

What Can I Do When They Get Stuck?

Christine Fraser, Reading Recovery, VSB

Think about what they know! Build on their strengths!

Think about someone learning to swim - do they need you with them in the water, in the shallow end of the pool holding them up with a life jacket, water wings, and a flutter board? Or do they just need to be practicing beside the edge of the pool where they can grab on if they need to? Maybe some support somewhere in between these two extremes? This is what we call 'scaffolding', not teaching, per se, but coaching alongside to help the student at the level of support that seems most appropriate.

When your student is stuck and needs some help, ask yourself...

- As a more knowledgeable person, a reader and a problem solver, how can I support them without giving too much or too little?
- By jumping in and correcting mistakes, am I inadvertently taking problem-solving opportunities away from the reader. Conversely, am I allowing the reader to labour too long and as a result they lose the integrity of the story or text?
- Can I focus my coaching prompts to be more specific than 'sound it out'. For example could I say 'look at that word and find something that can help you?' or 'Go back and read the sentence and when you get to the word you don't know, just say the first bit'.
- Am I asking this student to do something they can do? How do I know? For example - if I am asking them to sound out a word like 'hop' or 'man' can they do that? If it is a word like 'photosynthesis' do they know how to 'chunk it' or cluster letters together or break a word apart to solve it? Will prompting them to 'sound it out' be helpful? Would a prompt like 'break that word down' be more appropriate?
- Is the student able to use the meaning of the story and the way in which the words flow together (structure) to carry the reading forward? Are they able to predict what the next word might be?
- If they are learning English, will a prompt like 'Can we say it that way in English?' help or can I just tell them 'In English we say...'

Perhaps the student has read the whole book or passage successfully but cannot recall what meaning the text had. Comprehension is the most important part of reading! Even at the most emergent level.

- Ask your student if they know how to make a picture in their head while they read. If not you might need to model how you do this when you are reading. Talk about the different senses - 'I can smell that gingerbread baking - can you?' 'I can hear the big waves crashing onto the beach - it sounds like the ocean is roaring!'
- Check-in as they read each page or paragraph - use the RAP strategy - **R**ead, **A**sk yourself questions, **P**ut it in your own words
- Evoke their background knowledge and experience. 'Did you ever go fishing before? Tell me all about it'. Or 'I haven't lived in the pioneer days but I read a book about it...'
- Honour their personal experiences. Many of your students may not have had the experiences of the characters in the books we typically read in school but they have had a lifetime of their own experiences which need to be acknowledged.
- Questions, Questions, Questions! 'What happened? Why do you think he said that?' 'what is a lifeguard?' Use stickies to put into the books when a question arises about the text, then take them out as the answer become apparent.
- Go beyond the words on the page - ask them to read 'between the lines'. Help make what seems hidden, obvious! Model your own thinking out loud.
- Talk about the purpose of the text - is it a story? A 'how to...' manual? A fact book? Help them set a purpose for reading before they start.
- Show pleasure in the reading. Laugh, cry, and enjoy the text.

Many kids can read but don't - I try to make it my goal to bring the joy and pleasure of reading back to children who already think this is something they are not good at! If they have learned a language then they can learn how to read and write.

If you would like to see some slides in my presentation, please email me at cfraser@vsb.bc.ca