

Into Connectors: Teachers' notes

Introduction

A variety of resources and a balance of approaches are the key to effective literacy teaching. *Into Connectors* is a series of carefully bookbanded books, that introduces Year 2 and 3 children to small group peer learning. This approach allows children to practise their speaking and listening skills in conversations and discussions. It helps them to learn active listening, questioning and prediction skills and to apply comprehension strategies. The approach should not replace guided reading sessions but should be used with other literacy resources and alongside other strategies, including guided reading, shared reading, independent reading and reading to children.

Reciprocal reading

The *Into Connectors* books are based on the reciprocal reading approach, that is: using predicting, clarifying, questioning and summarising techniques to comprehend. Reciprocal reading has been shown to increase both reading and listening comprehension and it has been demonstrated that children using this approach transfer their learning into other contexts. It has also been effective in improving the achievement of learners from diverse backgrounds. Reciprocal reading requires children to use oral language skills. Oral language is the foundation for all other language learning and involves not only communicating, but also thinking critically and creatively, so using this series will have an impact across the curriculum.

Peer learning

Reciprocal reading requires children to work cooperatively and collaboratively. Peer learning, where children support each other, is a very effective and natural form of learning. Children's peers are among the most significant people in their lives. By working together in a cooperative atmosphere, where social learning, listening to each other, learning to take turns and building on what others say, are valued, children learn to interact and motivate each other to interpret, analyse, evaluate and make connections.

Before using *Into Connectors*

Children need to be familiar with the four comprehension strategies (predicting, clarifying, questioning, summarising) and know how to apply these to their own reading. They also need to be able to work independently of the teacher. Before using *Into Connectors*, model the strategies and allow children time to practise them. Be careful not to do this so much or so explicitly that it becomes boring. Observe the children to ensure that they remain enthusiastic and interested. Children will learn to apply the strategies as they practise them in context, and will gain confidence and understanding as they use the books.

Teacher explicitly models the strategies



Children practise applying the strategies

Learning goals

Children using *Into Connectors* will:

- practise being a leader
- take part in group discussions and conversations
- learn how to predict and give reasons why their predictions were right or wrong
- practise asking questions about what they have read
- learn to ask or look for help if they don't know how to say a word or its meaning
- practise sharing an opinion about something and be able to justify it
- think about the main ideas in a non-fiction text and recognise important facts.

Strategy – predicting

When predicting, readers:

- combine new material with what they already know
- anticipate what the text might be about or what they might find out next.

To predict, readers:

- use information from the text and their prior knowledge
- should be able to justify the source of their predictions
- should be able to confirm their predictions after reading.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Model the prediction strategy with the children using a non-fiction text.
- Introduce the strategy by ‘thinking out loud’, using statements such as: *I think*

this could be about... because... I predict this is going to tell me... because...

- Show the children a photograph in a non-fiction text that has captions and other appropriate visual information. Cover the main text.
- Give the children time to discuss the visual information they can see.
- Ask the children to work in pairs to create a short paragraph based on the photograph, captions and other visual information.
- Invite the children to read their paragraphs, justifying their predictions of what the text could be about.
- Invite the children to make some predictions using their prior knowledge.
- Now read the text and compare the children’s versions. Were the children’s predictions right or wrong?

Strategy – clarifying

Discuss with the children what ‘clarify’ means (to understand or make clear something that is not known).

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Choose a short text and read it to the children. Stop when you come to a difficult word. Show them, by ‘thinking out loud’ how you might find out what the word means, for example: *I don’t know what this word means. I will read on to see if I can find clues. This word is tricky because I am not sure how to say it. I will try to blend the sounds together. I have read on but I still can’t work out what this word means. I will look up the meaning in the dictionary.*
- Give the children a text that contains some challenging words. Ask them to

highlight words they don’t know the meaning of or how to say. Let them work with a partner to discuss what the words might mean in context.

- Give out copies of a junior dictionary. Talk about how the words in the dictionary are in alphabetical order. Look up one of the words that the children have highlighted and choose the meaning that best fits the text.
- Ask the children to turn to a particular page in the dictionary. Call out some words from that page and invite the children to find them. Dictate a sentence that includes one of the words on the page and ask them to find the meaning.
- Clarify geographical locations with the use of a globe. Invite children to find and talk about the ones they know.

Strategy – asking questions

Explain to the children that good readers think of questions as they read a text, which helps them to understand what is being read. Sometimes the answers to these questions can be found in the text – but not always.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Read a selected text, stopping where appropriate, to model a question by thinking out loud. You can use language such as:
 - *Why do you think...?*
 - *How do you know...?*
 - *What do you think would happen if...?*
 - *Do you think... Why/why not?*
 - *I wonder why...?*
 - *I think that this is the case, but I'm not sure...*
 - *I think this is why it happened...*
- Use headlines from magazines or newspapers. Ask the children to make a list of all the questions they can think of about the text.
- Give the children a large piece of paper and a piece of text. Ask them to make columns using the different question starters: *what, when, how, why, where*.
- Now they should work in pairs to generate questions and write them in the appropriate columns.
- Read aloud a text from a non-fiction book. Ask the children to role play being a newspaper reporter and to formulate questions that they could ask about the topic.
- Working in pairs, let the children use their questions in a role-play interview, with one child playing the role of reporter and the other an 'expert' on the topic.

Bright ideas

Predicting: Set up a 'Prediction board' in the classroom. Cut out some headlines from newspapers or magazines. Choose two or three children to make predictions each day. Invite them to write or talk about what they think the article is about, and to share this with the class. Another idea would be to write the titles of fiction books on the board and ask the children to predict what the story might be about. Alternatively, write some unfinished sentences or headlines with a word missing and let the children predict the missing word. For example: *Every week there was...; Winds...a house.*

Clarifying: Establish a 'Wow words' board in the classroom. Divide the class into teams. Choose one team each day to be 'Wow words' spies. The 'Wow words' spies should use books from the library to find words that they think no one will know the meaning of, or know how to say. They need to be able to find the meaning of the words that nobody has guessed and use them orally in a sentence. Teams are awarded points for the words they found that no one else knew.

Asking questions: Put a photograph from a book, newspaper or magazine onto a 'Question board' each week. Working in teams, ask the children to think of questions about the photograph and to write them down on small pieces of paper. Pin the children's questions back to front on the board. At the end of the week, turn the questions over. Award points for questions that no other team has asked. The team with the most points become 'Question masters' of the week.

Strategy – Summarising

Talk to the children about what summarising means – recalling main ideas, key points or the most important information, and arranging them in order, in their own words, to make sense.

Helping children to apply the strategy

- Read short examples of text to the children, then orally model a summary of what you read. You can use language such as:
 - *I think this text was mainly about...*
 - *Two important facts were...*
- After reading a selected text, ask pairs of children to list the main ideas and two important facts. Share and discuss with the whole group.

Expressing opinions

Encouraging children to express a point of view helps them to evaluate, and make judgements and inferences.

Talking about points of view

- Discuss the fact that an opinion is not necessarily based on certainty or proof. Explain that people have different opinions and that one opinion is not necessarily right.
- When reading to children, stop at an appropriate place and give an opinion about something stated in the text.
- Encourage children to respond with their own opinions, setting up a 'mini-debate' (collaborative reasoning) about the topic. Children need to be able to justify their reasoning.

Teacher tips

Use the following suggestions on a consistent, regular basis:

- *Never overdo the teaching.*
- *Make strategy learning a natural and enjoyable experience.*
- *Always be mindful of the learner and the varying levels of each individual.*
- *Keep up the practice in all literacy approaches in the classroom until the children are:*
 - *aware of what strategies they are using when reading*
 - *monitoring the use of their strategies*
 - *applying the strategies in other contexts.*

Bright ideas

Summarising: Use the summarising strategy with fiction texts. Two children per day could be summing up experts. After reading a story, the summing up experts choose three words that they think are the most important in the story and write them on the board, justifying their choices. For example, for 'Little Red Riding Hood' the words might be 'cunning', 'afraid', 'brave'.

Expressing opinions: Create an opinion board. On one half write *I agree*; on the other half write *I do not agree*. Each week, write a statement on the board, for example: *No children should be out after 8 o'clock*. Encourage the children to add their opinions in the appropriate column. At the end of the week, discuss the opinions.

Working with *Into Connectors*

Step 1

- Select a text and choose six children whose reading level matches the text level, to work together in a group.
- Talk to the children about the purpose of the books and their learning goals (see page 1).
- Give each child a copy of the book and look together at pages 2–3. Go through the procedure on these pages, ensuring that the children understand the instructions and the icons.
- Look at and discuss pages 18–19 and 20–23.
- Ask the children to each select a coloured icon then turn to pages 4–5. Guide the first child through the process of being a leader.
- Encourage children who try to clarify and give feedback on good questions.
- Work through the pages, guiding each new leader and giving encouragement, feedback and help where needed.
- At the end of the book, ensure that the children understand the independent or partner work suggestions on pages 16–18.

Step 2

- Choose another text. Remain in the group but as an observer only. During this time, fill in the initial observations column of the observation sheet (page 6).

Step 3

- The children should work through the *Into Connectors* books independently. Retain one book however, in each colour coded set, for a final observation. During this final observation, remain in the group for the entire time as observer only. Fill in final observations column of the observation sheet (page 6).

Collecting data

For effective literacy teaching, assessment procedures should focus on gathering information about learning. The assessment procedure for *Into Connectors* is based on formative assessment, for which feedback is central. It consists of the following: sharing learning goals with the children; observing children in group and independent activities; feeding back to children about their next steps in learning. Use the observation sheet on page 6 to help with this process.

Possible issues	Solutions
Some children complete the reading before others or dominate the discussion	Ensure that the groups of children are well matched in ability. Emphasise the importance of taking turns and listening to everyone's ideas.
Children not staying on task	Establish all routines firmly from the beginning. Keep an eye on the group, and step in when routines or behaviour are not as they should be. Children who continually disrupt a group need to stay on other independent tasks or in guided reading groups until they are able to participate in this approach.
Some children are reluctant to participate	Encourage and give feedback to reluctant participators, and involve these children in other oral activities in the classroom.
No one knows how to clarify a word or phrase	If no one knows a word or phrase, the leader can record this and ask an 'expert' later, (for example: teacher, parent, the internet).

Observation sheet

Child's name:	Initial observation		Final observation	
	Date:		Date:	
Confident in leadership role				
Participates in discussions				
Can make predictions: – uses information from the text – uses prior knowledge – justifies predictions with logic				
Willing to ask for clarification				
Asks: – basic questions – higher order thinking questions				
Able to summarise main ideas				
Able to recognise important facts				
Able to give an opinion and justify it				
Stays on task				
Listens actively to others				
Shows an interest				
Works well on independent tasks				
Shows an interest in finding out more				
COMMENTS				