

Article

The Barometer of Agency: Reconceptualising the ‘Guided Reading’ Teaching Approach

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Abstract: The guided reading teaching approach is a commonly utilised practice that teachers have employed for over 20 years, both in Australia and abroad. What the approach entails, however, can be open to interpretation—an outcome that highlights the challenge of describing and conceptualising the approach in clear and unambiguous terms. This study addressed this issue of ambiguity by exploring whether guided reading, rather than being a singular teaching strategy in-and-of-itself, can more accurately be reconceptualised as comprising a range of teaching strategies that educators move between from lesson beginning to lesson’s end. Following thematic analysis of the six most commonly prescribed texts used in Australian Initial Teacher Education literacy units, a new model was devised as presented in this paper; a model that teachers and researchers in Australia and abroad can draw upon to better understand, apply and/or evaluate their own and other’s use of the guided reading teaching approach in everyday practice.

Keywords: guided reading; reading education; teaching; gradual release of responsibility



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1. Introduction

The guided reading teaching approach is an internationally recognised practice [1] that Australian teachers have been using for over 20 years [2–4]; one of a “repertoire of teaching strategies” [5] (p. 10) that educators utilise when teaching children to read. An unambiguous definition of guided reading has proven elusive, however, leaving its translation and enactment open to interpretation both in Australia and abroad [4,6]. The challenge of clearly delineating what guided reading ‘is’ highlights its multilayered complexity, and the need for a more nuanced reconceptualisation of what the approach entails. This paper addresses this issue of ambiguity by considering the possibility that guided reading may not be a singular ‘strategy’ at all, but rather an amalgamation of several teaching strategies as educators move “from teacher-directed to student-led practice” *throughout* a guided reading lesson [7] (p. 21). In this paper, I propose a new model for conceptualising guided reading—a reconceptualisation of the guided reading teaching approach that educators and researchers can draw upon to better understand, apply and/or evaluate their own and other’s use of the approach in practice. The model—named the *barometer of agency in guided reading*—was designed following an investigation into how the authors of six university-endorsed publications described the guided reading approach in their texts. A review of the literature and report of my findings follow.

Research Question

How is the complexity of guided reading conceptualised in professional reading materials?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Reading Teacher

John Hattie [8], Chair of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), states that “expert teaching should be by design, not chance”. That is, teachers must use their knowledge of how children learn and the conditions that best support

child development, to plan for and implement effective programs. This is reflected in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST), with the expectation that all teachers “know students and *how* they learn” and that they “know the content and *how* to teach it” [5] (p. 6—emphases added). At the granular level, this is accompanied with the expectation that highly accomplished teachers “select from a flexible and effective repertoire of teaching strategies to suit the physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students” [5] (p. 10), and at the most basic level that teachers will enter the profession with ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’ of “literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching” [5] (p. 13). But what do these ‘strategies’ entail and how may they be applied with flexibility, when teaching children to read?

From 1996–1998, in Victoria, Australia, classroom teachers from 52 schools across the state engaged in a three-year Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP), designed to “develop a system-wide approach to maximising the literacy achievements of ‘at risk’ students in the early years of schooling (ages 5–8)” [2] (p. 1). The program’s design was centred around ensuring that teachers combined various internationally recognised teaching strategies, including modelled reading and writing, shared reading and writing, language experience, interactive writing, guided reading and writing, and independent reading “within a daily two-hour literacy block” that followed a twofold “three-part, whole-class, small-group, whole-class structure” [2] (pp. 4–5). The modelled reading strategy was to be used by teachers to engage in demonstrations, including ‘thinking aloud’ and/or explaining their actions while reading. Shared reading, while teacher-led, was to be used to read *with* children. During guided reading, children were to lead the reading activity with teacher support, and independent reading required that children read autonomously. Collectively, the strategies outlined above were designed to incrementally move the focus of teaching from a wholly teacher-led demonstration to self-regulated child-led activity. These reading-related teaching strategies had an internationally recognised history, being derived from the strategies of the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model [9,10]—the only omission being that of collaborative teaching, where peers support and learn from peers [10]. The ELRP program had such a positive impact on student learning across the state [11] that a state-wide adoption of the teaching approaches followed, via the *Early Years Literacy Program* [12]—strategies that teachers continue to utilise in contemporary classrooms across Australia [3,4,7] and more widely on an international scale [1].

The definitions given above appear quite straightforward, but their enactment has proved anything but. For example, in a study conducted with 1500 K-2 teachers from the UK, Ford and Opitz [6] (p. 313) found that two-thirds of their participants thought that the guided reading approach was a time for teacher demonstrations, “explicitly modeling for students a new skill or strategy”, even though demonstrations are characteristic of the modelled reading approach as per the GRR model outlined above. The reason for this apparent discord may lay in the fact that while the GRR is designed, as the name implies, to release “responsibility for the task” over to the child [9] (p. 338) with a move from a wholly teacher-led demonstration to wholly child-led activity, there has long been recognition that the process is nonlinear in application [1,10]. A decades-long tension exists between the desire to describe a one-size-fits-all model of effective teacher practice, and acknowledgement of the necessity for flexibility that responds to children’s needs and potentials as they present themselves. As a result, the GRR teaching strategies are often described in broad, simplistic terms, much as I have defined each approach above—descriptions that can appear quite rigid and dismissive of the need for flexibility, or, as with the definition for guided reading, can leave their enactment open to interpretation [4,6].

2.2. The Reading Learner

The Australian teaching standards place heavy emphasis on the actions of the teacher, most especially the expectation that teachers “select from a flexible and effective repertoire of teaching strategies” [5] (p. 10), and “know and understand literacy and numeracy teaching strategies and their application in teaching” [5] (p. 13). This is not at all surprising

given that the standards, as the title implies, outline what is expected of a teacher. But what is expected of children when teachers are using particular teaching strategies, how are teachers to determine the most suitable strategy to employ for each child, and how much agency does this afford children in their own learning? To be truly agentic, Manyukhina and Wyse [13] (p. 227) suggest that learners must (1) have a “sense of agency”—they must be aware of themselves as agentic beings with the ability to “make a difference” to their own learning, and (2) have opportunities to “exercise their agency by playing an active role in directing the learning process” (p. 228). A highly accomplished teacher, therefore, will shift between strategies as they respond to children’s behaviours, allowing themselves to be guided by each child as they determine how much agency to ‘expect’ of children (i.e., how ‘active’ they expect children to be), depending on their assessment of each child’s level of skill and capabilities at any given moment. In return, each child has the potential to guide the teacher via his or her behaviours, showing the teacher when more or less support is required. In this respect, the GRR model is as much about the learner releasing responsibility to the teacher “to access support, when needed . . . to the extent only that is required”, as it is about the teacher releasing responsibility to the child [14] (pp. 24, 26).

The degree of agency that teachers can expect of children, depending on the task at hand, is informed by the intent to create conditions that will enable learning and development. Too difficult a task may generate frustration, providing children with negative experiences, as may tasks that are too easy and lack cognitive challenge [15]. Lack of challenge may also result in children becoming averse to facing challenges, lacking the practice, strategies, and resilience to “persist . . . when learning gets tough” [16] (p. 14). Manyukhina and Wyse [14] (p. 228) emphasise that children’s sense of agency and actions are “temporally situated”—based on their past experiences, which will in turn influence their own expectations, attitudes, emotions, goals and motivation (or lack thereof). They state that “structural constraints and enablements”—the social environment that teachers create—will influence children’s actions “through mere anticipation” [14] (p. 227). That is, *expectation* of success or failure, including how success and/or failure is defined, will influence a child’s decision to pursue an action, or refrain. The teacher’s role, therefore, is to create environments that continue to provide—or facilitate—opportunities for children to develop positive relationships with reading—choosing strategies that set children up for success—so they are motivated and self-inclined to read for a variety of purposes, within and beyond the reading classroom.

2.3. Guided Reading

Guided reading has been identified as one of the most essential steps within the GRR model, serving as “a bridge from teacher ownership of a skill to student ownership” [17] (p. 218)—a step that is often overlooked when moving too quickly from modelled teaching to independent activity [10,18]. I would go further and suggest that rather than serving as a linear ‘bridge’ or ‘step’ from Point A to Point B, guided reading lessons are the most complex of all the GRR approaches, given that they provide the conditions through which teachers may employ all of the strategies encompassed within the GRR model from lesson beginning to lesson’s end [7]. A teacher may invite the children to share their knowledges and past experiences in connection to the text’s subject matter and to predict the text’s storyline via a picture walk; employing the shared reading approach during the text introduction [19]. They may model a particular “ideal form” [20] (p. 273) when introducing the lesson’s learning intention; that is, particular *ways of thinking* [4] that they want the children to apply when reading independently. This may be a decoding technique, strategies for deciphering meaning, metacognitive awareness of themselves as text-users, or ways of engaging critically with the text [21]. As children read from their own copy of the text, the teacher will offer one-on-one support when needed, while the other children in the group read independently and/or support each other via the collaborative reading approach [19,22]. Teachers will shift between strategies throughout a guided reading lesson as they respond to children’s changing needs and agentic potentials much like the

responsive swing of an Aneroid barometer—a phenomenon referred to as the “ebb and flow of scaffolding” [23] (p. 57) (see Figure 1). This calls for “a sophisticated kind of decision-making” [18] (p. 255)—the ability to “select from a flexible and effective repertoire of teaching strategies” [5] (p. 10) that highlights the professional judgement and expertise that highly accomplished teachers are expected to bring to each guided reading lesson.

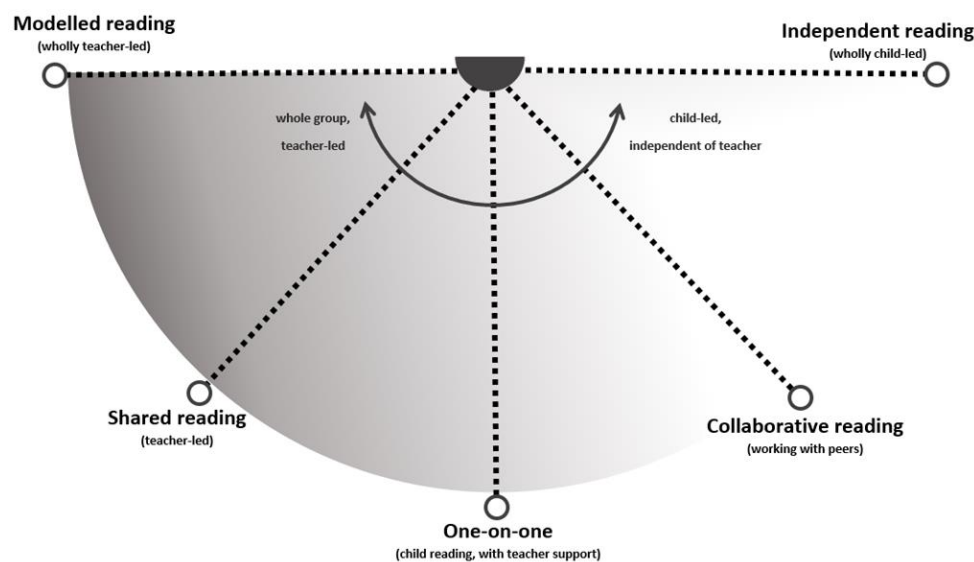


Figure 1. The barometer of agency in guided reading—the responsive swing of teaching and learning.

3. The Study

The investigation detailed in this paper aimed to analyse how the guided reading teaching approach has been described in professionally endorsed publications—publications that have been used in Initial Teacher Education (ITE). This analysis was inspired by the fact that the guided reading teaching approach is challenging to conceptualise and describe, resulting in a variety of interpretations as to its purpose and how it is to be enacted in the classroom both in Australia and abroad [4,6]. Ford and Opitz’s [6] intriguing finding that two-thirds of their teacher participants thought that guided reading was a time for *demonstrations* was particularly noteworthy, as was Stewart, Te Riele and Stratford’s [7] (p. 21) suggestion that guided reading in and of itself can follow “a general pattern . . . moving from teacher-directed to student-led practice, which reflects use of the gradual release of responsibility pedagogical model”. In response, this study sought to explore whether the complexity of guided reading may be more accurately conceptualised as a composite of more than one GRR teaching strategy, as per Figure 1—strategies that teachers move between like the swing of a barometer’s needle, as they employ their professional judgement to determine (1) the degree of agency to expect of children, and (2) the degree of agency children can expect to release to teachers, throughout a guided reading lesson. It is understood that the guided reading approach may present differently in practice. As such, this study is part of a larger study, providing the theoretical framework that will inform analyses of guided reading in practice.

4. Method

An audit of 38 Australian universities was used to identify the six most prescribed texts used in ITE literacy units [24], including the year of publication and edition of each text that was to be the focus of analysis. The decision to analyse ITE prescribed texts rather than sourcing focus texts in an alternative manner was based on the premise that “if a text is set as required reading [for a unit of study], this material will be the foundation of what is learnt in the course” [24] (p. 14). As such, having been vetted and selected for inclusion from the plethora of materials that are available, each prescribed text was considered to be a ‘university-endorsed’ publication. The indexes were used for five

of the publications, to locate the portions of text that contained information related to the guided reading approach—data that were signposted and endorsed by each of the publications’ authors. Guided reading was not listed in the index of one of the publications. In this instance, the search function of an electronic copy of the text was used to locate references to “guided reading”, “guided + reading”, “guided + read”, “guide + read” and “guide + reading” throughout. UAM CorpusTool 3.3 [25] was used to create a coding scheme, to code the data and to generate the output table, including theme and category counts and percentage calculations.

Text Analysis

This study sought to interrogate the *descriptions* of guided reading, as per the six prescribed texts most often used in ITE early reading units in Australian Universities—the study did not set out to investigate their enactment in practice. As such, the study sought to investigate the extent to which teachers are expected to move between the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) approaches encompassed within the GRR model [9,10] when engaging in guided reading, as per the descriptions detailed in professionally endorsed publications [24]. Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis (TA) [26] was used, where the author analysed the six publications under investigation, identifying themes (i.e., “patterns of shared meaning, united by a central concept or idea” [26] (p. 341)) and their subcategories, beginning with the following overarching themes: (1) teacher involvement in the learning experience; (2) noninvolvement of the teacher in the learning experience; and (3) other [i.e., commentary that did not directly describe the learning experience]). Themes one and two then underwent further coding to identify subcategories within each theme. The author deviated slightly from Braun and Clarke’s reflexive TA by inviting a second coder to participate in the first cycle of coding, using 10% of the data to negotiate coding agreement, and thereafter to engage in cyclic reviews of the coding process until coding was complete.

Figure 2 shows the coding themes and categories that were used and the conditions required of each, with consideration for the actor/s and agentic actions being described [13] (p. 227). For example, if the description implied that the teacher had an active role but the child did not, then the description would be coded as “modelled reading”. An instance of this included “The teacher introduces the book” [19] (p. 21). If other children had an active role in the description but the teacher did not, this was coded as “peer discussion/support” (i.e., collaborative teaching). An instance of this included “With support from . . . classmates, students can comprehend the text” [19] (p. 81). Note that the omitted text in the above quote was “the teacher or”; that is, “with support *from the teacher or* classmates, students can comprehend the text” (emphasis added). The omitted text (“With support from *the teacher . . .*”) was coded separately as “child led: child reading with teacher support”. Table 1 details the descriptions that were used for each category, with examples sourced from one of the analysed texts [19].

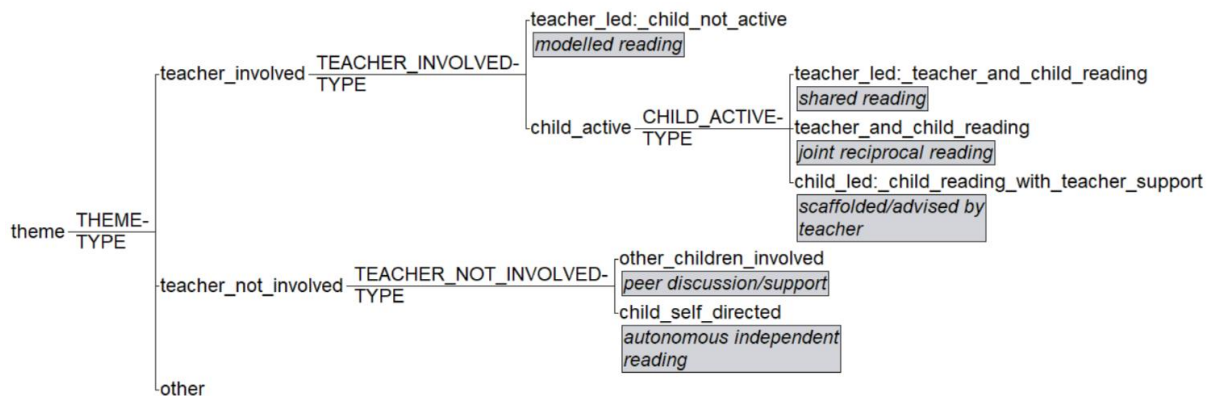


Figure 2. Coding scheme—guided reading learning experiences.

Table 1. Coding descriptions and examples.

Experience	Description	Example from Text [19]
Teacher-led: child not active (modelled reading)	The teacher leads the experience. May include a demonstration or instructions. Children are passive or not mentioned at all.	“The teacher introduces the book” (p. 21)
Teacher-led: teacher and child reading (shared reading)	Teacher and child are both active. The teacher leads the experience.	“[teachers] then activate students’ background knowledge on a topic related to the book” (p. 403)
Teacher and child reading (joint-reciprocal reading)	Teacher and child are both active. Neither the child nor the teacher is assigned a lead role.	“The children and teacher read the text together” (p. 114)
Child-led: child reading with teacher support (scaffolded/advised by teacher)	Children lead the experience. The teacher is active when needed, to offer support.	“Students read the book or text. Teachers provide support to students with decoding and reading strategies as needed.” (p. 403)
Other children involved: child-led, peer-supported (collaborative reading)	Children are active, working with peers, independent of the teacher.	“With support from . . . classmates, students can comprehend the text” (p. 81)
Child self-directed: child-led, autonomous (independent reading)	Children are active, working independently of the teacher and of their peers.	“Students do the actual reading themselves, and they usually read silently at their own pace through the entire book.” (p. 402)
Other	Information unrelated to the actions of practice, e.g., organisation and planning.	“Guided reading lessons usually last 25 to 30 min.” (p. 39)

5. Results

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the theme types and categories that were identified in the six texts’ descriptions of guided reading. N indicates the absolute number of times each theme type or category was referred to in each text. ‘Percent’ indicates the percentage of text devoted to each. The corpus of all six datasets is given in grey in the far-right column. All of the words used to describe guided reading were included in this analysis, assigned to one of the three themes listed under “THEME_TYPE” for each text: (1) teacher involved; (2) teacher not involved; and (3) other. The “TEACHER_INVOLVED” theme was then subdivided into the following categories: (1) teacher-led: child not active (modelled); and (2) child active. The “CHILD_ACTIVE” category was further divided into three subcategories: (i) teacher-led: teacher and child reading (shared); (ii) teacher and child reading (joint-reciprocal); and (iii) child-led: child reading with teacher support (scaffolded/advised). “TEACHER_NOT_INVOLVED” was subdivided into two categories: (1) other children involved; and (2) child self-directed. Information unrelated to the *actions* of practice was consigned to ‘other’.

Text1, Text2 and Text6 devoted the greater portion of their descriptions to action-related themes that included teacher involvement. Four of the publications (Text2, Text3, Text4 and Text5) devoted 41.38–45.52% of their text to information that was unrelated to the *actions of practice* (i.e., the ‘other’ theme type), with three of the texts (Text3, Text4 and Text5) devoting the greater portion of their text to information unrelated to the actions of practice. That is, logistical, organisational and other such prose—for example: “The books for guided reading are selected by relating them to the children’s reading behaviours” [22]

(p. 96). There was some ambiguity in the wording of the prose consigned to ‘other’, with some introductory, explanatory or concluding passages left open to interpretation. For example, Derewianka and Jones [27] (p. 315) wrote, “In guided reading sessions, work with groups of struggling readers”. Tompkins et al. [19] (p. 39) also used the term ‘work’: “Teachers use guided reading to work with groups of four to five students who are reading at the same level”. But what is the nature of such ‘work’? Is a teacher to adopt a teacher-led, modelled reading strategy; a teacher-led, shared reading strategy; a joint-reciprocal reading strategy; or a child-led, teacher-supported/scaffolded reading strategy in each of these contexts? Perhaps the authors of the five publications who used the term ‘work’ were purposefully ambiguous, because the answer in each instance would be: *it depends*.

Table 2. Theme and category calculations per publication.

Feature	Text1		Text2		Text3		Text4		Text5		Text6		ALL TEXTS	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Total Units	35		193		374		390		272		1021		2285	
THEME_TYPE	N = 20		N = 116		N = 218		N = 204		N = 145		N = 539		N = 1242	
- teacher involved *	13	65.00%	61	52.59%	80	36.70%	78	38.24%	49	33.79%	290	53.80%	571	45.97%
- teacher not involved **	2	10.00%	7	6.03%	46	21.10%	41	20.10%	30	20.69%	62	11.50%	188	15.14%
- other	5	25.00%	48	41.38%	92	42.20%	85	41.67%	66	45.52%	187	34.69%	483	38.89%
* TEACHER_INVOLVED	N = 13		N = 61		N = 80		N = 78		N = 49		N = 290		N = 571	
- teacher-led: child not active (modelled)	0	0.00%	21	34.43%	31	38.75%	17	21.79%	6	12.24%	39	13.45%	114	19.96%
- child active #	13	100.00%	40	65.57%	49	61.25%	61	78.21%	43	87.76%	251	86.55%	457	80.04%
# TEACHER_INVOLVED: CHILD_ACTIVE	N = 13		N = 40		N = 49		N = 61		N = 43		N = 251		N = 457	
-teacher-led: teacher and child reading (shared)	2	15.38%	22	55.00%	5	10.20%	38	62.30%	10	23.26%	91	36.25%	168	36.76%
- teacher and child reading (joint-reciprocal)	2	15.38%	4	10.00%	9	18.37%	2	3.28%	1	2.33%	15	5.98%	33	7.22%
- child-led: child reading with teacher support (scaffolded/ advised)	9	69.23%	14	35.00%	35	71.43%	21	34.43%	32	74.42%	145	57.77%	256	56.02%
** TEACHER_NOT_INVOLVED	N = 2		N = 7		N = 46		N = 41		N = 30		N = 62		N = 188	
- other children involved (collaborative)	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	14	30.42%	4	9.76%	0	0.00%	12	19.35%	30	15.96%
- child self-directed (independent)	2	100.00%	7	100.00%	32	69.57%	37	90.24%	30	100.00%	50	80.65%	158	84.04%

*, **, #—each symbol identifies a category that is repeated in a subsequent row, followed by a tabulation of subcategories.

GRR Teaching Approaches

Table 2 shows that three of the six publications made reference to all of the teaching approaches encompassed within the GRR model, describing how all of the approaches may be adopted at various stages of the guided reading process, including an additional category identified in all six of the texts, that of ‘teacher and child reading: joint-reciprocal reading’. The ‘teacher and child reading: joint-reciprocal reading’ category is one where neither the child nor the teacher is assigned the role of ‘lead’, much as occurs during ‘choral reading’ when a group of children, or the educator and children, read aloud in unison [28] (p. 350). While the number of units within this category is small, it was not excluded from the dataset given that the study was designed to analyse any and all descriptions of the guided reading teaching approach in the professional materials under investigation. It was also noted, during data analysis, that there were times when the strategies failed to appear in linear progression from modelled reading through to independent activity. That is, strategies could be referred to out of sequence. For example:

During the book introduction . . . This may involve discussions [shared reading] and demonstrations about specific reading strategies [modelled reading].... [28] (p. 284)

Of the remaining three texts, all were missing reference to collaborative reading with peers (coded: Teacher not involved: other children involved—Text1, Text2 and Text5), demonstrating that less consideration was given to how children may support or work with each other during guided reading than was given to teacher–child dynamics. Text1

was the only text that was missing reference to two of the approaches—(1) modelled reading (coded: Teacher-led: child not active) and (2) collaborative reading with peers.

As a collective, using the final, right-hand column in grey (Table 2), the six most prescribed texts used in ITE in Australian universities show acknowledgement that all of the GRR strategies can be used at various stages of a guided reading lesson, though collaborative reading with 30 references in total (where peers work with and support peers) and joint-reciprocal reading with 33 references in total (where neither the child nor the teacher takes on a lead role) were given far less consideration than all other GRR strategies. As would be expected, the strategy that received the most attention during guided reading across the corpus of all six datasets was that of ‘child-led: children reading with teacher support (scaffolded/advised)’, with a total of 256 references.

6. Discussion

This study sought to explore how the complexity of the guided reading teaching approach is conceptualised in university-endorsed professional reading materials, inspired by the fact that guided reading has been described in a variety of ways in Australia and abroad, ranging from a time for teacher demonstrations [i.e., modelled teaching] [6], to progression through all of the GRR teaching strategies, “from teacher-directed to student-led practice” [7] (p. 21). As such, the GRR model [9,10] and the strategies encompassed therein served as the study’s analytical framework, which was used to interrogate the descriptions of guided reading provided in the six most prescribed texts used in ITE courses in Australia [24].

As a collective, findings showed that the publications advocated for the use of all the GRR teaching strategies during a guided reading lesson, including an additional strategy (that of joint-reciprocal reading), albeit with limited emphasis placed on joint-reciprocal reading or peer-supported collaboration, and a greater focus placed on child-led reading with teacher support. Through the process of analysis, a disparity was also noted in regard to the appropriateness of engaging children in ‘round robin reading’ (explained below) during the child-led phase of the lesson. Winch et al. [29] (p. 194), for example, described the round-robin approach when detailing what may occur during guided reading, suggesting that round robin is synonymous with—and appropriate to use during—guided reading:

Each student is then given an opportunity to read in turn, a double-page spread at a time.

While Tompkins et al. [19] (p. 349) explicitly cautioned against ‘confusing’ round-robin with guided reading, and placed conditional caveats around its use:

Sometimes guided reading is confused with round-robin reading and literature circles, but these three small-group instructional activities are different. In round-robin reading, students take turns reading aloud to the group, which is useful only as a model for fluency and expression.

Further to the above, findings showed that the authors of the publications did not necessarily expect teachers to follow a linear progression from modelled teaching to autonomous child-led activity when engaging in guided reading. It was acknowledged that teachers may move back and forth between the different teaching strategies as the need arises. This reflects the descriptions of the GRR model as a whole as expounded by its authors, who recognise that the GRR model may be nonlinear in application as teachers respond to children’s needs and potentials [1,10]; a phenomenon referred to as the “ebb and flow of scaffolding” [23] (p. 57).

This study adds support to the suggestion that a guided reading lesson is much more than the enactment of a singular, siloed teaching strategy in the fashion that a modelled reading lesson, collaborative reading or shared reading may be enacted. Rather, it is highly likely that a teacher may adopt all of the GRR model’s teaching strategies throughout a guided reading lesson, as proposed by Stewart, Te Riele and Stratford [7]. Furthermore, this study has shown that even within a 15–20 minute guided reading lesson, a teacher’s

adoption of the GRR model's teaching strategies can be nonlinear in application. Teachers are expected to use their professional judgement to determine 'how agentic' they expect children to be throughout the lesson; that is, the degree to which they expect children to take "an active role in directing the learning process" [13] (p. 228) as they decode, use strategies for deciphering meaning, critically engage with texts and/or connect with texts on an affective and/or metacognitive level of engagement [14,21]. This requires "a sophisticated kind of decision-making" [18] (p. 255) on the part of the teacher, informed by an in-depth knowledge of each child's needs and potentials, and attention to the degree of agency children appear to be 'releasing' to their teacher [14], or to their peers—that is, their agentic potential. Figure 3, a revision of Figure 2 that now includes the joint-reciprocal reading strategy, captures this "ebb and flow of scaffolding" [23] (p. 57). When teachers move between teaching strategies, using formal and informal assessments of children's reading behaviours, knowledges, capabilities and interests, they ensure that children are set up for success, that children share control of their own learning, and that they create conditions that will support children to develop a positive relationship with reading.

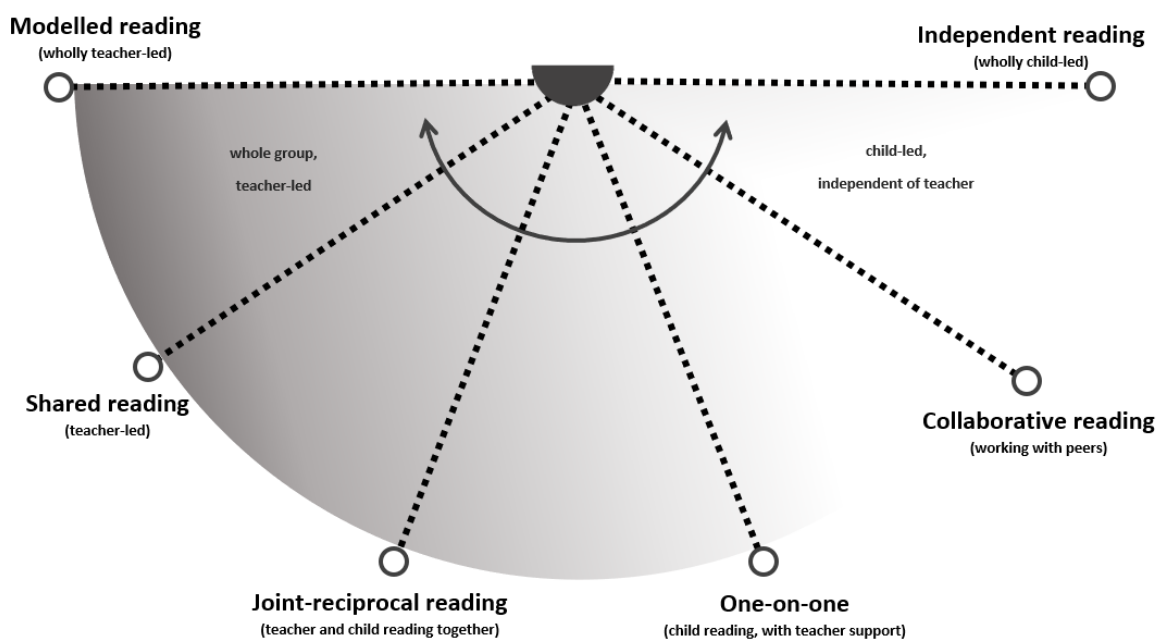


Figure 3. The barometer of agency in guided reading—the responsive swing of teaching and learning (revised).

7. Conclusions

The descriptions and themes found in the six prescribed texts under study have served to highlight the multilayered, complex nature of the guided reading teaching approach—an approach that teachers are expected to employ as per the ITE courses that make use of such texts. This finding has in turn served to question whether guided reading lessons are much more than the enactment of a singular teaching strategy, and whether they can be better understood to move through all of the strategies encompassed within the GRR model from lesson beginning to lesson's end. This finding addresses an issue with the GRR's title, being the 'gradual release of responsibility'. A 'gradual release' implies a unidirectional movement, from full control to none—once responsibility has been released, there is no going back. Use of the term 'responsibility' can have negative connotations, implying that in the beginning, a child is *irresponsible*, rather than emphasising that lack of action along the continuum of learning is as much an issue of development and capacity, an issue of agentic potential, as it is disposition.

In this paper I put forward a new model that teachers can use in Australia and abroad to evaluate and review their own guided reading practices and that of their colleagues, (1) to empower teachers—acknowledging their agentic professionalism; their professional

judgement; (2) to empower children—acknowledging their right and ability to be agentic in their own learning; and (3) to acknowledge the dynamic, nonlinear reality of teaching and learning. I propose that we move away from implying that teachers should seek to pass responsibility of learning over to children. Instead, I propose that we view the teaching of reading as the needle of an Aneroid barometer that swings back and forth in response to changes in the atmospheric ‘pressure’ of the classroom, measured and powered by a teacher’s ongoing questionings, discussions and observations of and with children. Using these assessments, teachers determine the degree of agency *they expect* of children, at this moment, with this particular text, based upon the level of skill, motivation and engagement they determine the children to be exhibiting *at this particular moment in time*—an assessment that can change from moment to moment, throughout a single sitting. This nuanced reconceptualisation of guided reading addresses the problem of seeking a ‘one-size-fits-all’ description of the strategies that teachers use in the reading classroom. I myself am eager to use this model as an analytical framework during the next stage of this project, as I explore how the guided reading approach is enacted in practice.

8. Limitations

As noted above, this study analysed professionally endorsed publications used in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) literacy units in Australian universities. It would be of interest to compare these findings with an analysis of how the guided reading approach is described in the most prescribed texts of international ITE courses in Canada, the US, the UK, New Zealand and other countries that are familiar with and use the GRR model in schools. Another limitation of this study is the acknowledgement that this study was an analysis of how guided reading is described. It does not explore whether—and/or the degree to which—the descriptions detailed in the prescribed text are enacted in the classroom, in practice. Nor does this study purport to have tested or explored how the *barometer of agency* may be realised in the reading classroom—a study I aim to turn to next.

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