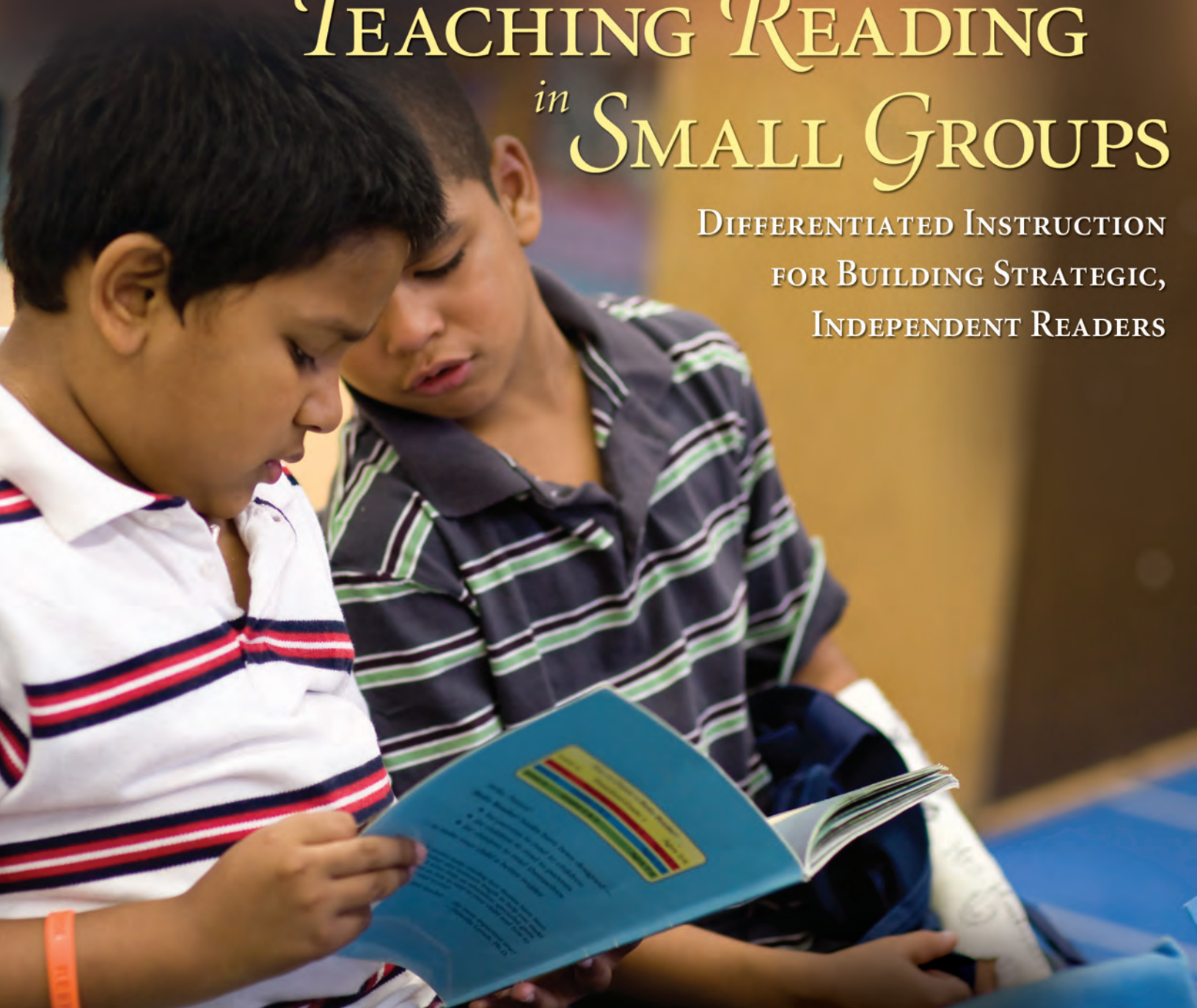


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Foreword by *Lucy Calkins*

STUDY GUIDE for  
TEACHING READING  
*in* SMALL GROUPS

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION  
FOR BUILDING STRATEGIC,  
INDEPENDENT READERS



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# Study Guide for *Teaching Reading in Small Groups*

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## *Introduction*

Social learning is essential to deepening one's professional practice. As a consultant with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, I help groups of teachers who meet to think together, plan together, and teach in front of one another. I believe this collaborative practice helps schools to grow exponentially. I created this study guide as a way to help jump-start these same communities of learners, even without a hired facilitator.

First, I suggest that your study group set aside time out of the classrooms for discussion, and also time to go into classrooms together to practice conferring with the support of each other.

I learned to lead small groups as a classroom teacher. I was lucky to have principals who set aside common, grade-level planning time, and who sent me to voluntary after school "Leadership Groups" at Teachers College. In these meetings, members would bring in transcripts of our own teaching for analysis and feedback, watch videos of each others' teaching, and study books like *Teaching Reading in Small Groups* for new insights and ideas. Opening up your classroom (literally or with transcripts and videos) might be a little nerve-wracking at first, but it will provide endless opportunities for thoughtful reflection and revision of best practices.

In my work as a staff developer, I facilitate "lab sites" where a grade-level team comes together for forty-five to fifty-five minutes, in a classroom with children, to practice teaching in front of and with each other. Teachers coach one another, rewind and try over again, and give feedback after the fact.

These models of my own learning as a teacher and of my teaching of teachers today, have lead me to create this guide. What I hope you find is an easy-to-follow guide to give you ideas for conversations, activities, and practices that will strengthen not only your ability to confer with readers in groups, but one that will strengthen collaboration with your colleagues.

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# Beyond Reading Groups, Beyond Guided Reading

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- What were your own school experiences with reading groups?
- What are the small-group structures you rely on most in your classroom to teach reading?
- What are your fundamental beliefs about teaching in general, and the teaching of reading specifically?
- What do you know about conferring that you'd want to take with you into other types of teaching, like small-group instruction?
- How balanced is your literacy instruction? Is there a way to bring more balance to ensure a bridge to independence?
- When in your life have strategies helped you to acquire new learning?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- Define guided reading. Compare your definition with the others in your study group.
- Take the bridge to independence graphic (Figure 1.2, page 9) in this chapter. Write the names of the types of instructional structures you use in your classroom along the “to/with/by” continuum (i.e., minilessons, independent reading, guided reading, read aloud, and so on). Where do you notice the heaviest balance? How can you create more opportunities in the areas that are lacking?

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# Forming Groups: Making the Invisible Visible Through Assessment

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- ❑ Discuss the terms used in the beginning of this chapter relating to assessment (i.e., formative, diagnostic, summative, and so on). Talk together about the assessments that are common practice in your school and look to see what you're most practiced at using. Can any of your current assessment structures help you to identify student needs and form small groups?
- ❑ Look back at your curriculum from past teaching. Where did you place your emphasis in your whole-class, small-group, and one-on-one teaching? (Comprehension, conversation, print work, fluency, engagement?) How can you create opportunities to teach and assess these this coming year?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- ❑ Do an engagement inventory in your own classroom three times this week. Come to your study group with the data and analyze it together.
- ❑ Bring two children's book logs to your study group and analyze them in pairs using the questions in Figure 2.1 on page 21.
- ❑ Ask children in your class to complete a reading interest inventory (or, if you teach younger children, ask some questions during your individual conferences about book choice).
- ❑ Help each other develop consistency when listening for fluent reading. Bring a few children into the room where your study group meets and listen to them read aloud, each taking a running record for fluency. Compare. Decide together what the children's level is on the fluency scale (see Figure 2.8 on page 32).
- ❑ Create a checklist together to be used to assess children's fluency during shared reading. Go into a classroom together to listen to a few children read. Have one teacher lead the shared reading lesson, while other teachers practice using the checklist.
- ❑ Transcribe a partnership or book club conversation from your class (you may want to tape record it first, and then transcribe). Bring the transcripts to your meeting and code them together. Write the conversational and comprehension skills that the children exhibit in the margin.
- ❑ Take running records of a few children reading and bring them to the study group to analyze together.
- ❑ Conduct a read aloud and ask students to stop-and-jot in response to prompts assessing a variety of reading skills. Bring post-its to the meeting to analyze and sort together.
- ❑ Decide on structures that you will use to organize and store assessment information: Reading portfolios? Reading notebooks?

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# Without Engagement, We've Got Nothing: Helping Children Want to Read

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- Think about yourself as a reader. What makes you engage with a text? When are times you've been unable to put a book down and when do you find that you abandon what you're reading? What are your habits and routines as a reader?
- What do you look for when you check to see if your students are engaged readers?
- Which students in your class do you think would benefit from one of the types of small groups to set reading plans?
- What structures do you already have in place to help children to be self-reflective? When do children look at, evaluate, and reflect on their own reading logs, notebooks, and post-its, to think about their skill work and process?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- Identify the students in your class who are in need of intervention in relation to engagement.
- Talk with your colleagues to share ideas about ways to wear your love of reading on your sleeve. How can you bring that passion into *your* classroom?
- Try "talking up books" with a small group of children who have difficulty choosing books. Watch these students over the next week and take notes on what you notice. Come back to your study group ready to discuss what you saw.
- Consider some possible goals that you have for your class. Allow children to sign up for small groups that interest them. Come back to your study group ready to discuss what you noticed about the level of engagement and investment with the self-chosen topics.

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# Guided Practice Toward Independence: Strategy Lessons for Comprehension, Print Work, and Fluency

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- ❑ Think about a successful learning experience you've had—something outside of reading. What were the steps your teacher used to help you understand? What were the qualities of his or her demonstration? How did he or she support you as you practiced?
- ❑ When have you felt the need to use an otherwise underground reading strategy? What was the challenge and what did you do?
- ❑ Think of a goal you have for a reader in your class. How can you take that goal and break it down into the steps of a strategy?
- ❑ What did you notice about the demonstration example that you know you already do when demonstrating? What new things will you try?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- ❑ With your study group, try to read a challenging text in the genre that your class is studying. Notice when you encounter difficulty, and what you do to solve the problem with the difficulty. Work with colleagues to phrase your problem-solving into step-by-step strategies.
- ❑ Videotape or audiotape your demonstrations. Bring your video/audiotape to the study group. Look/listen for the qualities of effective demonstrations mentioned in Chapter 4. If you had a do-over, what would you change?
- ❑ Videotape or audiotape yourself working with a small group during the coaching phase of the strategy lesson. Critique your coaching alone or with your colleagues. Ask, “Did I use the leanest possible prompt with each student? Did I prompt the student in ways that can be generalized to other books, or that are very specific to this one?”

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# Talking About Books: Improving Partnerships and Clubs

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- What do your students currently understand about behaviors, routines, and activities to do during partnership time?
- How long can your children sustain their partnership time? How productive is it?
- How often do your students have opportunities to be social around books? Do you currently use structures such as whole-class conversations, book clubs, or partnerships?
- What is your role when students are talking about books?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- Practice listening. As children talk, transcribe what you hear. Look back at the transcript to analyze it for evidence of comprehension or conversational skill. Even better, bring the transcript to a group meeting with colleagues and analyze it together.
- K–2 Teachers: Read about the ideas for differentiated partnership work. Study the text levels of the books that your children are reading. Think about partnership activities that would best scaffold the skill work they are doing at that level. Create sheets of labels together that can be used in your small-group work to introduce the differentiated partnership activities.
- Begin a book club with other teachers at your school. Study the kinds of talk you have and the challenges you face when talking. Think about the strategies you'll want to teach your own readers based on the work you do yourself.
- Plan a read aloud with open-ended prompts to elicit divergent thinking in your students. Do the read aloud and listen in as children talk. Move around the classroom and coach students as they converse.

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# Reading with Fluency and Expression: Shared Reading, Warm-Up and Transfer Groups, and Performance Clubs

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- Who has been a model of fluent, expressive reading in your life? Do you have any “aha!” memories like mine?
- How are you a model of fluent reading in your classroom? When do children have a chance to hear one another read aloud to provide models for one another?
- Think of your students. Can you imagine any that would enjoy being part of a performance club? Perhaps there are some that are otherwise reluctant readers but would enjoy the incentive of performing in front of others?
- What are some of your favorite songs, poems, and plays that could be used in performance club small groups?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- Work with colleagues to develop a set of texts that you feel will engage your students and entice them to be part of performance clubs.
- Invite some colleagues into your classroom to watch you and a small group of students during a shared reading lesson. Have your fellow teachers watch for your pacing, how you keep your children engaged, and how you respond to and adjust your teaching based on what you hear. Debrief the experience and swap roles.
- Tape or audio record yourself doing a small-group warm-up and transfer lesson. In a grade-level meeting, listen to the prompts you give students as they practice on an easier, then harder text. Ask yourself as you listen, “Did I give a good blend of positive reinforcement as well as prompts to support and redirect the students? Did I use the least amount of scaffolding necessary?”



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# Moving Readers to the Next Level: Text-Level Introduction Groups

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- ❑ Do you have a systematic way of collecting data about your readers, including ways to keep track of their reading levels across the year?
- ❑ When you look at your class' reading-level data, whom are you concerned about? Who is making adequate progress?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- ❑ Look at your class' list of reading levels. Try to get data from at least the previous six to twelve months. Look at the list to determine who is making adequate progress, and who is of concern. Start to develop some theories about why some students might not be making the progress you would hope for.
- ❑ Study text levels with colleagues. Get a few texts at the same level. Read them and ask, "What are the difficulties that this text seems to pose to a reader?" Create a chart of skills, strategies, and research questions to prepare for your small-group work.
- ❑ Research some of your readers in assessment-only conferences. Make individualized plans for the children that you will try to move to the next reading level using small groups that introduce children to text difficulties.
- ❑ Plan a series of lessons to do with a group that you are trying to move to the next reading level. Use the "One Teacher's Story" section (page 192) and corresponding notes as a model.

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# Organizing and Managing Small-Group Conferencing: Common Questions

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*Questions to ask yourself and to explore with your colleagues:*

- What successful strategies can you share for organizing and managing yourself and your students during reading workshop?
- What are some management and organization struggles that you could use support with?
- How do you currently organize your note taking?
- Which suggestions from this chapter are you most likely to try right away?

*Ideas for activities or exploration in and out of the classroom:*

- Create a note-taking system and put it in practice for about a month. At the end of the month, reflect on its strengths and weaknesses. Make changes that you feel will make things easier for you.
- Using a class list and a blank chart like the one in Figure 8.7 on pages 218–19, attempt to make a weekly schedule for your small-group and one-on-one conferencing. Be sure to leave time and space open for impromptu conferencing.