are expected to do at various points in the writing process. They know when and they know where to keep writing in progress, where to find materials when they wish to “publish.” They know where writers’ tools are kept such as dictionaries or thesauruses. The teacher keeps an ongoing “status of the class” to keep track of where children are. In folders teachers and children keep records of the strategies and skills they are mastering and of the pieces of writing they have finished. Children and teachers together negotiate goals for both quantity of work to be accomplished and also for the number of finished pieces of writing and their quality.

Workshops begin with a mini lesson in which teachers model different aspects of writing and of the writing workshop. At the end of the workshop there is a time for children to share finished work or work in progress. For more information on the writing workshop approach see the bibliography at the end of this guide.

### G. Word Study

Direct instruction on spelling can take place during the Word Study portion of the literacy block. See the Reading Guide. Teaching spelling also occurs in context when the teacher confers with individual students on their writing.

### H. Learning Activity Centers

Writing can take place in learning activity centers. It is important to remember that this should not be the only time and place where writing occurs. Response is critical to writing. Teachers cannot easily provide response when they are engaged with a guided reading group, which is often the reason for scheduling centers. In general, learning activity centers are planned to support specific writing tasks, for example responding to a reading text through a specific assignment. Spelling and word study related to specific skills can also take place in LACs.

## III. Writing Experiences Suggested in the Completing the Circle Curriculum

### **A. Informal and ongoing writing activities**

The activities here are generally not expected to be or to become formal writing texts. Although a journal may eventually become the basis for writing a later text that will be revised and edited, generally speaking journals and logs are first draft writing. Appropriate responses focus on the meaning and ideas the child is trying to express.

## **1. Journal Writing**

Journals are widely used as a way to structure children's writing, especially when children are just beginning to write. Teachers model their own journals before beginning, highlighting particular aspects of the writing process. Children are usually encouraged to "compose" a story or communication with a picture and then to "write" the story in words. Some teachers take dictation initially. (Note that children are able to write very quickly if they are encouraged to make "approximations" rather than to spell correctly.) Teachers generally circulate during journal time, responding to the content of what the children are communicating, asking questions, gently supporting children in stretching out their sounds, and so on. As noted earlier, sometimes teachers pull together small guided writing groups during this time.

Journals in the form of bound books are not always necessary. Some teachers make available a variety of sizes and shapes of writing paper. The paper may be blank, provide room for a picture as well as lines for writing, or be entirely lined. It is important that teachers are aware of the "messages" children get from the kind of paper provided. For example, because of limitations of space, some children will write only a sentence when they could actually write much more. Providing blank paper can help children who struggle with small muscle coordination write more easily without having to stay on the lines. Children will quickly become fluent and need space beyond the constraints of a journal. This may happen in kindergarten or first grade, certainly by second.

Teachers usually think of journal time (if they are not using a writing workshop approach) as an opportunity for children to "have a go" at writing. Perfect form is not expected. We want children to understand that the purpose of writing is the communication of ideas. Teachers do not generally correct journals, though they may choose one thing from the journal as an individual teaching point. For example, a child might write "Im gonig to Deisnlan" in a journal. After sharing the child's excitement and/or asking what the child will do at Disneyland, the teacher may point out that the child has used all the letters in "gonig" and isn't that wonderful. The teacher can then tell the child that she/he may want to know that "-ing" is a suffix or ending found on many words. The word "going" could be written out for the child to see on another piece of paper or in the child's writing folder on the personal spelling list. Attention to form – growing knowledge of spelling or punctuation for example – will be attended to during direct instruction in other parts of the writing curriculum.

## **2. Dialogue Journals**

Dialogue journals share many of the characteristics of typical approaches to journals, but they are designed to set up an explicit dialogue between the child and the teacher. After all, the purpose of writing is to communicate. What better way to make this concrete than to communicate back and forth in writing with an audience who is sitting beside you? As children develop, they are able to wait longer for feedback. They learn to write for audiences who may never be in their presence. Eventually one of their most important learning tasks as developing writers is to step outside of their own egocentric thinking and be aware of what an audience will need in order to understand the communication.

Dialogue journals were also designed to mimic the kinds of interaction some parents might use with their young children as they learn to talk. Mothers hear children communicate with one or two words meaning a larger idea. “drink milk” might mean “I want to drink milk.” The mother responds, “Oh, you want to drink some milk?” Or the parent might ask the child to say more, to elaborate. “Which cup do you want to use?” If a child uses an unconventional form, “I drank my milk,” the parent seldom gives a grammar lesson but rather models back, “Oh, you drank your milk?” The child learns conventional forms and elaborated communication through this scaffolding.

A teacher will start a dialogue journal by composing a picture(s) of a story while she/he thinks aloud. The teacher then, still thinking aloud, writes the story, making decisions about which details to include. The written story will usually be much shorter than the picture story. The teacher invites the children to read the story out loud with her chorally.

Next, the teacher asks the children if they have questions. She writes a child’s question with a different colored pen and notes that child’s initials or name. The teacher writes an answer with her original pen, carefully saying the words as she writes. Another child asks a question and so on.

At a later time in the year, after the children are comfortable with the dialogue journal process, the teacher will explicitly model how their questions are helping her think about what she should add to her writing so her audience will have a better idea or picture of her story. For example, a child might say, “What color was the house?” The teacher might say, “Oh, I should have put that in my writing to start with. Then you would have known.” The teacher might then actually insert the word “green” into the original text.

Finally the teacher has the children read the text again chorally, and lets each child read his or her own question as she, the teacher, answers. The children thus see visually and hear literally the dialogue.

After modeling for a few days (less time probably for children who are already writing and reading on their own), the teacher invites the children to create their own dialogue journals. The teacher sits with the child who can tell her story even if the print is not yet decodable for the teacher. The teacher writes a question, carefully reading out loud the words of her question. If the child can write an answer, at whatever stage of approximation, fine. If necessary, to get the dialogue (and writing) going, the teacher can ask a question that could be answered with a yes or a no. The teacher can write these words the first time and share the pen with the child who simply circles the desired response. The very next dialogue journal, the child can be expected to write yes or no. And the approximations move from there.

Of course a teacher does not have time on any given day to sit with all her/his students. One way to handle this is to sit with small groups of 4 or 5 students at a small table and dialogue with all of them simultaneously. They will need time to draw and compose and that gives the teacher time to reach across the table and respond individually. Again, as with other journal writing, the children benefit by “listening in” on each other’s journals.

As children develop further as writers and as they gain confidence, the teacher may not need to sit beside the child. Instead, the teacher writes back to the child each day. The important thing is to make the response a genuine dialogue – very much like a letter back and forth. That has a very different feel than “commenting on” a journal where the relationship signaled is less equal. At upper grades, some teachers have used dialogue journals as a motivating way to support students in their independent reading. Student and teacher chat about the reading in the same way that friends might talk about a good book they are both reading.

In the Completing the Circle curriculum, dialogue journals are also used with assigned topics in support of reading. Children may write about an experience or topic to tap their prior knowledge or schema related to the text that is going to be read. Children may respond to the text in some way through the dialogue journal during or after reading. This is very similar to a **reading response journal**. Putting it under the dialogue journal category would imply that the teacher might be modeling and that questioning from the teacher or other children might be part of the process.

Dialogue journals were first used and found to be effective by teachers with children who were learning English as a second language. Teachers have also found dialogue journals to be especially effective in teaching emergent readers! Children learn to read more quickly when they are using their own words and syntax to write about relevant experiences and ideas. The teacher reflects their language back to them, perhaps in a more elaborated form, using conventional spelling and grammar. The children can refer to previous pages in their journals when they need to remember how to write a word. The picture provides a memory device as to the content of a particular entry.

Magic lines. This is a handy strategy for children to use when they are frustrated by not being able to spell a word they want to use. Their first strategy is to write the sounds they hear. But when absolutely stuck, they can simply draw a magic line for the word as a whole or they can write the first letter and finish the word with a magic line. Discuss with the children why it is important not to break the flow of ideas just to get a word spelled right. Explain that this line is just a “place holder” so they can go back later, use their strategies, and fill in the blank.

### **3. Learning Logs**

Learning logs are used to gather developing knowledge and reflections on a unit of study. They can be used to explain what the children have been learning in their own words, to ask questions, to observe and record observations, to explain processes, to organize information, to predict, to recall past learning, to make sketches about their learning, and more. Writing in learning logs helps children capture their thinking so they can go back later and rethink and refine or extend. Learning logs make visible to children the way their thinking and ideas change and grow over time. Teachers can use learning logs to assess how children are developing in their understandings. They might catch misconceptions for example. The learning logs then help the teacher plan subsequent learning experiences.

### **4. Reading Response Journals**

In a reading response journal, children respond –before, during, or after - to a particular text being read. The prompts are assigned and are used by the teacher to support the reading in some way. Journals written before a text is read may help children reflect on prior experiences with the topic or theme of the story. Journals written during or after give the children time to reflect on the text or use a comprehension strategy individually before group discussion. Reading Response Journals may also provide beginning ideas that can be developed later into a more formal writing assignment.

## **5. Other Tools supporting “writing to learn”**

Throughout guided and independent reading, children are encouraged to keep track of their thinking and to ask questions or note memorable words or passages. They are encouraged to use bookmarks, sticky notes, or reading response journals. These are all part of using writing to learn. These traces may be used as one basis for later discussion and sharing of ideas. Sometimes the notes can be used to develop more formal pieces of writing. Children need to understand the place of writing to learn in their own learning.

## **6. Language Experience**

Language experience activities are a form of shared writing. After reading a story and/or after an interesting learning experience, children are first invited to discuss what happened orally. After a meaningful discussion, the teacher explains that the children are going to compose collaboratively while she/he writes their words. The teacher supports the composition of the sentences by repeating what the children say and asking for ongoing input until the sentence is agreed upon. The text the teacher writes should reflect the children’s collaborative contributions. It will not, of course, match exactly because there are several suggestions and because the teacher will also probably shape the sentence into a standard English form.

The language experience story, text, or retelling can then be used for reading. Children can read more easily when a text is relevant and familiar and uses vocabulary they know. Language experience provides for all these conditions. The text may be read from a chart or overhead. It may be copied in parts over several posters to be illustrated as a wall story. It may be printed in individual books to be illustrated and taken home for reading. In the Completing the Circle curriculum, we use language experience often as a way of retelling of stories or summarizing the ideas in information texts. The language experience story is then used to support other forms of retelling as in choral readings or readers theater. Children also get practice in reading.

Language experience can also be used with individual children. In this case, it is important that the teacher write the words and sentences exactly as the child says. The child needs to see that oral language can be represented in print. Of course, the teacher may spend a little time helping the child articulate orally what he/she wants to say. But this should never be done in such a way that the child feels corrected or wrong.

## B. Other writing genres

A wide range of writing genres need to be part of the writing curriculum. The writing genres described here are often taken through the complete writing process and finished texts result in “publication” of one sort or another. Here we will describe only those which have been suggested in the Completing the Circle curriculum.

### **1. Retellings and/or Summaries**

Language experience activities obviously serve as a bridge to having children write their own retellings of stories or information texts. The children do need to learn intermediate tools for supporting their ability to do this individually.

This writing genre grows out of teaching the comprehension strategy of understanding the difference between main or important ideas and supporting details. Writing a summary as a genre in its own right involves a number of reading and writing strategies including inferring and synthesizing. The **Reading Guide** describes an approach in which teachers first model, using a shared class text. Children collaboratively list main events or ideas. The teacher helps them understand how they might shorten this list to a particular level of specificity. Note that usually there are not right or wrong or easy answers to making decisions about what needs to be included. Children very much need to understand this and have the opportunity make these decisions themselves, first in guided settings and eventually independently.

After making lists of what is to be included, creating story boards with individual frames developed for each important idea, can be a next step. The illustrations, of course, can be elaborated. The children next need to make decisions about how to write about each frame. What sentence or sentences best tell what is happening in this frame? The sentences then become a summary. We also recommend *Read and Retell* by Brown and Cambourne as an excellent resource. The related chapter on main ideas in *Strategies that Work* will also be useful.

### **2. Letters**

Letters can be taught in authentic contexts. The curriculum provides a variety of ways to invite children to use the letter genre to support or extend their reading. For example, children can write letters to characters in a story or write a letter that one character might send another. More authentic purposes involve writing letters to real people or organizations for real purposes.

- Children can write letters to favorite authors and illustrators.
- Children can write letters to gather more information for their inquiry projects. These might be to “experts” on a content area topic or family members living far away from whom the children want to gather stories and experiences.
- Children can write persuasive letters to solve a problem or accomplish a project in which they have ownership through classroom inquiry. For example, children could write a letter to the principal explaining why they wish to grow a garden or begin a recycling project.

### 3. Interviews

After a number of the stories in the curriculum, we've suggested that children interview family or community members on a variety of topics. For example, Do you know any stories about the night sky? What was school like when you were growing up? Whatever the topic, the class should discuss together the kind of information they would like to gather. Collaboratively, the class should compose a list of questions? They should learn to read the questions. Discuss how they might take notes during the interview in order to remember what was said. The amount of writing will of course depend on the age of the children. Certainly pictures, sketches, and symbols can be used to capture the ideas. Provide an opportunity for children to role-play interviews before they go out on their own.

After the interviews, children will be sharing what they've found with the class. They can write up their interviews in varying degrees of formality, ranging from writing informally in learning logs to using their notes to write and illustrate a more formal report of the interview or story that emerged from that interview. These should be developed and supported during writing workshop or other designated writing blocks. Some classes might go on to put together class newspapers or books including all the interviews.

### 4. Poetry

Poetry is an important genre, too complex to do it justice in this guide. We recommend that you refer to sources listed in the bibliography at the end of this guide. Poetry is often bypassed because teachers are nervous about teaching it. When it is taught teachers often use formulaic poetry assignments such as acrostic (spelling out a word or name vertically and choosing words, phrases, or sentences beginning with those letters) or cinquains or diamantes. These can sometimes be fun and motivating for children superficially. They can also be used to demonstrate comprehension to some degree through effective word choice. But they do not help children choose poetry for purposes of real communication.

We don't suggest however that it is necessary to start poetry from scratch. We include a rich range of poetry in the *Completing the Circle Curriculum*. Many of the poems can be read and appreciated through a variety of experiences: choral readings, art, movement and so on. Often the poems can be used a model for children to write their own. The subject of the poem may inspire them to write other poems on the same topic. Or the form of the poem may provide them with a structure.

The important point for the teacher is to show the children possibilities through think alouds and modeling of writing poetry. Sometimes the teacher will ask the children to imitate the poem closely initially in order to try out the form. In this curriculum we suggest this idea several times using such works as *Red Fox Running* and the *Important Thing* book/poem. The teacher models on the white board or an overhead, showing how she/he chooses a new topic and substitutes words for the words in the poem, holding to the original sentence structure or syntax. After this "exercise," the children should be allowed to compose their own works, using the model only as much as necessary for accomplishing their own purposes.

**List poems.** We also suggest that teachers support children in writing list poems composed of words or phrases related to a specific topic. Teachers begin by discussing with the children the importance of choosing “just right” words or descriptions, of being concrete, of creating visual images for the reader. Often the children have the opportunity to observe an event or object and brainstorm a number of descriptions (words or phrases). For example, they might observe and describe a tree through the seasons. They might experience and reflect on a rainstorm. The children gather as a class. The teacher asks each child to contribute his or her one favorite phrase or word or image. These are all collected on a chart or overhead. Then collaboratively the teacher and the class move phrases around into appropriate clusters. Some phrases might be repeated as refrains. The result is a collaborative class list poem. Children are then invited to write their own poems. Descriptive paragraphs may be the next step for some children who can then work with the teacher on arranging lines to help the paragraph become a poem.

**Found poems.** Found poems work something like the list poems above. Instead of generating words or phrases, the children gather their favorite words and phrases from a text. They contribute their favorites to a class list, then work with the teacher to shape a poem. They can go on to create their own found poems.

**5. Narrative Texts.** Like most genres, children need lots of examples, lots of modeling. Often writing a particular kind of narrative/story (fiction or non fiction) is easiest after children have read several similar texts. In this curriculum, the children might write their own “**why tale**” after reading several stories or legends telling about how something came to be. Or they might write other kinds of stories, true or otherwise. Tools that were used to support comprehension can be used in reverse to help plan original pieces of writing. A **story map** is an obvious tool. They ask children to decide on the problem, the characters, the settings, and the events that lead to the resolution of the problem. A **story board** helps children flesh out the problem, the main events and the resolution. A **character wheel** helps children make plans for fleshing out a character: what the character says, does, thinks, looks like and so on.

Any one of these elements can also become a piece of writing in its own right. This is especially true when writers (and the children here) are writing nonfiction. For example, children can write about real people in their own lives – a **biographical sketch**: a parent who is a hero for example or a grandparent whom they love and remember. Descriptions of favorite places parallel the settings in stories. See *Blazing Pencils* and *Active Voices* in the bibliography for ideas for assignments that will help children develop in these genres.

**6. Information Texts.** There are many more possibilities for conveying information than the traditional, and often boring, **report** genre. Many of these possibilities are reflected in the information texts chosen for the Completing the Circle curriculum. Again, we suggest that the teacher read the text. With the children, discuss the characteristics of a particular format for sharing information. Invite the children to use these forms to report on the topics they are researching. Examples include **ABC books**, “**all about books,**” **naturalist journals**, and so on. Children can use cookbooks as models for writing the “**how to**” genre.

Text examples are important. Discussing explicitly the characteristics of the genre is important. Teacher modeling is important. Then, giving the children time to gather information, to write first drafts for response, to get feedback from the teacher and peers, to gather more information and/or to revise, to share again, and edit are all important steps in supporting children toward success.

Teacher response can happen in individual conferences. (This is true for the narrative writing above as well.) Teachers also find that by reviewing first draft writing (in this assigned writing situation), they will notice typical problems the children are having. The teacher can gather examples on an overhead and lead a class discussion. For example, the children might be having trouble choosing more interesting or more concrete words. At the editing phase, children might be having trouble with incomplete sentences or using punctuation for dialogue. After the whole class discussion, the teacher can ask children to work in pairs to help each other solve whatever the focus problem is. If further support is needed, the teacher can meet with a remaining smaller group to guide the revision or editing process more closely.

**7. Transmediation.** We discussed transmediation in the Reading Guide, the idea of transforming a text from one meaning making system to another as in written text to art or drama. Equally powerful learning experiences can happen as children transform one writing genre to another. Readers Theater is one example. A story is turned into a drama by using the dialogue in the text or creating new dialogue. Stories can become newspaper reports. News stories could be turned into more fully developed narratives. Stories can be turned into poems. The possibilities are endless. These experiences help children comprehend the original texts more fully. They also become more aware of the characteristics and demands of different genre.

**8. Publication.** We believe attention to both process and product is important. Not all writing can or should be taken to publication. Writing that supports learning through thinking, reflection, and observation is one important reason for writing. However, writing for publication supports children's motivation and engagement with writing. It also provides an authentic purpose for careful editing and proofreading. Publication is not simply frosting on the cake.

Publication can take the form of published books – individual or class collections. Collaboratively written, authentic texts can include newspapers or encyclopedias organized around a particular topic, histories of a local community and so on. Publication may mean writing and sending letters for real purposes. It might mean submitting writing for contests or children's magazines. It might mean displaying writing, attractively formatted or even illustrated, in the classroom or in the school.

It is also important to consider publishing bilingually so that Native languages are valued, bilingualism encouraged. Encourage children to write in two languages. Be sure they receive support from a family member, the culture teacher, or other community member who can help them do this well. A number of recommended books in the curriculum are in two languages and can be used as models.

#### IV. Bibliography

- ***Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*** by Donald H. Graves. Graves original work on how children learn to write.
- ***A Fresh Look at Writing*** by Donald Graves. Graves adds to his original work by responding to concerns of teachers about different aspects of writing. He shares how to include conventions of writing in ways that don't inhibit development of strong writers.
- ***The Art of Teaching Writing*** by Lucy Calkins (Excellent video by Calkins also available from Heinemann). This text, along with Graves, is one of the original sources for ideas about how to support children in a writing workshop atmosphere.
- ***Writing Between the Lines*** by Lucy Calkins. Ideas contributed by the teachers who work in the New York Writing Project. Examples include encouraging children to keep writers' notebooks instead of journals. Also includes a comprehensive discussion about the connections between reading and writing.
- ***Inside the Writing Portfolio*** by Carol Jenkins This book follows a young writer through school. Although it gives guidance for assessment, it also summarizes the research on how children grow over time in different aspects of writing from writing informationally or writing stories to how they grow as spellers.
- ***Coping with Chaos*** by Brian Cambourne & Jan Turbill. Focuses on emergent writers and follows a kindergarten student learning English as a second language and a first grader through the school year.
- ***Writing Workshop*** by Fletcher and Portalupi. Practical guidance on setting up a writing workshop classroom. Other books by Ralph Fletcher are also highly valued.
- ***At the End*** by Barry Lane. A great source for ideas on how to get children to revise in meaningful ways.
- ***Active Voices I*** by James Moffett. This is a collection of writing samples for children writing in a variety of authentic genres across the nation.
- ***Blazing Pencils*** by Meredith Sue Willis. This book is full of suggestions for texts to use as models for good writing and experiences to help children get there. Deals with both fiction and non fiction.
- ***For the Good of the Earth and the Sun*** by Georgia Heard. Real world poet works with children in New York City to help them write poetry from their own experiences, for their own purposes. A beautiful book full of rich ideas for teaching poetry.
- ***Is that a Fact? Teaching Nonfiction Writing in K-3***. This is an exceptional source for helping children organize and express themselves in interesting ways in nonfiction writing.
- For texts related to spelling see Word Study in the Reading Guide.
- ***New Standards: Writing and Reading. K-3***. Although this book is listed in the Assessment Guide, it provides excellent examples of children's writing at different stages of development. Benchmarks can help you make instructional decisions.
- **Six Traits Writing**. Approach to writing developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Includes several publications, a website, and professional development available. Again, this is an assessment and instructional resource. In a number of schools, the rubric for writing is implemented without the full professional development. Be sure not to use the rubrics in isolation but explore all of the pedagogical context surrounding the rubrics. Type Six+1 Trait Writing into a web search.

# ASSESSMENT GUIDE

## I. Introduction

The Completing the Circle Curriculum is based on the best research available, research on teaching literacy, research on “best practices,” and research on the most effective curriculum and instructional strategies for Native American children. The content of the curriculum is vitally important: rich, relevant themes and literature; the most effective instructional strategies, including those deemed especially important for American Indian children. In this guide we add a third, essential component of the curriculum - classroom assessment.

No teaching/learning cycle is complete without the inclusion of a meaningful approach to classroom assessment. Assessment is critical in guiding teachers’ planning and instruction. Indeed, assessment could be seen as the driving force in teaching and learning. What do children know? How did they understand this particular lesson, concept or strategy? How will I adjust my teaching to better build on a child’s strengths or to meet a child’s needs? What do I do next for an individual child, a group of children, or the whole class?

The debate on testing and accountability lies beyond the scope of this guide, but is clearly important. However, no matter the positions in this larger debate, most educators agree that the assessment that occurs inside classrooms is critical. It is the assessment most closely tied to supporting children’s learning on a daily basis. We find ourselves in agreement with the Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing prepared by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English Joint Task Force on Assessment. (See [www.ncte.org/positions/standards.shtml](http://www.ncte.org/positions/standards.shtml) for elaboration of these standards.) Here is a summary:

1. The interests of the student are paramount in assessment.
2. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.
3. Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.
4. Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.
5. Assessment must be fair and equitable.
6. The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important, consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.
7. The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.
8. The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.
9. Assessment must be based in the community.
10. All members of the educational community – students, parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the public – must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment.

11. Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.

Building on the foundation of these standards, with which we strongly agree, we base the assessment tools and practices in the Completing the Circle Curriculum on the following principles for a sound classroom assessment system.

- We must base our assessment on multiple sources of information, not just multiple “tests” and/or paper/pencil tasks, but assessments grounded in multiple ways of knowing and of demonstrating knowledge and understanding or accomplishment of skills and strategies. These might include observations of students talk and or behaviors, work samples, and so on.
- We must include multiple perspectives. Parents and other caregivers, other teachers, and the children themselves can contribute to our understanding of what children know and need to know and helpful ways to support them.
- We need to document processes and dispositions, not just products.
- We need to document learning over time so that teachers, families, and children can see and value the progress that has been made.
- We need to value strengths, not just needs. In this case, we need to look at learning broadly and value the experiences the child brings from home and community, not just typical “school knowledge.” When we value what children and their families already know and value, we have a better foundation from which to build toward the school knowledge we also want them to gain. This curriculum values, in particular, growth in first and second languages and supports the research (and common sense) that reports that children who are fully multi-literate are advantaged in many ways.
- Children need to be deeply involved in reflecting on their own learning, helping to set their own goals. When children can “name” the strategies they are learning to use, they are better able to generalize and apply these strategies in new situations.
- We need to provide “evidence of learning,” not just checklists or grades based on numbers without the evidence behind the numbers.
- We need to have opportunities for teachers to examine evidence of student learning and to reflect on what that evidence might mean for their teaching.
- Classroom assessment needs to be tied to larger performance standards and frameworks for describing the patterns children typically move through as they become more successful readers and writers with more challenging curriculum.

Just as with the **Reading and Writing Guides**, space does not allow here for a comprehensive overview of classroom assessment. We suggest that teachers use the bibliography for further support in their growing knowledge of classroom assessment in general and specific assessment strategies in particular.

We do believe it will be important to consider one of the comprehensive classroom assessment systems. These “systems” provide frameworks for integrating in meaningful ways the separate, specific assessments tools and signs of progress that are collected.

These systems commonly provide scales of development (or benchmarks behind which lies a theoretical framework which explicitly describes the stages through which children typically progress in literacy) that are useful in this integration of the many separate facets of the complex processes involved in literacy. The following are systems that we have found useful. There certainly may be others. We do suggest making sure they are based on the principles described above. These are:

- First Steps
- Work Sampling
- The Learning Record

Finally, we hope to collect actual assessment samples from teachers implementing this curriculum. We believe evidence in the form of actual work and/or observations will help teachers from outside a particular classroom or school see what children can typically accomplish or even what may be possible beyond “typical.” On the other hand, samples are also useful in helping teachers see how they might adjust their teaching. Again, we suggest that the bibliography contains some resources that include student work.

Finally also, note that our focus in this curriculum is on comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. It is also on the important roles played by oral language and writing in supporting growth in reading. As a consequence, this guide will not go into depth on the assessment of phonemic awareness and phonics. Certainly teachers will be able to see growth in those areas as an important consequence of the curriculum. But they may want to use other specific assessment tools for that purpose that we do not discuss here.

## **II. Assessment Tools – Multiple Measures**

### **A. Anecdotal or Observational Samples**

Anecdotal or observational notes are very important for capturing evidence of learning that occur during conversation and discussions. For example, a child may explain that he or she inferred the meaning of a word by using prior experience and the context of the sentence. Anecdotal observations are also important for capturing evidence of behaviors and processes important in learning literacy. A teacher may observe that a student goes to a resource, a thesaurus for example, in order to find a more interesting word to use in a character sketch.

Observations should be descriptive rather than evaluative, describing the behavior itself or quoting the exact words a child used. Observations need to be detailed enough for the teacher to go back and recall the incident more fully later when the observation is being used to reflect on the child’s growing competence on some dimension of learning. Often it is useful to note the social context of the observation. With whom was the child working or talking? What was the learning context? Math, writing, dramatization, etc.? Noting the social contexts helps the teacher plan future social or learning contexts where the child can be successful. Or the teacher may reflect on why that context was supportive and how to transfer these insights to a new learning context for the child.

Of course the art of using observations as an assessment tool is first in learning to write enough to be useful but not so much that it detracts from other demands of teaching. The art is second in finding the time and an effective system for gathering observations. Ultimately, if observations are valuable to the teacher in making better decisions for supporting children's learning, they are very much worth the time. Taking observations simply becomes part of good teaching!

Observations are not taken easily in the middle of whole class shared reading or writing or any direct whole class instruction. However, a particularly meaningful comment from a particular child during whole class instruction might be recalled later if the teacher makes a habit of taking a few minutes at recess, lunch, or after school to scan his/her memory of the day's important events.

Observations are taken more easily during small group work or individual conferences. Teachers simply create a habit of working with a clipboard and sticky notes or labels for jotting observations as they listen to children. Teachers sometimes use a class seating chart with blocks for each child's name and space to write a short observation. Sometimes teachers observe for particular, predetermined purposes with these seating charts. For example, today the teacher might observe the choices the children are making during independent reading time. In situations where the observations are made public on a chart, for example, teachers can note children's names or initials. These can then be transferred later to assessment collections of anecdotes for a particular child if an important sign of growth or need is involved and needs to be collected as evidence separately.

In such classrooms, children understand that the things they say and do are important to the teacher. In fact, some children have been known to say, "I knew you thought it was important because you wrote it down." This is especially true when the teacher models how she or he uses or reflects out loud the information noted for real purposes. For example, a teacher might say, "I noticed that you went back and reread what you had written so far before going on to add a new sentence?" Do you use that strategy often in your writing?" Or, "[a particular child] said this earlier in the discussion. How does your example add to what [that child] said?" Or, "You said x. Could you tell me more about that?" Capturing "traces of thinking" is especially critical for the teaching of comprehension as described in the Reading Guide. And of course the ultimate goal is for children to internalize meaningful steps in their own learning and to be able articulate that learning for their own reflection.

See *Taking Note* by Brenda Power in the bibliography following for more detailed ideas. See also the comprehension texts recommended in the **Reading Guide** and the sources for Writing Workshop recommended in the **Writing Guide** for more specific ideas on how to integrate observational notes into the ongoing structures of the classroom.

## B. Work Samples

### Writing

Writing samples are one of the most common types of work samples used for assessment. It is important to think about the purposes for the writing in deciding what to assess. Is the focus on learning what the child is understanding about the topic or the content of the writing? Is the sample primarily about communication and secondarily about seeing how the child writes in an informal context? Is the focus on the strategies the child is using? Or is the focus on the final product, representing that child's growing abilities as a writer in communicating for a particular purpose?

Informal Writing Samples Informal samples in the Completing the Circle Curriculum include dialogue journals, reading journals or logs of various sorts, and learning logs. The primary focus in these should remain on the content of the communication. Are the children able to articulate the personal connections they are making to a particular text? Can they share three important ideas from an informational text or are they simply selecting random details? Can they share their own experience in an understandable, interesting way?

At the same time, informal samples do give the teacher information about children's growing knowledge of print conventions, the grapho/phonics system of the language, spelling, sentence structure and so on. This information can be pulled out by the teacher and used valuably in other parts of the writing curriculum instructionally. Teachers should be sensitive that they do not inadvertently undermine their primary purpose by assessing for form within the context of discussing the journal or log.

The teacher will want to encourage children to grow in their ability to share their thinking in these informal contexts. Children will need to write more because it allows them to communicate more (though not always, of course!) Teachers will look for a growing range of strategies in responding to a text, e.g. making connections, noticing important images, and so on. Finally teachers will want to see children grow in their ability to explain clearly their understanding of a concept, for example the concept of a habitat in science.

These areas of growth don't focus on form. They focus on children's growing ability to communicate their ideas and articulate their understandings of important concepts. The teacher can create rubrics. Better yet, the teacher and the children can create the most meaningful rubrics together. Teacher modeling and sharing lots of examples of effective logs or journals also help children visualize what they need to accomplish and assess their own growth in these areas of the curriculum.

Formal Writing Samples In the Completing the Circle Curriculum, a number of writing assignments are taken through the entire writing process to a finished product. Examples include informational writing such as "how tos" and reports of various kinds. Examples of narrative writing can include retellings and summaries, relating personal experiences in response to stories in the form of autobiographical incidents or anecdotes, memoirs, etc.

The first response should still be to what the child is trying to communicate. What is the content of the piece? Does the child understand the concept he or she is trying to convey? Is the information accurate? Does the text structure reflect what the child knows about trickster tales or some other genre?

Second, the teacher looks at a final product for growing mastery of different aspects of writing, apart from the content. Teachers use different frameworks for understanding varying elements that go into composing a text. Six Trait Writing, for example, provides one framework for looking at different aspects of writing such as organization, voice, effective word choice and so on. Remember that the Six Trait approach is generic. It is probably most valuable for the teacher and students to create rubrics together after studying a particular genre of writing in the reading curriculum

When a piece of writing is taken through the writing process, it is important for the children to save all drafts of the writing. The teacher can assess the children's growing abilities with different aspects of the process. For example, do the children really understand revision or does it simply mean changing a few spelling errors and punctuation marks and copying over neatly. Revision is one way the teacher can tell if the children are increasingly writing with audiences in mind.

Finally the teacher needs to understand the larger picture of how children grow and progress developmentally as writers. Teachers need some meaningful expectations of what writing in a particular genre might look like for children of a particular age or grade level. For this, teachers should look to comprehensive systems of assessment mentioned in the Introduction. They may also wish to look at *New Standards* and *Active Voices*, both listed in the bibliography for examples of writing at different ages or stages of development

Early Spelling Of particular interest to kindergarten and first grade teachers is how children gradually learn to compose in print – their growing knowledge of the grapho/phonics system. *Words Their Way* gives detailed information on how this knowledge develops and shares assessments that can help teachers identify the stage of development and appropriate learning experiences for children at each stage. It is important that teachers realize that the use of developmental spelling actually supports children in learning phonics. It is also important for teachers to know that artificial writing assignments such as using frame sentences and letting children fill in the blanks is not in fact writing in the sense of composing. It is largely copying.

Retelling Another form of writing of particular importance to comprehension is retelling or summaries. A number of strategies are suggested in both the **Reading** and **Writing Guides** to support children in effective retellings. See in particular Brown and Cambourne, *Read and Retell*, for assessment strategies for written retellings.

We feel that the teaching of writing has been very much neglected with the current emphasis on reading. We have emphasized especially writing that supports reading in the Completing the Circle Curriculum. Writing is deserving of emphasis in and of itself. We strongly recommend undertaking a more in-depth study of the teaching of writing using one of the comprehensive texts in the bibliography.

### **Visual Interpretation Samples**

Many of the visualization strategies, including both artistic interpretations and graphic organizers, provide excellent information on children's growing comprehension of texts and or important concepts. In addition to the understanding communicated, teachers will want to look for growing complexity. Children should always be asked to explain their work, giving reasons for the choices they made.

A Story Board provides one example. Teachers will be able to see how children are understanding the main ideas or events in a narrative text. Is the main problem and resolution included? Do the children integrate other important details such as the setting? In much the way that children can become more sophisticated in their retellings by actually using appropriate story language, children can become more sophisticated in storyboards by using color and details effectively. Even children who are not artistic can effectively use graphics and color and detail to convey their ideas.

Semantic maps or other forms of mapping such as clusters are other visual samples that can and should be assessed. Children will show their understanding of the most important ideas or larger categories of a concept and of details at varying levels of categorization. Connections among the important ideas may also be shown. Comparing a semantic map early in the year to one developed later is likely to show significant growth. Remember that semantic maps, although clearly a form of outline, provides much richer information because it allows connections to be made in ways beyond a linear unfolding.

Visualizations that are primarily artistic interpretations would be assessed somewhat differently. In these samples, children are translating their comprehension from one medium to another, from reading and words to art and pictures or sculptures and so on. Be careful not to expect or encourage that artistic interpretations always be literal translations. It is important, however, that children understand their purpose here is to communicate their important understandings of a text. Children can use their symbolic understandings and feelings in these samples. It will be important for children to explain their artistic compositions.

### **Dramatizations**

Dramatizations can be captured in videos or through observations. Teachers and children often develop rubrics to assess these performances. Again, the purpose is to communicate effectively important understandings of a text.

## **Projects**

Projects may be written or visual or dramatic. Projects may also involve taking action of some sort to solve a problem. They should be assessed in ways that focus on what children understand about the content to be learned, the effective strategies to be gained through doing the project, and the effectiveness of the communication as a whole. Rubrics focusing on all three aspects are generally used. As with other rubrics, it is most effective for teachers and students to develop them collaboratively. For examples of projects and effective rubrics see *Literature Circles Resource Guide* listed in the **Reading Guide**.

## **C. Fluency**

Fluency is typically assessed through assessment provided in comprehensive reading programs. Teachers are provided with passages in which the difficulty level and word counts are predetermined. Teachers, others, or the students themselves time the readings. Growth is assessed by growing speed with texts of the appropriate grade level. Children are encouraged to practice passages in order to read them more quickly. Points are deducted for any mistakes in reading.

In our view, it is important to understand fluency as a more complex issue than simply speed. How we assess conveys to children what counts as a skill or strategy. Therefore it is important that children are assessed on fluency in more complex ways. After explanation, modeling and discussion, children and the teacher can create rubrics for oral readings that include reading in meaningful phrases and reading with expression. Children can be accountable for comprehending what they have read through retellings or other means.

Children can be assessed informally through meaningful performances such as choral readings, readers theater, or poetry recitations. If necessary, a more “official” assessment through the comprehensive reading program can be undertaken several times a year if required. We discourage weekly timed tests. On the other hand, we encourage weekly opportunities for children to practice and perform repeated readings for meaningful purposes! Tapes or videos are another way to capture this evidence besides rubrics. Tapes also allow children to self assess more easily.

When children vary significantly in meeting the acceptable range for reading speed, of course teachers will need to explore in further depth what might account for the discrepancy. Often the issue is not that the child can’t read quickly enough but that the child is not reading in a text of the appropriate difficulty. The other issue of course may have to do with confidence.

## **D. Instructional Conversations/Discussions**

Teachers will need to use a variety of alternative approaches to assessing the effectiveness of oral discussion skills. Observations, of course, will be important. Children and the teacher will need to discuss characteristics of effective discussions and collaboratively create rubrics. “Fishbowls” can be used to model such discussions with a small group

engaging in a discussion in the center of the room while children gathered around learn to make their own anecdotal observations of effective discussion strategies. Tape recording group discussions provides evidence. Children can listen to the tapes and self assess. See *Literature Circle Resources* in the Reading Guide for sample rubrics.

### **E. Oral reading samples**

Running Records and Miscue Analysis are essential tools for gathering information on how children are progressing in their understanding of the skills and strategies necessary for effective reading. Both approaches are based on the understanding that we can learn a great deal about children's reading knowledge and strategies by having them read a passage out loud and noting exactly what they say and do. When children do not read the text exactly, their words and behaviors are viewed as miscues rather than mistakes. The miscues give teachers information on which cueing systems and strategies the children are using and which they may need to work on.

Running Records as developed by Marie Clay in New Zealand and applied in the U.S. through the work of Fountas and Pinnell are generally used for emergent readers because they use a "short hand" or notetaking system that does not require a text to be copied ahead of time. There are also some slight variations on what count as errors. Miscue Analysis was developed by the Goodmans and is more often used with more independent readers. It depends on having the text to be read copied ahead of time. It can be used as well with younger readers. Miscue analysis encourages deeper reflection on which miscues are most serious and which are actually signs of effective strategies and comprehension.

These assessment tools are too important to give short summaries here. We recommend that teachers pursue careful study of the strategies in texts recommended in the bibliography. In addition to the texts listed here, teachers can also find assessment strategies described in many of the professional books listed in the Reading and Writing bibliographies. For example, Taberski's book describes in great detail how she uses Running Records to match children with appropriate level texts for independent reading as well as how she uses them to determine her next teaching steps with each child.

What we do want to emphasize here is that these are not simply assessment tools. They are equally instructional strategies. While they are reading, children must become aware of when they are comprehending and when their comprehension breaks down. This is true at the surface level of reading (the grapho/phonics, syntactic, and lexical levels of reading the words on the page) and the deeper levels of comprehension. Teachers should model these strategies and give children opportunities to practice the strategies and self assess through guided reading in small groups and individually. We want to stress that once teachers learn to use these assessment tools, they learn to listen to children more effectively during informal reading samples. Formal samples and assessments are not always necessary.

## **F. Interviews**

Understanding the experiences children bring to the classroom is a critical aspect of assessment. These are experiences the children may bring from home, from activities beyond school, and from prior schooling. Teachers can most easily learn about these experiences from the children themselves and from their families. They can use information on strengths and interests to plan meaningful experiences for the children as they acquire new knowledge or new strategies. Some teachers use surveys and questionnaires to gain this information. While this is an important beginning point, we recommend conferences and interviews face to face. This allows the teacher to read non verbal cues. It allows the teacher to ask follow up questions and probe more deeply. “Tell me more.” In interviews with parents or other caregivers, it is important to convey respect for them as their child’s first and most important teachers. “What do you know about your child as a learner (reader, writer, and so on) that will help me as your child’s teacher at school.” An important foundation of the Completing the Circle Curriculum is valuing and using children’s prior experience and their experience outside of school as well as their experience in school.

## **G. Self Assessments**

Children’s ability to reflect on their own learning, their ability to self assess, and their ability to set their own learning goals has a major effect on their ability to transfer learning, to use strategies strategically and to transfer learning to new contexts.

We believe that teachers need to be explicit about what they are teaching and to be explicit about how the learning will be assessed. “How will we know when we are making connections? How do we know those connections are helping us understand the text? How do we know we’re getting better?” These are discussions that take place in instructional conversations. Rubrics or descriptions of what will count as evidence should be negotiated and co-constructed with students. Then children should have the opportunity to apply their growing ability to self-assess with meaningful response from the teacher.

For examples of self assessment see *Literature Circles Resource Guide* and *Together Is Better* and other resources listed in the bibliography below.

## **III. The Content of Assessment**

Our goal with this curriculum is to increase children’s vocabulary and improve their comprehension. Combine the tools described above with the ideas listed in this section to answer questions about comprehension and vocabulary in particular.

### **A. Comprehension**

Teachers should consider using the comprehension assessments suggested in *Mosaic of Thought*, one of the texts describing the approach to comprehension that has informed our curriculum. An appendix in this text provides Strategy Use Interviews based on think alouds using a text. Rubrics describe the level at which the children are able to use each strategy to comprehend the text. The assessments can be used individually as each strategy is taught.

The rubrics can inform teacher's less formal assessment of the children's use of the strategy through observations and work samples. The prompts in the Strategy Use Interviews could be adapted and used as prompts for reading response logs and other writing samples. The assessment guides are also available on a Mosaics website.

It is important to note that we expect these comprehension strategies can and should be taught throughout the school years. Emergent readers will be applying the strategies as they listen to texts read aloud, before they can read a text independently. As they move up through the grades, children will apply strategies to increasingly challenging texts. Finally, children also learn to apply strategies in specific variations to an increasing range of texts.

## **B. Vocabulary**

The most important points to remember about vocabulary assessment are these:

- You do not have to test every vocabulary word in order to be sure children are learning vocabulary.
- Don't rely on traditional vocabulary tests which may be in the form of matching words and definitions, defining words with single synonyms, or fill in the blanks.

Do assess vocabulary in use. Have the children talking and writing about the current theme. This ensures that they will be using the vocabulary associated with that theme in their discussions and writing. Use anecdotal observations and work samples to assess if they are using the words well.

Do assess through activities like creating semantic maps and other graphic organizers that ensure that children are learning key vocabulary in the depth and complexity that these words deserve.

Assess children's strategies for learning what a word means. This can be done through observation, conferences, and self reflections. Teachers will also see strategies in use during oral reading samples and can document through running records or miscue samples. More specific assessments can be created to be sure the children understand how to use tools like the thesaurus or dictionary.

Finally, assess children's enthusiasm for words through their participation in active experiences like acting out or illustrating words they find interesting. Interest in and participation in collecting interesting words as a class (e.g. wondrous words and marvelous metaphors) can also be noted.

Teachers should assess acquisition of Native language vocabulary as well and not just leave this to a culture teacher, although of course the two should work together. This ensures that Native language is valued as part of the regular curriculum. Again, be sure to assess use of the vocabulary in meaningful contexts such as writing and talking and projects rather than through simple tests.

## IV. Bibliography

### **Comprehensive Classroom Assessment Systems**

*Assessing Literacy with the Learning Record* by Barr and Arnston

Meisels - Work Sampling. See articles and program materials.

*First Steps: Reading Developmental Continuum* developed by Education Department of Western Australia and published by Heinemann.

These first three assessment systems provide developmental scales, benchmarks, or other indicators of patterns of development. Each of the three provides suggestions for documenting student growth through anecdotal observations, work samples, and other complementary assessments such as lists of books read independently and so on. It is important to have a picture of how children grow and develop across the four grade levels, K – 3. It is important that multiple types and sources of evidence be used to inform teaching and document growth.

*Together Is Better: Collaborative Assessment and Reporting* by Davies,

Cameron, Politano, and Gregory. This resource supports students in setting goals and reflecting on their own learning. It also provides advice for developing three-way conferences: students, parents, and teachers

*Miscue Analysis Made Easy: Building on Student Strengths* by Sandra Wilde

Running records and/or miscue analysis are essential tools for understanding how children are integrating cueing systems and using effective reading strategies. This is a comprehensive guide.

*Knowing Literacy: Constructive Literacy Assessment* by Peter Johnston This book is an in-depth, comprehensive overview of literacy assessment. Includes support in using running records effectively.

*Windows into Literacy* by Lynn Rhodes. See also the accompanying book of reproducible assessments. Again this text is a comprehensive overview of literacy assessment.

*Kidwatching: Documenting Children's Literacy Development* edited by Yetta Goodman .Includes anecdotal observations, miscue analysis, assessment of print and book knowledge, and more.

*Taking Note: Improving Your Observational Notetaking* by Brenda Power

*Authentic Literacy Assessment: An Ecological Approach* by Leslie and Jett-Simpson.

This text is a comprehensive overview of literacy assessment and includes many examples (and blackline masters for) specific assessment tools and strategies.

\**Mosaic of Thought* – see rubrics in back for assessment of comprehension strategies or see Mosaic website, the link to “tools.”

\**Reading & Writing: Primary Literacy Standards* from the New Standards Project Provides extensive samples of student work used as evidence of proficiency in meeting these nationally developed standards in reading and writing, K-3.

See also many of the bibliographic entries in the **Reading and Writing Guides**.

