WRIGHT GROUP

LEAD 21

LITERACY EQUITY ACCELERATION DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation and Acceleration Through Small-Group Reading Instruction

Program Research Base

Mc Graw Hill **Wright Group**

Contents

Differentiation and Acceleration Through Small-Group Reading Instruction

Executive Summary

A solid base of research shows that students learn reading best when they have access to a full range of instruction geared to various grouping sizes. In addition, research shows that the exclusive use of one grouping pattern tends to widen the gap between below-level readers and advanced readers. Educators have learned that each grouping size, including independent reading, contributes its own benefits, and in a well-rounded reading program students should move from one size group to another on a regular basis.

In **Wright Group LEAD21**, the small-group concept is enhanced. It includes all the common expectations of guided reading, but also encompasses teaching methods to address both differentiation and acceleration. The major portion of the reading instructional block of **LEAD21** incorporates three components: Interactive Reading (whole-class, community reading, which includes read-alouds); Differentiated Reading (small-group reading, which includes the principles of guided reading); and Independent Reading.

LEAD21 stands out from the traditional basals in its Differentiated Reading component, referred to in this White Paper as Small-Group Reading Instruction, or SGRI. It fulfills four functions: first, it provides targeted, scaffolded instruction as an intervention for students with similar needs. Second, it provides explicit instruction and demonstrations to smaller groups of students: Intensive, Strategic, Benchmark, and Advanced Readers.

Third, it is designed to be a forum for response across a shared text when a small group of students have read the same text and are asked to collaborate on their response to the text. Lastly, and related to the third function, SGRI in **LEAD21** becomes a forum for response across texts when a small group of students have read different, but related texts. The Differentiated Reader fulfills this last need and is the primary reading text in the program, written for four levels of readers.

Five guiding principles govern the instructional plan for Differentiated Reading in **LEAD21**: 1. The need to differentiate instruction; 2. The need to provide equitable access to high-quality instruction for all students and reduce the stigma of being a struggling reader; 3. The desire to shift teacher focus from student progress to student proficiency; 4. The need for acceleration of below-level readers; and 5. The desire to follow a gradual release model of instruction.

LEAD21 incorporates a grouping structure designed to address the needs of all students in the class to help them successfully learn to read.

Differentiation and Acceleration Through Small-Group Reading Instruction

Introduction

There has always been a problem with grouping practices in reading programs (Caldwell and Ford 2002; Nagel 2001; Opitz 1998). The complexity of the interaction between readers, texts, and the contexts in which reading takes place is often ignored by educational decisions that suggest that one program, set of materials, instructional technique or grouping arrangement can address the needs of all students in a classroom (Opitz and Ford 2001). Common sense and personal experiences would suggest however that one size rarely fits all (Gregory and Chapman 2002). Students vary in their background knowledge, readiness, language, learning preferences, interests, and reactions. A single instructional response to a group of diverse learners often means that the teaching technique will help some while it ignores others (Forsten, Grant and Hollas 2002). Furthermore, the exclusive use of the single instructional technique over time will magnify that flaw.

No one grouping pattern is inherently bad, but the exclusive use of one grouping pattern often leads to problems in the classroom (Caldwell and Ford 2002). In the past, the overuse of homogenous small groups often meant that many readers never had access to the same quality of instruction as others did. The grouping tactics themselves contributed to the establishment of a public stigma attached to reading instruction. These negative feelings about reading and school actually ran interference with even the highest quality small-group instruction. In the end, this type of small-group instruction did little to bring below-level readers up to proficiency or narrow the gap between readers in high and low groups. In fact, because of the inherent flaws in that model, the gap often widens between readers.

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In contrast, the overuse of whole-group instruction often meant that many students—especially below-level readers—were not reading text appropriate for their levels. These students weren't reading at all due to the frustration level of the material in front of them and the minimal amount of teacher support they were provided. On the other end, students were reading without adequate challenges. The difficulty of keeping a group of diverse students engaged with the same material often meant that some students—often those who needed help the most—were not engaged. Again this type of grouping did little to support the growth of below grade-level readers.

Differentiated instruction emerged as a practice to address these concerns. It acknowledges that all grouping patterns—large groups, small groups, teams, partners and individuals—have value because they all offer the reader slightly different experiences with different outcomes (Radencich and McKay 1995). When teachers plan, they consider the strengths and weaknesses of each grouping approach and then put them together to allow the teacher to best meet the needs of the classroom. The groups are formed and dissolved as needs change to allow for maximum flexibility, avoiding the static nature of the grouping patterns of the past (Opitz 1998.)

It is important to remember that while it is often possible to form and reform groups during a single lesson on any one day of instruction, it is more important to look at a classroom program over time. When we evaluate the program over time, we should be able to see that students have been involved in a variety of grouping arrangements, leading to a wide variety of reading experiences, accomplishing many reading outcomes. Differentiated instruction can be visible during any one lesson, but it is probably even more important that differentiation is seen over the course of many lessons.

The Role of Small-Group Reading Instruction: Why Is It Important?

Wright Group LEAD21 is designed to provide students with a variety of learning opportunities in a comprehensive literacy program. Some work is best done in large groups in which many voices add to the accumulation of knowledge. At other times, individual interaction is the key to effective teaching and learning. In between these two ends of the spectrum is small-group work. **Small-Group Reading Instruction (SGRI)** is one of the most critical components of a comprehensive literacy program. In small groups students gain the advantage of interacting with other students but also have the potential for direct and constant contact with the teacher. SGRI allows the teacher to provide a layer of differentiation to whole-group instruction by providing opportunities to work with students whose needs are more alike than they are different. SGRI allows the teacher to vary the student membership of the groups and the level of texts used with each group. This helps the teacher target instruction to better meet the needs of the students in a manner that isn't as possible in large-group settings (Ford and Opitz 2008). This may be especially critical for the below grade-level reader.

Generally these learning opportunities are reflected in four key components that define reading instruction in **LEAD21**: reading to the students, reading with the students in large groups, reading with the students in small groups, and reading done by the student (Mooney 1990). These components lead to three instructional activities that comprise the major portion of the reading instructional block of **LEAD21**: Interactive Reading (community reading which includes read-alouds), Differentiated Reading (which includes Guided Reading), and Independent Reading (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). In **LEAD21**, typically Interactive Reading (kindergarten through grade 5) is a teacher-directed, large-group activity used with a heterogeneous mix of students. Independent Reading activities, on the other hand, provide for individualized approaches to achieve instructional or recreational goals of the reading program for specific students. Guided Reading is the primary vehicle for targeting specific, scaffolded instruction to intervene with smaller homogenous groups of students who share similar needs. The term Guided Reading often calls to mind a specific instructional approach for small-group reading instruction (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). So for the basis of this Program Research Base, we will use the broader phrase **Small-Group Reading Instruction** (SGRI) which includes the typical interpretation of Guided Reading but is not limited to that specific instructional approach. Since an important goal of **LEAD21** is the development of independent, strategic silent readers, SGRI is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself. SGRI is always used as a vehicle to further the development of independent, strategic readers, and as such, is labeled Differentiated Reading in **LEAD21**.

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In **LEAD21** the typical components of a comprehensive literacy program do not stand alone as separate and unconnected activities. An intentional effort has been made to link instruction thematically across the literacy block. Effort has also been made to design the large-group, small-group, and independent activities collectively so that they offer a smooth flow of instruction in connected experiences (McLaughlin and Allen 2002). In a national survey of primary teachers, only half of the teachers linked their instruction thematically and two-thirds of the teachers connected their shared and guided reading experiences (Ford and Opitz 2008). Typically, it is recommended that time be divided with one-third of the time devoted to whole-group activity and two-thirds devoted to small-group and independent activities. But in the survey only about 37% of instructional

time was devoted to small-group instruction (Ford and Opitz 2008). On the other hand, in a study of effective schools, over sixty minutes was devoted to small-group work, which was significantly more than for moderately effective and least effective schools, given the same demographic groups (Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole 1999).

The Purposes of Small-Group Reading Instruction

It is important to distinguish the purpose of whole-group instruction from that of SGRI. The whole-group setting is best suited for instruction and experiences for which all students are responsible. Whole-group instruction is also more conducive to learning experiences in which it is beneficial to hear multiple voices responding to those experiences. When it is essential that all students receive information, and when it is beneficial for many voices to respond to the experiences, whole-group instruction may be the most efficient and optimal vehicle for achieving those aims (Caldwell and Ford 2002).

It should be noted that the more successful whole-group instruction is, the less instructional burden is placed on SGRI. Since whole-group instruction is often the most efficient use of time and materials, it is important to maximize the benefits all students receive from that instruction. Clearly student engagement plays a critical role in reaching all students during large-group activities. In exemplary teachers' classrooms where teachers had the greatest impact on performance and achievement measures, engagement levels were as high as 90/90—90% of the students on task 90% of the time (Pressley 2006). Often whole-group instruction leads to more passive learning activities where one person does (often the teacher), while most of the others watch. These formats often allow students—many times those who need it the most—to easily tune out the instruction. Intentional efforts must be made in planning for and soliciting high levels of engagement during these times. Usually this means rethinking regular classroom routines and intensifying them. Intensification is an intentional effort to help more students get more mileage out of those classroom routines. Bomer (1998) suggested it's a way to turn up the heat and light on these practices so they are more effective for more learners. This may be true even when texts used in whole group are more difficult for some readers. Recent research suggests that difficult texts surrounded by effectively scaffolded, teacher-mediated instruction may actually accelerate the growth of below-grade level readers (Stahl, et al. 2005).

Even with intensified whole-group instruction, some students will still need additional attention. This creates a need for differentiated instruction. SGRI is the primary vehicle for differentiating instruction (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). The primary purpose of SGRI is to provide targeted, scaffolded instruction as an intervention for students with similar needs. SGRI allows teachers to address the diversity of needs and interests that exist in most contemporary classrooms that cannot be addressed in large-group instructional activities, without the pragmatic constraints of developing a totally individualized approach.

SGRI is also used for three additional purposes in **LEAD21.** First, SGRI is used to provide explicit instruction and demonstrations to smaller groups of students: Intensive, significantly below grade level; Strategic, below grade level; Benchmark, on level; Advanced, above level. Such demonstrations may be conducted as a follow-up to shared-reading instruction for students who need additional exposure to what was presented in the large-group setting. These demonstrations may also be specifically tailored to the group when the demonstrations are not appropriate for other students.

Second, SGRI is used to provide a forum for response across a shared text when a small group of students have read the same text and are asked to collaborate on their response to the text. The teacher plays a significant role in mediating the interaction, but the focus may be less controlled than typical scaffolded instruction provided during Guided Reading.

SGRI allows teachers to address the diversity of needs and interests that exist in most contemporary classrooms that can not be addressed in large-group instructional activities, without the pragmatic constraints of developing a totally individualized approach.

Finally, SGRI may also be used to provide a forum for response across texts when a small group of students have read different but related texts and are asked to collaborate on their responses across the texts. **LEAD21** provides just such different but related texts through Differentiated Readers. In this case, students of mixed achievement levels may be grouped together for SGRI, notably for Inquiry projects. While they have read different levels of texts, the related nature of the texts allows them to work together on a common focus to their response. Again in this case, the teacher plays a significant role in mediating the interaction, but the focus may be less controlled than typical scaffolded instruction (Opitz and Ford 2001). In **LEAD21**, SGRI is designed so that a teacher usually addresses multiple purposes during the lesson—providing a demonstration, targeting scaffolded instruction, and mediating responses.

Additional advantages of SGRI can be summarized as follows:

- Students are provided with additional practice for introduced skills by using reading materials more suited to their needs.

- Students can read a variety of texts at their instructional levels.

- Students interact with the teacher on a closer basis than is possible with large-group instruction.

- Students often work with other students who share similar backgrounds and needs.

- Students receive targeted attention that ensures greater success.

- Students can proceed at a pace that accelerates their growth.

General Description of the Typical Small Group

In a national survey of primary grade teachers about their guided reading practices (Ford and Opitz 2008), researchers found that in general small-group reading instruction included the following characteristics:

- Averaged a two-hour Reading and Language Arts block

- Used 37% (44 minutes) of the Reading and Language Arts block time for guided reading

- Averaged four groups

- Averaged six students per group

- Met with each group three to four times a week

- Spent about 20 minutes with each group

- Changed groups monthly

In contrast, **LEAD21** takes the small-group format and develops it into a more comprehensive teaching platform.

Guiding Principles for Effective Small-Group Reading Instruction in Wright Group LEAD21

In **LEAD21**, SGRI instruction is seen as more effective within the framework of a comprehensive literacy program (Cunningham, Hall, and Cunningham 2000; Kane 1995). In **LEAD21**, SGRI or Differentiated Reading is not independent of shared reading. Rather, it is connected to large-group instruction and is extended by independent work activities. SGRI supports themes and contributes to a deeper level of understanding of the key ideas. It provides a forum for reinforcing and practicing skills and strategies addressed in other lesson components. In **LEAD21**, SGRI often evolves from shared reading when single texts are being used but differentiated levels of support are needed (Opitz and Ford 2001). This may be especially true with informational texts, when differentiation within the texts and within levels of support are possible (McLaughlin and Allen 2002).

In **LEAD21**, the first guiding principle underlying SGRI is the need to differentiate instruction. It most often takes the form of four teacher-directed reading groups: Intensive, significantly below level; Strategic, slightly below level; Benchmark, at grade level; Advanced, above grade level. Differentiation is based on the use of key instructional strategies: targeted, instructional, leveled texts called Differentiated Readers, and adjusted levels of teacher support. During SGRI, students are provided a Differentiated Reader that has been selected by the teacher based on the needs of the students. The Differentiated Reader is from a set and is read by all students in the group (Fountas and Pinnell 1996). At times, a variety of texts that are related but at different levels may be used with a group when it is appropriate. In addition to text selection, differentiation is accomplished by adjusting the level of teacher support for different groups of learners. This may be seen in the degree of teacher involvement in demonstrations, scaffolded instruction or mediated, shared response across texts when working with different groups (Opitz and Ford 2001).

The second guiding principle for SGRI is the need to address two primary concerns of homogeneous small-group instruction of the past: 1) providing equitable access to high quality meaning-based instruction for all students; and 2) reducing the stigma of being a struggling reader (Caldwell and Ford 2002). Since expectations and tasks in **LEAD21** have been held constant for all students, and differentiation is based primarily on text choices and levels of teacher support, all students will have access to high quality meaning-based instruction. Similarly, because of consistent expectations and activities with related, similarly formatted, engaging texts, called Differentiated Readers, the daily reminders of the stigma of being a struggling reader, obvious in many classrooms, are less obvious in **LEAD21**.

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In **LEAD21**, a third guiding principle which governs the content of SGRI is the desire to shift the teacher focus from student progress to student proficiency. In the past, teachers have often focused on student progress in the use of guided reading materials. Teachers often saw student progress from a lower level to a higher level as an end goal for reading instruction. While progress is important, **LEAD21** shifts the teacher's focus from progress to proficiency. Teachers need to be less comfortable with a student's progress as evidence and more concerned with achievement of grade-level proficiency as the end goal. **LEAD21** clearly identifies targeted proficiency end goals (benchmarks) and then structures the pacing of SGRI to accelerate student progress

to lead toward the end goal of grade-level proficiency. Acceleration is an intentional effort in designing instruction to increase the learning curve for those students with the greatest needs. For students who for whatever reasons find themselves below grade-level expectations, making progress may not be enough. The pace of that progress becomes a critical instructional consideration. In **LEAD21**, the end goal for SGRI is grade-level proficiency for all readers. Progress is important but only as a sign that students are moving closer to benchmark standards for their grade level.

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In **LEAD21**, a fourth guiding principle is acceleration. Care has been taken to make sure that learning opportunities provided during SGRI work to close the gaps between learners and accelerate the progress of those learners with the greatest needs. This is accomplished through the following elements:

- Materials designed so that the number of texts with which students work equalizes practice opportunities across groups

- Texts designed with common features which allow a student to move more quickly to more difficult texts

- Targeted instruction within SGRI

- Links between SGRI and other components of the instructional lesson

In **LEAD21**, SGRI follows a gradual release model as the fifth guiding principal. (Au and Raphael 1998; Pearson and Gallagher 1983; Wilhelm 2001). This occurs in two ways: across the literacy block, and within the SGRI lesson. First, SGRI is connected to what happens in large-group activities. SGRI is seen as the opportunity to practice with guidance what has been taught and modeled in the large-group setting. What is practiced within SGRI with guidance is also connected to student independent work. SGRI is designed to equip students to transfer what has been learned toward self-initiated, self-regulated literacy activities.

Secondly, the lesson within SGRI is also designed to follow a gradual release model. The SGRI lesson design typically begins with explicit instruction in which the teacher provides information and demonstrations as needed. The lesson moves toward the reading of the text in which the teacher provides scaffolded instruction as the students read and respond. Finally, the lesson ends with Respond, in which the teacher provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they can work independently. Again, the goal in **LEAD21** is to ensure that the learner improves as an independent, strategic

reader. The gradual release model permeates the instructional design of the overall literacy block as well as individual lessons used during SGRI. A summary of the gradual release model is as follows (Wilhelm 2001):

1. Teacher does while students watch: Modeling and Demonstration

2. Teacher does while students help: Teacher-led Collaboration

3. Teacher does while students do: Guided Practice

4. Students do while teacher helps: Student-led Collaboration

5. Students do while teacher watches and assesses: Independent Practice

Finally, SGRI is informed by ongoing assessment: 1. Frameworks help teachers be very intentional in their instructional plans; 2. Authentic assessment techniques and tools guide teachers in using data to adjust subsequent instruction to target learners. The key to effective, scaffolded instruction is knowing where students are, where they need to be, and then building a bridge between those two points. This requires being able to use efficient, effective, ongoing assessment tools and adjust plans accordingly (Fountas and Pinnell 1996).

Typical SGRI Lesson Format

In **Wright Group LEAD21**, SGRI lessons are designed with consideration to the level of support the learners require. The format follows a typical pattern with attention to three phases of the lesson: before, during, and after the reading (Beuhl 2001). The "*before* phase" must frontload the lesson in order to guarantee the greatest number of students succeed both during and after the reading. The text must be introduced in ways that will encourage strategic reading and provide understanding. Frontloading addresses five key instructional objectives:

- Generating interest through Introduce the Theme to build momentum to sustain the students during the reading

- Activating schema so students bring their knowledge of the world to the page, through Activating Prior Knowledge

- Building Background knowledge that students will need to understand the reading, including addressing specific vocabulary demands of the text

- Setting Purposes to keep readers clearly focused while reading

- Providing explicit instruction related to skills and strategies that the Intensive and Strategic students need to be successful with the reading; Benchmark and Advanced students receiving reminders of those same skills and strategies

Many frontloading goals can be addressed in a teacher-directed preview of the text. In primary grades, variations on picture and print walks are often an effective way to prepare students for the reading. In the intermediate grades, previewing the text, especially nonfiction genres, may include analyzing the structure of the text and noting special features which assist the reader.

The "*during* phase" of the lesson has as its goal the reading and understanding of the text. Meaning-making needs to be at the heart of SGRI. It is important that students have opportunities to learn new strategies and practice previously introduced strategies while they read. Reading may involve a number of techniques:

- Students reading the text on their own

- Students reading the text to each other

- Students reading the text as partners

- Teacher monitoring as students read the text together

- Teacher leading students in reading the text together

- Students repeating part of the texts read aloud by the teacher

- The teacher reading aloud parts of the text to the students

- Any combination of the above techniques

The teacher should always try to use a technique that promotes as much independent reading as possible while monitoring to make sure students are successful. The teacher also needs to avoid techniques over-relied on in the past (such as round-robin reading) that have actually interfered with the outcomes of SGRI (Opitz and Rasinski 1998).

To enhance monitoring while students read, teachers need to develop a repertoire of questioning techniques based on word identification and comprehension strategies. (See Read and Guide Comprehension in **LEAD21**.) The teacher needs to be able to seize a teachable moment and pose the right question to the students to assist them in solving the problem encountered while reading (Fountas and Pinnell 1996).

The "*after* phase" of the lesson extends and builds upon the reading and understanding of the text. This may take place under the guidance of the teacher during SGRI, or may be initiated with teacher guidance but completed independently from the teacher. This may include follow-up explicit instruction based on skill or strategy needs that emerged during the reading. See Respond and Respond and Write in whole-group and small-group instruction, respectively. The *after* phase provides an opportunity to go in-depth to address difficulties in word identification and comprehension strategies that

emerged while monitoring students as they read. Teachers also need to monitor discussion after reading with effective questioning techniques in order to seize teachable moments so that students move toward the use of more sophisticated strategies. Students need assistance in solving problems while discussing and responding to what they have just read. The teacher's role in the after phase of the lesson includes any or all of the following (Kane 1995):

- Modeling how to talk about the text

- Inviting personal response

- Returning to the text for one or two teaching opportunities

- Assessing students' understanding of what is read

- Setting up extensions through other activities

The students' role in the after phase of the lesson may include any or all of the following (Kane 1995):

- Talking about the text

- Reacting personally to the text

- Revisiting the text to solve problems

- Rereading the text to partners or independently

- Engaging in extensions through other activities

Follow-up response and extension activities are designed so that students can demonstrate what they have learned in ways that are interesting and useful to them. The first priority is for these activities to provide students ample opportunities to read, write, speak, and listen. A secondary purpose is for these activities to create additional excitement about reading and writing through a variety of modes: discussion, writing, visual arts, performing arts, and multi-media. It is hoped that response and extension activities may actually lead students to additional related readings, thereby providing increased time with texts (Ford and Opitz 2002).

It is also important to address assessment issues after the reading of the text. Often this is conducted by the teacher, but also needs to involve self-evaluation techniques completed by the students.

Some activities used during SGRI may be designed as BDA activities—before, during, and after (Buehl 2001). These are structures that prepare students for the reading, facilitate comprehension while reading, and provide a forum for responding to the reading. For example, some graphic organizers are designed to provide space for

learners to record ideas before they read, keep track of details while they read, and synthesize information after they have read.

How Small-Group Reading Instruction Changes Across the Grades: A Vision for SGRI in the Intermediate Grades

Wright Group LEAD21 acknowledges that SGRI has developmental dimensions that are addressed in lesson adjustments as students move through the grades. Some have suggested that this change is seen in gradually moving from *guided reading* to *guiding readers*; from *guiding directly* to *guiding indirectly* (Fountas and Pinnell 2001; McLaughlin and Allen 2001). Developmental dimensions cover many facets, as discussed in the ensuing section.

As readers change, the purpose for SGRI shifts from demonstrations and intervention toward shared response to texts. We have argued that there are four primary purposes for SGRI: demonstration, intervention, shared response about the same text, and shared response across texts. Clearly, the model of SGRI for primary classrooms focuses heavily on demonstration and intervention. The scaffolded instruction at the heart of SGRI models moves teachers into the role of coaches and defines the nature of the interaction in these small groups. This does not mean that intermediate grade teachers would never use small groups for demonstration or intervention; however, as readers change, the need for a primary grade intervention model of guided reading in the intermediate grade is significantly reduced. Small groups are better used to help intermediate grade readers work collectively to comprehend and respond to and across texts (Fountas and Pinnell 2001).

As readers change, the nature of demonstrations provided to students in SGRI becomes more sophisticated in terms of examples of skills and strategies, literary elements, and procedures. While demonstrations are often not the prime focus of SGRI in the intermediate grades, when they are used, they should focus on building the skills, strategies, elements, and procedures already introduced and learned in the primary grades. SGRI is a time to raise the bar on the level of sophistication by which students are able to understand and respond to text. Demonstrations may also provide students with an increasing set of tools to use with less teacher guidance and support, as well as increase their ability to self-initiate and self-regulate work on an independent basis.

As readers change, the nature of intervention provided to struggling readers in SGRI more actively involves the learner in the scaffolded instruction. We know that in many intermediate grade classrooms, some students still may require a type of scaffolded instruction more typically identified for primary students. Certain techniques like retrospective miscue analysis and repeated reading, however, remind us that when older readers are still dealing with micro features of the text (letters,

sounds, word parts, word recognition, simple sentence structures), teachers need to begin to include students in recognizing oral reading patterns and identify self-regulating behaviors (Moore and Gilles 2005; Oczkus 2003). Another significant shift for intermediate grades is away from scaffolded instruction towards monitoring macro levels of the texts (vocabulary, text structures, comprehension strategies, response techniques). This is done usually through "tracking" response during discussion and using strategic prompts to move students towards more sophisticated levels of understanding and response. The teacher needs to take a "running record" of the conversation students have, analyze that conversation to get a sense of which skills and strategies are being used and which ones still need to be worked on, and then provide strategic interaction to build the bridge between the two points. Teachers must develop think-aloud and prompting language that helps students make connections, generate questions, visualize mental images, make inferences, determine importance, as well as synthesize and monitor during their reading and response.

As readers change, the nature of shared response in SGRI is refocused.
Attention to the macro level of the text through response becomes increasingly more important. Response should extend to an increasing variety of texts and genres. Response becomes the vehicle for monitoring which skills and strategies students use in demonstrating their understandings of and extensions from the texts. Teachers should be able to show increasingly more sophisticated ways for students to respond to and extend texts. Response should be multi-modal, involving many literacies including oral language, written language, visual arts, performance arts, and the new technologies.

As readers change, the nature of the independent work away from SGRI changes. A combination of teacher-structured activities for meaningful seatwork and center-based activities and structures for independent work guides additional reading, writing and inquiry; sometimes it may be the same tasks as in SGRI but with more indirect teacher support. Structures for independent work that provide powerful learning opportunities like Writer's Desk, Book Corner, and Inquiry Projects may be the same tasks as in SGRI but with less teacher support and direction.

As readers change, the type of materials used during SGRI expands. While all readers need to be exposed to a variety of texts especially in considering the mix of nonfiction and fiction, intermediate grade readers should be able to handle an ever-expanding variety of texts with more complicated text features in increasingly more sophisticated ways. SGRI texts should be intentionally planned to provide this expanding exposure (Harvey 1998).

Aligning SGRI with Independent Work Structures: What Do the Rest of the Students Do When the Teacher Is Working with a Small Group?

In **Wright Group LEAD21**, SGRI is conceived and designed in conjunction with independent work structures, identified as Study Stations, Independent Practice, Self-Selected Reading, and Inquiry Projects. **LEAD21** believes the power of instruction away from the teacher needs to rival the power of instruction with the teacher during SGRI (Ford and Opitz 2002). Independent Study Stations are designed based on learner needs and curriculum demands: Book Corner, Word World, Vocabulary Central, Writer's Desk (Grades K–5), and Phonics Focus (Grades K–2). These structures lead to outcomes based on the scope and sequence but also have the ability to be modified by the teacher based on the needs of the students. They are intended to go beyond just keeping students busy, to actually providing students with meaningful opportunities to practice their literacy skills, strategies, and behaviors. The Study Stations are accessible (to be completed independently within the students' instructional levels) and purposeful (meaningful enough to be valued by the students). The Study Station Flip Charts offer numerous appropriate activities that students will be able to and want to do independently.

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In addition, independent work structures are another critical component in differentiating instruction. Open-ended activities allow the greatest potential for differentiation. Structures may accommodate both heterogeneous and homogenous working groups of students, so that all learners have opportunities to work with peers of various abilities: Study Station work being largely homogeneous while Inquiry Project groupings are largely heterogeneous.

Five primary structures have been considered as ways of organizing instruction away from the teacher:

- Meaningful small-group and individual work, Study Stations, may flow naturally out of shared reading activities. This work may be designed so that some groups or individuals will be able to work independently without direct guidance from the teacher, while the teacher works more directly, providing greater support to other groups or individuals (Caldwell and Ford 2002; McLaughlin and Allen 2002).

- A parallel process like the Writer's Desk Study Station may be used to frame meaningful small-group and individual work away from the teacher. While some students are working more independently through the stages of the writing process, other groups or individuals may be working more directly with the teacher (Cunningham, Hall, and Cunningham 2000).

- **LEAD21** has developed a number of classroom structures to provide ongoing independent work that flows from classroom instruction. Teachers are able to use the *Practice Companion* (K–5) and the *Phonics Companion* (K–2), as well as other independent seatwork activities to engage some groups and individuals, while teachers work more directly with other groups or individuals. These activities may also involve completing tasks to prepare for upcoming instruction.

- **LEAD21** has developed classroom structures for small-group and independent inquiry as an ongoing alternative for engaging learners away from the teacher—the Inquiry Project. This self-directed and self-regulated inquiry links thematically to key questions guiding each of the units (Winebrenner 2001; Heacox 2002).

Inquiry is at the heart of **LEAD21**. Independent inquiry projects, scheduled for Day 5 of each week, are based on a self-directed learning cycle. Inquiry is used as a solid base for all learning within a unit, not as an add-on, or something to do as time permits. Each unit is guided by the Theme Question, posed to frame learning within the unit. Also in **LEAD21**, the inquiry strand is designed to produce life-long learners who know how to go about learning anything they want to know. The projects follow the basic steps, modified for learners' needs from grade to grade, listed below:

- Step One: Generate Ideas and Questions

- Step Two: Decide on a Question

- Step Three: Make a Conjecture

- Step Four: Identify Needs and Make Plans

- Step Five: Collect/Share Facts and Ideas

- Step Six: Organize and Synthesize Information

- Step Seven: Confirm or Revise Your Conjecture

- Step Eight: Develop Presentation

- Step Nine: Share Your Findings: Deliver Presentation

- Step Ten: Identify New Questions and Make New Plans

In addition to the Inquiry strand, **LEAD21** has developed a Study Station infrastructure to facilitate meaningful independent work. These are focused around four key strands: Word World, Grades 3–5, (activities with letters, sounds, word parts, words); Phonics Focus, Grades K–2, (activities with word sort cards, phonics elements cards and games); Writer's Desk (writing mechanics and process, spelling, publishing); Book Corner (directed and independent reading); and Vocabulary Central (working with vocabulary and vocabulary strategies). Flip Chart activities for each Study Station are designed to address different learning needs and to provide performance-based assessment evidence with minimal amounts of teacher planning and preparation.

In **LEAD21**, these independent work structures are designed with the following guidelines (Kane 1995):

- Teachers are given time to learn about their students before setting up structures. This allows teachers to be better able to adapt, modify, or create structures for independent work for a specific group of students.

- Independent work structures are initially introduced and practiced with the whole class. These structures often work best when they evolve from class routines. A potential flow might be as follows:

    1. Watch the teacher.

    2. Help the teacher.

    3. Student does in group.

    4. Student does with partner.

    5. Student does alone.

- When moving small groups and individuals to independent Study Stations, the teacher introduces the stations to groups one at a time.

- **LEAD21** creates a safe emotional climate where students can work together and in small groups. It can not be assumed that students will know how to work effectively independently. Teachers must teach students the interpersonal skills they need to work together and independently. These include turn-taking strategies, listening strategies, ways to work with partners, ways to respond to each other, ways to disagree with each other, ways to challenge each other, and how to make choices.

- Accountability measures are built into independent structures to foster engagement and provide assessment information. Techniques for daily, weekly, monthly and yearly assessment are integrated. These might include paper trails, performances, self-evaluations, contracts, learning center records, choice menus, reading tickets, center folders, and center boxes.

- Study Stations may contain both required and optional learning experiences. Choice is inherently motivating for many students, so it is important to consider building choice into independent work options.

- Study Stations take advantage of the physical classroom environment most teachers operate within. Consideration is given to work spaces, storages spaces, display spaces, traffic patterns, and permanent fixtures. Other considerations teachers can incorporate might include creating a print rich environment, creating an inviting classroom library, student involvement (ownership) in arrangement, noisy versus quiet activities, permanent versus portable activities, and permanent versus temporary activities (retiring activities that are not being used or are overused).

- **LEAD21** encourages teachers to reexamine any independent work structures, so they can continually improve them for a greater likelihood of successfully providing meaningful learning opportunities away from the teacher.

Conclusion

Richard Allington said that most recent educational research can be boiled down to four words: "Kids Differ. Teachers Matter." He concluded that if that is true, then the key to effective reading instruction is finding a teacher who can effectively address the differences kids bring to that classroom. It begins by providing all students access to the best quality whole-group instruction. Intentional efforts must be made to design whole-group instruction to maintain high levels of student engagement. Large-group activities need to be intensified so that all students are surrounded by teacher-mediated instruction when working with common texts which might be difficult for some. It also includes providing teachers with the ability to handle the challenges of differentiation with SGRI. In order to meet the needs of the different students in any given classroom, the teacher must be flexible and adjust both instruction and materials to fit the student, rather than expect the student to adjust to the curriculum. Instruction always must focus on helping all students move toward proficiency. Grade-level proficiency is the end goal for all students who read below level, and for some students this means that instruction must be designed to accelerate the growth of those students. And Advanced readers must be encouraged to continue to progress.

In **Wright Group LEAD21**, SGRI and the aligned independent work structures become the crucial vehicles in assisting classroom teachers for providing differentiated instruction. This aspect of the program allows teachers to selectively use specifically tailored texts and connected activities to effectively meet the varied needs of students. SGRI is planned to allow for varying degrees of teacher support in providing scaffolded instruction to accommodate the varied needs of students. These key aspects of **LEAD21** will help teachers to achieve the goal of meeting the needs of all students and help students become independent, lifelong learners.

LEAD21 Differentiation and Acceleration Pedagogy	
Research Says	**LEAD21 Delivers**
The exclusive use of one grouping pattern often leads to problems in the classroom (Caldwell and Ford 2002).	The instructional program provides four levels of grouping on a weekly basis: • Whole-group teaching directed at the entire class • Differentiated small-group instruction for homogenous groups • Study Station work for homogenous groups • Weekly Inquiry Projects for heterogeneous groupings
All grouping patterns have value because they all offer the reader slightly different experiences with different outcomes (Radencich and McKay 1995).	All students within one classroom move from heterogeneous whole-groups to homogeneous small-groups, and to heterogeneous small-groups within the span of one week.
Groups should be formed and dissolved as the students' needs change (Opitz 1998).	Four Benchmark Weeks are built in to allow teachers to assess placement in the small reading groups.
Small-group instruction should be targeted to better meet the needs of the students in a manner that isn't as possible in large-group settings (Ford and Opitz 2008).	Four reading groups span twenty-seven reading levels with Intensive, Strategic, Benchmark, and Advanced groups.
Guided Reading has been the central feature of reading instruction (Fountas and Pinnell 1996).	Small-Group Reading Instruction enlarges the concept and renames it to include principles of differentiation.
Only half of teachers surveyed link their reading instruction thematically and two-thirds of the teachers connect their shared and guided-reading experiences (Ford and Opitz 2008).	Whole-class shared reading and small-group reading are linked thematically. The Literature Big Books, Concepts Big Books, and the Theme Reader—for shared reading experiences—are thematically linked to the Differentiated Readers, developed at each of four reading levels for small-group instruction.
In effective schools, over 60 minutes was devoted to small-group work—significantly more time than in moderately or least effective schools (Taylor, Pearson, Clark and Walpole 1999).	The instructional plan includes at least 80 minutes of small-group work each day.
Whole-group instruction is most beneficial in cases in which students need to hear multiple voices responding to the same experience (Caldwell and Ford 2002).	Whole-group instruction is used to introduce themes, develop vocabulary, and share small-group reading experiences. The Differentiated Readers, used in the small groups, extend the whole-group reading themes so that all students continue with the topic at their own instructional level—gaining unique perspectives on the theme. Then, back in the whole-class experience, each member has unique information to share with the class.
In exemplary teachers' classrooms, engagement levels were as high as 90/90; that is, 90% of students on task 90% of the time (Pressley 2006). Intensification of instruction is one way to get more students engaged (Bomer 1998).	Small-group work encompasses not only guided reading principles, but is also the chief means for differentiation. Lesson plans for small-groups are designed for more intense instruction for Intensive and Strategic level students.

Author Biography

Dr. Michael P. Ford has been actively involved in reading education for the past thirty years. Ford is a former first grade teacher and Title I reading teacher who left his university position to return to teaching first grade in 1997–98. During the 2008–2009 school year, Ford was on sabbatical visiting elementary classrooms in multiple districts to examine how teachers are meeting the daily challenges of small-group reading instruction. Since 1987, he has been responsible for teaching undergraduate and graduate reading education courses at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh where he also served as Associate Dean for the College of Education and Human Services. Ford has published over fifty articles for journals including *The Reading Teacher, Language Arts, Childhood Education and Learning Disabilities Quarterly*. His most recent publications are the chapter "Guided Reading: Now and Then" for the book *Essential History of Current Reading Practices* (IRA 2008) and the article "A National Survey of Guided Reading Practices: What We Can Learn from Primary Teachers" for the *Journal of Literacy Instruction and Research* both co-written with Michael Opitz. He is the co-author of *Reaching Readers: Flexible and Innovative Strategies for Guided Reading; Where Have All the Bluebirds Gone? How to Soar with Flexible Grouping; Books and Beyond: New Ways to Reach Readers; and Do-able Differentiation: Varying Texts, Groups and Support to Reach All Readers*. Ford has consulted with teachers throughout the world including recent international school conferences in Costa Rica, Columbia, Turkey, Holland, Germany, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Bahrain. Most importantly, Dr. Ford is the father of two boys who inform his thinking about literacy programs on a daily basis.

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