



Children who find reading intrinsically rewarding are motivated to read more

Keeping stories at the heart of early reading instruction

Richard Boxall advocates an approach that supports children to engage with the content of what they are reading, no matter how simple the text might be

Early reading instruction is centred on decoding, and with good cause. Unless children have a good grasp of the correlation between letters and sounds, they will always struggle to read independently.

But deciphering is not the same thing as understanding. As we redouble our efforts to make phonics accessible to all children, and especially to those who have difficulties, it is easy to overlook the importance of teaching them how to access the ideas, concepts and rewards encoded in print when they are reading on their own. Group discussion, shared reading, and whole-class demonstration of these processes do not *automatically*

make them part of a child's independent reading repertoire. Yet they are the essential prerequisite for subsequent progress and enjoyment, so they have to be facilitated from the very start.

Questions that help to recast our thinking here might include the following.

1. How do we enable children to *think high* even though they are reading low?
2. How do we challenge children to engage with the content of their reading while they are learning how to access print efficiently?
3. How can the ideas in a text support a motivated independent engagement with the printed code?

Take 'learn to read' books seriously

The learning potential of reading scheme books is often ignored. There is a perception that these are useful only as a bridge to more literary (better) texts. Their place is to support the escalation of successful decoding, frequently at the expense of understanding or engagement.

Yet scheme books themselves are varied. While language use will be controlled to enable access by children at different stages of reading development, the reasons for doing so differ, so teachers need to be clear about which text they choose and why.

For example, in some books text is constructed by combining words that are phonically regular. These texts support the application of phonic decoding strategies, but children often struggle to link the language they read with the language they use. This can compromise understanding.

Conversely, natural language texts enable children to access the language they use encoded in print. However the vocabulary and language structures chosen may present decoding challenges.

The more teachers are aware of the strengths and limitations of the books they use, the more readily they can compensate for these when designing an immersive reading programme which supports independent reading engagement, enjoyment and understanding.

Combining phonics instruction with reading for pleasure

Hackney Learning Trust's Daily Supported Reading (DSR) programme currently operates in more than 80 schools across London and beyond. It uses natural language texts to develop thinking and understanding while children are learning how to read independently. The programme operates alongside good, systematic phonics teaching and provides an excellent system for organising reading in Key Stage 1.

Some of the ideas that underpin the programme are explored below.

How are understanding and reward linked?

Children who are learning how to read are initially motivated extrinsically. They read to please their teacher, their families, or to get praise and positive feedback, but after a time this isn't enough.

Lifelong readers are intrinsically motivated. They are aware of the personal and social benefits that reading brings to their lives.

A child's animated expression shows that he is fully engaging with the story



Making the move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation early on is vital. Part of this must be down to the reward that children experience as part of their independent reading each day.

Reward, motivation and understanding are closely aligned

Reading a story independently will be rewarding if a child understands how and why things have happened, can identify the funny or scary bits in the text and illustrations, follow the narrative sequence, enjoy the language and relate to the protagonist, or learn something new.

This applies as much to children who are learning how to read as it does to independent readers. Children who are learning how to read need to read lots of books. The sense of accrued reward day after day fosters future engagement and motivation with texts as yet unread.

Reward must outweigh effort in the long run, and reward is usually about a text message.

Front-load the story

Currently schools use a range of contexts to teach reading. One way to deepen thinking and understanding is to link these contexts within a 25-minute daily reading lesson that combines reading

to, with, and by children in a continuous sequence. Here is an example of how it might work.

Step 1: tell the story to the children
Think and talk about the main idea.

Step 2: read the story to the children

Let the children hear the language.

Step 3: say a sentence

Get them to practise saying a hard bit.

Step 4: support them to help themselves

Prompt children to help themselves when they get stuck.

Step 5: instigate independent reading

Let the children read on their own.

Step 6: respond to the story

Talk about the text together.

The sequence in practice

To illustrate how this works, I have taken *Seagull is clever* from the PM Storybooks series. This is an early reading book using natural language sentence structures. The simple nature of the written text belies some complexity in the link between the

words and illustrations. This is essentially a non-fiction text following a narrative sequence.

To begin with, we would tell the story to the children alerting them to the concepts or ideas that might be challenging. The aim is to expand their prior knowledge before independent reading.

When telling the story, it is good to use rich and challenging language to supplement the simplicity of the text. Always have a question to open up discussion, so that you can check understanding by exploring how the story might go before you read it to the children.

As we alert children to the potential difficulties they might face understanding the text, we are preparing them to engage with the ideas more fully from the start.

Step 1: tell the story, talk and think about the main idea

This story is called Seagull is clever.

Seagulls are birds that like to eat fish. That is why they live near the sea. Sometimes the weather is stormy and then the seawater is wavy and dangerous. This is the time that seagulls get hungry. They can't catch fish if the waves are too big. Can you think why?

In this story, Seagull thinks of another way to feed himself. He looks for shellfish to eat. Shellfish are found on rocks. They taste delicious. They live inside a hard shell that is difficult to open. How will Seagull open the shell and feed himself?

Talk together about what may happen and clear up any misunderstandings. Then say: 'Let's read the story and find out. Listen...'

Step 2: read the story, let children hear the language

Now read the story to the children.

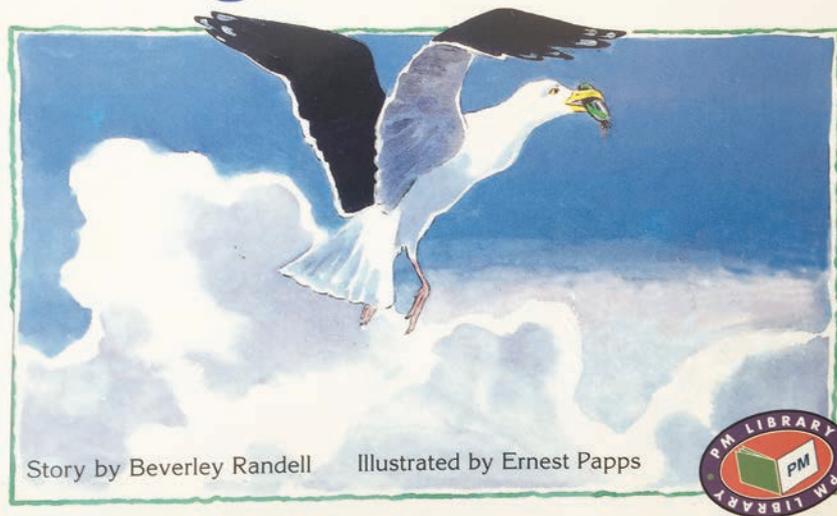
While the children are listening, they will draw on the information they were primed to think about when you told them the story beforehand. This will activate their engagement with the story when they read it on their own. They also hear how reading sounds when it is fluent and well phrased. This supports understanding.

Step 3: say a sentence, practise saying the hard bit

Ask the children to find the part where the story says: 'Is Seagull eating the shellfish? No he is not.'

The children now look through the book and find this page on their own. It is unusual to have a question like this in an early reading book, and so the aim is to prepare them to read an unexpected

Seagull is clever



language structure independently. The children practise saying the sentence together and on their own.

The other reason for getting them to look for this page is that it requires them to attend to the picture. This shows the seagull picking up the shellfish in its beak (not eating it) before dropping it deliberately on to a rock to smash the shell open. This is where the seagull shows how clever it is. Children who misunderstand this page miss the whole point of the story. Where this happens there is little sense of reward when they complete reading the final page independently.

Step 4: support children to help themselves when they get stuck

For example:

- ask them to read words together
- get them to listen to themselves while they read
- when they find a hard bit, get them to slow down, check, then go back and reread.

Step 5: instigate independent reading

The children now read the story for themselves, drawing on their previous experience in the lesson. The adult facilitates their independent engagement with the story by supporting them to solve their own problems, both in terms of decoding difficult passages and uncovering the messages they contain. Feedback is provided on the turn of the page. 'Good, you sorted out that hard part on your own. So he's not eating the shellfish is he?'

Step 6: talk about the story

Elicit a response to the story by asking an open question or making a provocative statement: 'Do you agree that Seagull is clever?' or 'I don't think it was smart to smash the shellfish.' Your aim is for each child to establish their own opinion in response to the story.

Now have the children look back through the book to find a part (picture or text) that supports their opinion. Get them to share their ideas.

For children who are learning how to read, this lesson sequence helps to develop their independent response to text when reading on their own. They are increasingly challenged to think high, day after day.

The experience of schools that have implemented the Daily Supported Reading programme alongside systematic phonics teaching demonstrates the long-term effectiveness of this approach.

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FIND OUT MORE

- **PM Storybooks:**
<https://shop.scholastic.co.uk/pm>
- **Selecting the right book for your intended purpose:** *Which Book and Why*, edited by Sue Bodman and Glen Franklin, IOE Press
- **For more information on Daily Supported Reading,** contact richard.boxall@learningtrust.co.uk

Daily Supported Reading

Daily Supported Reading (DSR) is a quality first teaching programme that ensures sustained independent reading opportunities for all children in Year 1.

Each child receives a daily 25-minute reading lesson at their instructional level, taught by a teacher or trained adult. These lessons are scripted and take place every day without exception. Children are grouped by reading attainment level, with no more than six children in each group.

A project coordinator manages the implementation of the programme, and organises a weekly development meeting for all the adults involved. These meetings usually last for 30 minutes and are used to collect feedback on the progress of each child. This data informs the regrouping of children each week and shapes the planning of future teaching sessions. Meetings always include a professional development component.

The programme aims to maximise reading progress for every child. Once it is firmly established in Year 1, it can be introduced in Reception classes during the summer term of the same year. For children who are still experiencing difficulties, it can be extended into Year 2.

The coordinator/team leader must be someone with a strong early literacy background and the capacity to motivate, enthuse and develop the adults who are part of the reading team. Adults change reading groups regularly so that they learn to respond variably to children at different stages of reading development.

The aims of the programme

- To dramatically increase the quantity of texts that beginner readers engage with enjoyably and independently every day.
- To accelerate the progress of all children by giving them the opportunity to work with a trained adult in a small group every day.
- To establish a coherent approach to early reading instruction in Key Stage 1.

For the children

- To enjoy daily independent reading in small groups led by a trained adult, and to increase the quantity and challenge of texts read across the year.
- To learn to solve problems they encounter in a text independently, while keeping the story or message in mind.

For staff

- To gain experience of teaching a range of children at different stages of learning to read and to develop a responsive approach.
- To build the capacity of school staff to move children on, and to make effective judgements about when to do so.