''Try that again''

Effective guided reading depends on the teacher's ability to 'tune in' to a child's thought process as she reads and make quick, informed judgements about when and how to interject, say **Sue Bodman** and **Glen Franklin**...

I t's a Year 2 guided reading lesson. The children are reading a retelling of the traditional tale, *Sly Fox and Little Red Hen*. After the book introduction, Lucy listens in as Ryan reads quickly and accurately but with little expression. *''Hmm''*, says Lucy. *''I was thinking that Sly Fox would have a sly voice.''* And then she prompts, *''Try that again, Ryan, and think about how Sly Fox would say it.''* Ryan does just as he is asked, reading expressively. *''Good job, Ryan. Did you listen to yourself? You sounded just like Sly Fox talking.''*

Lucy had a decision to make. Should she let Ryan continue reading until he makes an actual error? Or should she stop him and help him to use expression effectively to support the meaning of what is coming next in the tale? In this article, we explore three ways that the teacher can support effective learning during guided reading: Noticing, Prompting and Praising.

What do we mean by noticing?

In guided reading, the book introduction prepares the children for what they are about to read. Then, as they begin to read independently, the teacher listens in, actively observing all that the children do so that she can make effective teaching decisions. She considers each child's reading behaviour: the things they do well, the errors they make, the way they refer to the pictures, and the sound of their oral reading. This active listening process enables the teacher to gather information about the child's current understanding, in order to help develop reading (and thinking) skills. We may see children hesitate or look puzzled, with a little shake of their head and a frown – they know something's not quite right. We may hear them read a different word from the one printed on the page, and we wonder why. We may watch as they sound out each phoneme but are unable to blend to read the word. Sometimes we notice them seeming to do nothing at all!

Teacher 'noticing' involves bringing together observations from previous reading lessons, understandings of how children think and learn, the current lesson focus and knowledge of the child. It's a complex task. Without effective 'noticing', the

guided reading lesson will not achieve the potential progress for the group members.

Lucy listens in to Ryan reading: *"I may not be able to reach you, but I'm still going to catch you"*. He reads accurately, yet Lucy notices he has read without any expression. Lucy knows that Ryan has heard many traditional tales read by the teacher where foxes and other sly animals have featured. Lucy will have activated this prior knowledge and created the expectation for expressive reading during the introduction and strategy check; she has heard him previously read books with appropriate expression. Reading without phrasing and expression could indicate limited comprehension. He may be so focused on reading accurately that he might not be fully understanding the nuance of the meaning. Whatever the reason, Lucy has noticed something unexpected and now needs to make a response: *"Hmm"*, she says. *"I was thinking that Sly Fox would have a sly voice."* She now has to decide what she will about it.

What do we mean by prompting?

A prompt is a call to action (Clay, 2005). Prompts address the child directly and send him in search of what he knows (and the teacher knows he knows) that will help him. The use of prompting is one of the ways learning is supported during a guided reading lesson. The 'noticing' teacher has insight into the child's thinking and learning and draws on that knowledge to ensure that prompts offer the right level of support at the right time. The role

of the teacher in guided reading is to aid the learner to use everything she knows to enable fast, efficient problem-solving on the run. This is why close observation is so important to inform effective teacher prompts.

Lucy expects Ryan to be able to read the sentence with appropriate phrasing and intonation as this will support his comprehension. She judges him able to infer the fox's intended action, and how that intention links to emphasis and expression. She knows he has previous experiences of foxes in stories that frequently have malicious intent, and she requires him to draw upon that experience. So she decides to prompt: *"Try that again, Ryan, and think about how Sly Fox would say it."*

Prompts can provide different

strengths of support. For example, Lucy's prompt focuses Ryan on a source of information that he is neglecting to use – that Sly Fox would say that line in a particular way in this particular story. By saying *'Try that again, Ryan'*, the teacher is indicating that he can do this and that she expects him to do so. By directing him to the area of new thinking, she provides him with a way to do so effectively. This is a mid-range level of support as Lucy judges that Ryan needs specific direction to use his knowledge of the character of storybook foxes. She might have said just 'Try that again', anticipating that he could fix this for himself. However, in this instance, she decided to provide an increased level of support, based on her knowledge of

Ryan's reading, and drawing his attention to the specific aspect being neglected: *"... and think about how Sly Fox would say it."*

What do we mean by praising?

Teachers are natural praisers! We do it all the time. We want our children to know that they are doing a good job, though sometimes we can be in danger of 'damning with faint praise' Johnson (2012: 42). After all, what does 'good' actually mean? If we say 'good' to one child, and 'excellent' to another, then suddenly good doesn't seem quite so good. Praise is linked to motivation and the formation of 'can-do' attitudes. Young learners often think that trying hard and doing well are the same, so praise needs to be specific in order to direct children's attention to the approaches they are using in order to motivate them to persevere. General statements of 'good boy' or 'well done' will not help build self-efficacy (Greenspan, 1997). Of course, we are not advocating no feedback at all. Children do need to know what they've done well so that they know how to do it again for

themselves independently. Providing this information to the learner is a feature of effective teaching (Hattie, 2007). The difference is that feedback is specifically tailored to this child's immediate problem solving.

Now Ryan reads, *"I may not be able to reach you, but I'm still going to catch you."* in a beautifully phrased and expressive voice. Lucy's prompting has enabled him think more closely about the meaning in this context and to read the sentence with appropriate expression and emphasis, but Lucy wants to ensure that Ryan will be able to do this again for himself, and independently, in the future. After all, independence is the ultimate aim of guided reading. She says *"Good job, Ryan. Did you listen to yourself? You sounded just like Sly Fox talking."*

Her praise provides clear guidance about how Ryan can monitor for reading expression for himself, whilst also communicating that it is the self monitoring and the effort that

she is recognising, not merely the 'getting it right'. Let's unpick what she says in a little more detail – it's full of powerful teaching decisions.

1. *"Good job, Ryan"* – Lucy applauds his efforts as a job well done.
2. *"Did you listen to yourself?"* By asking if he had listened to himself she hands him the responsibility to monitor meaning so he can read with expression. He knows that this is something a reader needs to do, and that he should take on this role for himself from now on.
3. *"You sounded just like Sly Fox talking"* reinforces 1. and 2. by indicating exactly what it is that is admirable about his reading skill.

Why is this successful teaching?

The scenario we have described may seem like a series of off-the-cuff comments or a casual conversation between a teacher and a child. Actually, it demonstrates a series of

effective teacher actions based on carefully constructed evidence and professional knowledge. Even within this short example, Lucy adapted her talk as she responded to Ryan's reading actions. Responding effectively is probably the most difficult job for those of us who teach guided reading. Whilst all the children in the group have similar reading attainment, the teacher will need to know what each particular child is able to do independently and is likely to do when stuck. This 'response history' (Schwartz, 2005) is of critical importance when deciding how to act.

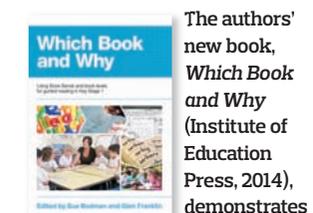The example we have used in this article has focused on

reading for expression – this is what Lucy 'noticed' and acted upon. Of course, noticing, prompting and praising apply to any reading behaviours, for example, using decoding, applying phonic knowledge or lapses in controlling direction across a page of text.

When we notice something, we need to ask ourselves 'What do we know about this child?'.

Only by knowing what children can do already, and where we expect them to go next, are we are able to offer the right level of support at just the right time. This is 'responsive' teaching. In guided reading, we need to 'tune in' to individual children by moving around the group, listening to a good chunk of their reading (not just a few words or one line of text) in order to observe and respond to what they do independently. 'Listening in' is a vital component of effective teaching in guiding reading as it creates the context for noticing and gathering evidence about what each child does as they read. With effective noticing, we can fine-tune our prompting and praising to best support each of our young readers to love reading.

THINKING ON THE RUN

LET'S REVISIT THE INTERACTION BETWEEN LUCY AND RYAN, MOMENT BY MOMENT, IN ORDER TO THINK ABOUT HOW SHE NOTICES AND ACTS UPON WHAT SHE KNOWS OF RYAN AS A READER.

Child Action	Teacher knowledge	Teacher Action	Teacher response
"I may not be able to reach you, but I'm still going to catch you", read accurately, but without expression	Ryan is familiar with traditional tales Lucy has heard him read with expression previously	Noticing	*"Hmm. I was thinking that Sly Fox would have a sly voice."*
	Lucy expects Ryan to be able to read the phrase with appropriate phrasing and intonation.	Prompting	*"Try that again, Ryan, and think about how Sly Fox would say it."*
Ryan reads the sentence with appropriate expression and emphasis. *"I may not be able to reach you, but I'm still going to catch you."*	Lucy provides clear guidance for how Ryan will monitor his own reading expression in future.	Praising	*"Good job, Ryan. Did you listen to yourself? You sounded just like Sly Fox talking."*

ℹ **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

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DO YOUR RESEARCH

Further reading to support the ideas raised in this article...

▶ **Clay, M. M. (2005). Literacy Lessons Designed for Individuals - Part 1; Why? When? and How? Auckland, N.Z.: Heinemann.**
▶ **Greenspan, S. I (1997). The Growth of the Mind and the Endangered Origins of Intelligence. Reading: MA-Addison Wesley.**
▶ **Hattie, J. A. C. & Timperely, H. (2007). The Power of Feedback. Review of Educational Research, 77(1) pages 81-112.**
▶ **Johnston, P. H. (2012). Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives. New York: Stenhouse.**
▶ **Schwartz, R.M. (2005) Decisions, decisions: responding to primary students during guided reading. The Reading Teacher, 58 (5) pp.436-443.**