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Sincerely,
Karen Haag

"Imagine a classroom in which a student's group assignment does not define who the student is. Through a combination of large groups, small groups, teams, and partners, students contribute to a variety of situations. Some of the time, students might be working with peers who are more alike in their achievement level or skill needs. At other times, students might be working with peers of mixed abilities and talents, so that everyone can make a contribution to the activity at hand. And even when students know that they are struggling, they do not have to endure classroom structures that serve as daily reminders to them (and everyone else) of their low status.

Imagine small-group work with the teacher that is planned on the basis of the students' needs and the expectations of the school. The small-group work can be focused around many types of texts, including basal selections, trade books, and magazines. These materials are read by the student in many creative ways without relying on a round robin reading style. The students can actually engage in a variety of response activities to deepen their understanding and extend their connections.

Imagine independent work that students are engaged in away from the teacher – independent work that rivals the power of the teacher's instruction. Students read and write away from the teacher. Classroom structures allow students to meet together to read, discuss, and respond to stories. Independent structures promote inquiry-based investigations and allow partner and individuals to work on projects using reading and writing to learn about critical issues and answer questions.

Imagine small-group reading instruction that is placed within an overall flexible grouping plan. Imagine grouping that provides students with large-group activities to build community through shared experiences, as well as moments for individual activities where students can read and respond to self-selected books and texts. Imagine reading instruction that is fully integrated with writing instruction, with one flowing out of and into the other. Imagine a focus not only on writing mechanics but also on the processes of reading and writing." ---From *Where have all the bluebirds gone? How to soar with flexible grouping*
By JoAnne Schudt & Michael P. Ford

If you're like me, you want to know about all discussion-group formats.
For this writing, I went back to the inventors. Notice the 1990s as the era in which reading workshop, book clubs, and guided reading were introduced. As the years have moved on, the definitions of the terms blurred. Actual practice may be a hybrid of the techniques the original authors advocated. I thought it might be helpful to use the authors' own words to consider each discussion format. From there we can understand what is needed to implement each way of grouping. No one way is right – either for a child, or a classroom, or a school, or a year, or a grade level. As teachers we should know about all tools available to us and then choose or blend as we see the need. We should support our decisions with our knowledge of effective, research-based instruction and recent assessment of the students in our care. Even the authors say, "We still don't completely get it and we need more work and study." To that end, it is my hope that we will continue to research in our classrooms and discuss the results until we find what works for all learners. *Karen Haag*

Consider these questions as you read about each kind of discussion group:

1. What is the advantage of this kind of reading group? Who in my room would benefit?
2. What is the disadvantage of this kind of reading group? Who in my room would not benefit?
3. What time of year or with what unit would this kind of reading group work for me?
4. Do I need to be using a variety of reading groups because of the wide range of abilities in my room? How would I do that?
5. How might I blend the different kinds of reading groups due to time constraints?
6. How can I gather assessment to determine who needs what?
7. Where can my assistant be helpful? What kind of training or support does she need?
8. Because of time constraints, how might I integrate reading and writing instruction?

Group Types

1. Socratic Seminar: Whole class approach; one challenging article; questions posed by teacher or student leaders, eventually
2. Inquiry Circles (Harvey Daniels and Stephanie Harvey) – Paths to Discussion (Richard Louth NWP) or Summarizing and Reporting Circle (Rebel Williams): Different books based on central idea; mixed ability groups; could be whole class, each with a different book or article; could be based on interest, genre study, author study, theme study, character study.
3. *Question the Author* (McKeown & Beck): Same book heavily guided by teacher; teacher reads aloud or students read silently to points predetermined by the teacher; students raise questions at the predetermined points for discussion; mixed ability or ability grouped.
4. Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell) and Balanced Literacy: Four kinds of reading (reading aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading) and four kinds of writing (shared writing, interactive writing, guided writing or writing workshop, and independent writing)
5. Book Clubs (Tammy Raphael) or Literature Circles (Kathy Short & Jerome Harste): Same books: ability grouped or mixed ability; students select the books from what's available; students lead the discussion in small groups.
6. Reading Workshop: Self-selection and conferring (Debbie Miller); students independently reading and/or partner reading; relies heavily on teacher conferring; teacher pulls strategy and skill groups.
7. Small-Group Differentiated Instruction (Jennifer Serravallo); differentiating for students even when they're in a group, using formative assessment to form groups, conferring is a cornerstone; advocating for using the group the child needs, which require that all teachers know them. *Not discussed in this writing.*
8. Reading Groups – the way we used to do them☺

Sources

Book Clubs: An alternative framework for reading instruction, Taffy E. Raphael and Susan I. McMahon, The Reading Teacher, Vol. 48, No. 2, October 1994.

"For years, reading instruction involved breaking the reading process into smaller, more manageable units. Instruction focused on helping students master individual skills until they could orchestrate their use when reading. This approach was influenced by behavioral learning theories, which described how observable behaviors were acquired. In reading, this often meant a focus on oral fluency and the ability to answer literal comprehension questions. Basing instruction on behavioral theories was called into question in the 1970s and 80s, when we became concerned with how little time students spent reading and the view of reading as merely an accumulation of skills (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Durkin, 1978-1979, 1981). Research indicated the value of building instructional models around authentic literacy experiences, especially the value of using real literature. Current views of reading instruction are based in social constructivist theory (Gavelek, 1986; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Wertsch, 1985), which emphasizes learning as a social process. Reading and writing develop through interactions with both adults and peers; students should not sit in isolation, working on individual worksheets to practice skills outside the social and cultural contexts of normal use. Instead, students should interact using oral and written language to construct meaning about what they have read."

"Our original components (i.e., instruction, reading, writing, and community share) served to guide initial planning, but the distinction among the components blurred as we implemented the program. For example, during reading time, we often observed students writing in their logs as they recorded thoughts for later discussion. Even though these components merged during implementation, for the convenience of the reader we describe the individual components that supported book clubs.

Thus, instruction for the reading component focused on fluency, vocabulary development, knowledge of genre, the implementation of various strategies, and personal response. Instruction for the writing component focused on ways in which ideas could be recorded, added to, changed over time, and synthesized across entries and texts.

- *Reading*. Reading instruction concerned fluency, reading vocabulary, comprehension strategies, genres, and aesthetic and personal response. Teachers addressed fluency indirectly by providing time and assigning daily reading of the selected stories and related trade books. Students often read ahead due to high interest in the stories but were asked to reread the section that would be discussed during that day's activities.
- *To help increase vocabulary*, teachers used different strategies to build upon the current reading. For example, when students read a relatively challenging book, such as *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (O'Dell, 1960), they kept think sheets such as Mei's (see Figure 3) in their reading logs. These helped draw students' attention to interesting or unknown words; to locate the words in the text; and to determine meaning from context clues, reference materials, or other resources.
- *Writing*. The writing component focused students' attention on issues for discussion about texts, encouraged students to adopt relevant stances toward literary understanding (Langer, 1990), and underscored ways to link ideas from different sections within a text and across the different books they were reading in their themed units. Students consulted a reading log map (see Figure 4) for ideas about writing responses in their reading logs. Categories such as "wonderful words" and "character map" helped them with comprehension and clarification of ideas and encouraged them to bring their own background knowledge and experiences to bear to make sense of the text. Categories such as "me & the book" or "book/chapter critique" enabled students to be analytical about the story and their responses.
- *Community share*. The community share component of book club provided a context for teachers to meet with their students as a whole group. This setting served different purposes depending on when it occurred in relation to the students' book club discussions… During community share teachers modeled different ways of responding to texts and of participating in discussions about text. The teachers generally led these whole-class discussions in response to students' specific questions or needs the teachers perceived as they observed Book Club discussions. Students or the teacher could initiate discussion of confusing or disturbing aspects of the book that they had not resolved within their individual book clubs. Instruction. In addition to the focus on indirect support (e.g., increasing the range of possible log entries, extending background knowledge, clarifying confusions), instruction included direct ways to enhance the quality of students' book club conversations.
  - ➢ Audio taping and transcribing. Students read transcripts and then analyzed.
  - ➢ Played short segments for the class who then assessed the conversation: what they did well and what they could improve.
  - ➢ Used transcripts to perform as plays. After the dramatization, students were better able to analyze how it felt to never get to say something, were bossy, asked silly questions, or started a good discussion.
  - ➢ Students observed each other. Competent groups demonstrated for groups who were learning."

Literature Circles and Response, Bonnie Campbell Hill, et al, Christopher-Gordon Publishers, 1995.
---From Foreword by Kathy Short
"The term "literature circle" grew out of my work with Jerry Harste and Carolyn Burke on the authoring cycle (Short, 1986)…Initially, many of who were exploring literature in the classroom focused on using literature extensively in the classroom. We read aloud, provided time for independent reading, and engaged students in activities related to the books that filled my classroom. My major goal as a teacher was to have my students become fluent readers who loved books. I accomplished that goal but quickly realized that students can read extensively without thinking deeply and critically about what they read. Through conversations with educators such as Karen Smith, I became convinced that what was missing was the counterpart to author circles and so began to explore literature circles.

- Reading is a transactional process whereby students construct understanding by bringing meaning and extracting meaning from text.

- Students' primary focus is not on extracting information from a text, figuring out the interpretations the teacher wants to hear, or learning about literary elements. They enter the world of literature to learn about life and to make sense of the world.
- Cooperative learning formats where tasks and roles are divided among the members of the group shut down the thinking and talk which is at the heart of dialogue.
- Literature circles are not a variation on reading groups. They are not a better way to teach reading. They are a place to think and inquire.
- Students may not be able to independently read the books they are discussing in literature circles because these books must support children's in-depth consideration of many layers of meaning… The issue is not whether they can read the books, but whether they can productively think together about books.
- Literature circles are most powerful when they are part of an inquiry-based classroom. The heart of the curriculum is not the books, but inquiry.
- [The authors] have not arrived at some final point, but are continuing to think with each other."

Launching Literature Circles, Rebel Williams, 1993
"A circle, simply defined, is an opportunity for a small group of students to come together for the purpose of sharing or talking about a novel, short story or some other literary experience.
The circle was originally designed as a process to promote oral communication in small groups, which are structured so that all participants share equal status. The process, based on sound psychological principles, blends and promotes the principles of education in practice. The circle promotes self-understanding and self-respect as well as understanding and respect for others. As circle members express themselves, observe, and listen to others, they gradually realize that all human beings are alike in that every one senses, feels, thinks and behaves. At the same time, it becomes obvious that people are different from one another because they sense, feel, think, and behave in their own unique ways. This understanding of likeness and differences, referred to as the Principle of Unity and Diversity, is central to mental health. Children who develop this awareness can come to know and like themselves as individuals. Moreover, they can know and like others for who they are without being judgmental.

- Everyone gets a turn to share, including the leader.
- A student can skip her turn if she wishes or take a turn nonverbally.
- Everyone listens to the person who is sharing.
- The time is shared equally.
- There are no interruptions or put-downs; no gossiping is allowed.

There are several types of circles. Students progress through the developmental structures of these circles and acquire clear understandings and important skills that will lay a strong foundation for free exploration of any topic.

1. *Paired Sharing* – Start by sharing with a neighbor or a buddy. Simple exchanges talking about what they liked or thought about a story with one another. The important thing is to get the children into the habit of sharing.
2. *Personal Response Circles* – Similar to the paired sharing but increase the number of participants to three or four allowing them to form a circle.
3. *Personal Experience Circles* – Participants share personal experiences that are similar to those in the story or poem they have read. In these circles, students become more caring and more tolerant of one another.
4. *Summarizing and Reporting Circles* – used across the curriculum, group members take notes, draw conclusions, and write up results to share with the rest of the class. Class sharing can be in the form of (1) oral reports, (2) group-to-group presentations, (3) gallery walks, and (4) written reports.
5. *Problem-Solving Circles* – Used across the curriculum and is often the most exciting because students have a real-life task to accomplish. The best problems are school concerns or large issues that clearly affect students' lives. Circle members need to define the problem and list possible solutions.

Participants can lobby for their favorite idea, negotiate a solution that they can all support, and then put a proposal together to present their recommendations. PERSUASIVE writing easily grows out of these circles.

6. *Cognitive-Reaction Circles* – Students get together after a specific experience and share what they learned. This type of circle is powerful for pooling everyone's knowledge to gain different perspectives and deepen understandings. It's also a great circle to use at the end of a learning cycle to help students solidify their understanding of the information and concepts in the unit. When reading a novel, students may extend over several days, and participants may want to spend the first day on personal responses and then go deeper into the literary aspects of the story on successive days. They can take place at the end of the novel or at key points in the plot when students want to get each other's reaction."

Question the Author, Beck & McKeown, Scholastic, 2006.
"Our approach to comprehension instruction, *Questioning the Author*, focuses on the importance of students' active effort to build meaning from what they read and the need for students to grapple with ideas in the text. The findings from our implementations of QtA…pointed to dramatic changes in the classroom discourse. They came from comparing reading and social studies lessons that were taught by our collaborating teachers before and after they implemented QtA. The changes in the discourse included the following:

- Teachers asked questions that focused on considering and extending meaning rather than retrieving information.
- Teachers responded to students in ways that extended the conversation rather than in ways that merely evaluated or repeated the responses.
- Students did about twice as much talking during QtA discussions that they did in traditional lessons.
- Students frequently initiated their own questions and comments, in contrast to rarely doing so in traditional lessons.
- Students responded by talking about the meaning of what they read and by integrating ideas rather than by retrieving text information.

Student-to-student interactions during discussions developed."

Reading With Meaning, Debbie Miller, Stenhouse, 2002.
"Structured around a mini-lesson (15-20 minutes), a large block of time to read, respond and confer (45-50 minutes), and time to share (15-20 minutes) the readers' workshop format provides a framework for both strategy instruction and gradual release of responsibility.

- Gradually releasing responsibility to children as they gain expertise, teaching a few strategies of choice, response, community, and structure guide my work.
- The minilesson provides teachers with opportunities to think aloud and show how strategies are used to make sense of the text.
- The large block of time for reading, responding, and conferring allows children to practice strategies in small groups, in pairs, and independently, and gives teachers time to teach, learn, and find out how the children are applying what they've been taught.
- The share time gives children a chance to share their work as well as an opportunity for reflection, conversation, learning, and assessment.
- Only when we took the time to really get to know ourselves as readers were we able to seriously consider the implications of the proficient reader research for the children in our classrooms.
- *Teacher modeling*, or showing kids how, includes explaining the strategy, thinking aloud about the mental processes used to construct meaning, and demonstrating when and why it is most effective.
- *Guided practice* or what I like to call "having at it" (it's also sometimes called scaffolding) consists of gradually giving children more responsibility for each strategy in a variety of authentic situations. Here, children are invited to practice a strategy during whole-group class discussions, asked to apply it in

collaboration with their peers in pairs and in small groups, and supported by honest feedback that honors both the child and the task.

- *During independent practice*, or the "letting go" stage, children begin to apply the strategy in their own reading, ideally using real texts in real situations. Teacher feedback through conferences is essential; teachers need to let students know they've used a strategy correctly, encourage them to share their thinking with their teachers or their peers, challenge them to think out loud about how using the strategy helped them as a reader, and correct misconceptions when they occur.
- *Application* of the strategy, or the, "Now I get it! Stage, is evident when children apply learning independently to different types of texts of in curricula areas. By this stage, children are more flexible in their thinking: they begin to make connections between the strategy and others; they can articulate how using a strategy helps construct meaning; and they can use the strategies flexibly and adaptively when they read."

Guided Reading, Good First Teaching for All Children, Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, 1996.
From Chapter One-
"Before the end of second grade the great majority of children will have become good readers and writers. There will be a range of rates of learning and, just like everything else, some children will like reading more than others and be more skilled at it. Basic reading is within the reach of every child. The key is good first teaching.

1. *By reading aloud*, teachers help children experience and contemplate literary work they cannot read.
2. *In shared reading*, children participate in reading, learning critical concepts of how print works, and get the feel of reading.
3. *Literature Circles* enable children to think more deeply about text as they talk with one another and co-construct new understanding.
4. *It is through guided reading*, however, that teachers can show children how to read and can support children as they read. Guided reading leads to the independent reading that builds the process; it is the heart of a balanced literacy program.
   - It gives the children the opportunity to develop as readers while participating in a socially supported activity.
   - It gives the teachers the opportunity to observe individuals as they process new texts.
   - It gives individual readers the opportunity to develop reading strategies so that they can read increasingly difficult texts independently.
   - It gives children enjoyable, successful experiences in reading for meaning.
   - It develops the abilities needed for independent reading.
   - It helps children learn how to introduce texts to themselves.

The teacher works with small groups of children who use similar reading processes and are able to read similar levels of text with support. The teacher introduces a text to this small group, works briefly with individuals in the group as they read it, may select one or two teaching points to present to the group following the reading, and may ask the children to take part in an extension of their reading. The text is one that offers the children a minimum of new things to learn; that is, the children can read it with the strategies they currently have, but it provides opportunity for a small amount of new learning.

The ultimate goal in guided reading is to help children learn how to use independent reading strategies successfully. Teachers, based on their knowledge of children, possible texts, and the processes involved in reading and learning to read, make a series of complex decisions that influence and mediate literacy for the young children in the group. Guided reading also involves ongoing observation and assessment that informs the teacher's interactions with individuals in the group (a running record on each child about every three weeks) and help the teacher select appropriate texts.

We wish to make our definition of guided reading very clear. While there are many adjustments and variations related to the age and level of children, in guided reading:

- A teacher works with a small group.
- Children in the group are similar in their development of their reading processes and are able to read the same level of text.
- Teachers introduce the stories and assist children's reading in ways that help to develop independent reading strategies.
- Each child reads the whole text.
- The goal is for the children to read independently and silently.
- The emphasis is on reading increasingly challenging books over time.
- Children are grouped and regrouped in a dynamic process that involves ongoing observation and assessment.
- The more children use problem solving while reading for meaning, the greater and more flexible their problem-solving repertoires become.
- Our rule of thumb is that if the reader, with an introduction and support, cannot read about 90 percent of the words accurately, the text is too difficult."

Socratic Seminars (Mortimer Adler and the Great Books program) from Socratic Seminars International, http://www.socraticseminars.com/education/whatare.html, Dec. 4, 2009,
"Socratic Seminars are a highly motivating form of intellectual and scholarly discourse conducted in K-12 classrooms. They usually range from 30-50 minutes--longer if time allows--once a week.
An effective Socratic Seminar creates dialogue as opposed to debate. Dialogue creates "better conversation." As William Issacs states in Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together, dialogue is a conversation in which people (students) think together in relationship. Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in a relationship with others---possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred." The practice of Socratic Seminars teaches students to recognize the differences between dialogue and debate and to strive to increase the qualities of dialogue and reduce the qualities of debate in each Socratic Seminar. Some of the most significant differences between dialogue and debate are presented below.
DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

- Dialogue is collaborative: multiple sides work toward shared understanding. Debate is oppositional: two opposing sides try to prove each other wrong.
- In dialogue, one listens to understand, to make meaning, and to find common ground. In debate, one listens to find flaws, to spot differences, and to counter arguments.
- Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view. Debate affirms a participant's point of view.
- Dialogue reveals assumptions for examination and reevaluation. Debate defends assumptions as truth.
- Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: openness to being wrong and an openness to change. Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
- In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, expecting that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than threaten it. In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
- Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs. Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
- In dialogue, one searches for strengths in all positions. In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.
- Dialogue respects all the other participants and seeks not to alienate or offend. Debate rebuts contrary positions and may belittle or deprecate other participants.
- Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of answers and that cooperation can lead to a greater understanding. Debate assumes a single right answer that somebody already has.
- Dialogue remains open-ended. Debate demands a conclusion.

By creating dialogue, Socratic Seminars foster active learning, critical thinking, and close reading skills as participants explore and evaluate the ideas, issues, and values in a particular text. An effective seminar consists of four interdependent elements:

1. The Text considered - A seminar text could be drawn from readings in literature, history, science, math, health, and philosophy or from works of art or music. Effective seminars occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions in response to the ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text.
2. The Questions raised - An opening question has no right answer; instead it reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the leader. An effective opening question leads participants back to the text as they speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved. Responses to the opening question generate new questions from the leader and participants, leading to new responses. In this way, the line of inquiry evolves on the spot rather than being predetermined by the leader.
3. The Seminar Leader - The leader plays a dual role as leader and participant. The seminar leader consciously demonstrates habits of mind that lead to a thoughtful exploration of the ideas in the text. As a seminar participant, the leader actively engages in the group's exploration of the text.
4. The Participants - Participants share with the leader the responsibility for the quality of the seminar."

Still to Study

Inquiry Circles by Smoky Daniels
Daily 5 by Gail Boushey & Joan Moser
What have I forgotten?