

Facilitation Guide



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STARTING STRONG

Evidence-Based
Early Literacy
Practices



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teachers provided by Stenhouse Publishers



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Summary

Starting Strong shows teachers how to use four proven instructional approaches—standards based, evidence based, assessment based, and student based—to improve their teaching practice in all areas of early literacy.

Authors Katrin Blamey and Katherine Beauchat draw on their years of experience and early literacy expertise to guide you in figuring out what to teach and how to find the most instructionally sound method to teach it. They help you determine the instructional needs of your classroom and take full advantage of what you know about your students so you can engage them in learning.

With chapters on oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and writing skills, this comprehensive book explains each skill and provides research-based strategies for targeting each area. Supported by evidence-based research and aligned to key tenets of the Common Core, the book also includes classroom-tested activities and children's literature suggestions for each area of literacy.

The following are suggestions to help groups of educators read, discuss, and extend the ideas from *Starting Strong* into their classrooms. These ideas will come to life as teachers are given opportunities to put them into practice with students. With that in mind, we have developed discussion questions and pulled provocative quotes and professional development ideas from each chapter that will enable participants to reflect on the text.

The format of the guide is set up as a Read Share Teach study group. This guide could be used as a structure for a study group with a group of teachers or could be used individually as a reflective structure for those reading the book alone. The suggestions offered in the guide are designed to foster collaboration and spark new thinking.

Chapter 1

Early Literacy Targets

Connecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What do you see as the essential components to early literacy?
- What are your areas of strength in early literacy instruction?
- In what areas of early literacy instruction would you like to improve?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 1-2.
- This text is organized around four types of instruction that contribute to the authors' thinking about teaching: standards-based instruction, evidence-based instruction, assessment-based instruction, and student-based instruction. Respond to the types of instruction. How is this similar to or different from your thinking?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Reflect on and discuss Figure 1.1, "Four Assessment Types Informing Literacy Instruction" (6).
- Think through your assessment system. Jot down current assessments and identify if they are used for screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and/or outcome.

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

Becoming literate involves the development of a network of skills, including oral language, vocabulary, alphabet awareness, phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, comprehension strategies, and writing (10).

Further, low-income children who do not attend preschool or attend low-quality preschool are more likely to experience higher dropout rates, decreased job opportunities, a lower quality of life, and a higher probability of becoming involved in crime (1).

Our preservice teachers are simply enamored with Pinterest and Teachers Pay Teachers, finding cute and creative ideas to engage students in learning. However, this tremendous resource can also be a pitfall. Just because an instructional idea exists does not mean that it is good (4).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

What is one idea/concept that you will take away and keep thinking about?



Chapter 2

Developing Oral Language

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- How do you currently incorporate oral language into your classroom?
- As children develop oral language they are confronted with four major tasks: phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (12). These tasks are largely based on experiences and exposures in their social environment. What connections can you make to the text as a result of your own experiences with children in your classroom?
- What are you noticing in terms of oral language skills of students that enter your classroom/school?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 20-26 on dramatic play, including “Classroom Vignette: Old MacDonald’s Farm” (24-25).
- Respond to the excerpt on dramatic play and how this is similar to or different from your beliefs about the teacher’s role in play in the classroom.

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- To track oral language for your students, the authors recommend informal anecdotal records (32-33).
- Look at Figure 2.11, “Sample Anecdotal Record.” Code the transcript for phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics. What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- Between meetings, try taking your own anecdotal record of a student as a way to assess his or her oral language.

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

Neonatal response indicates that the second-trimester fetus in uterus can hear and respond, through movement, to voices and sounds that have become familiar (11).

However, just because oral language is integrated across subject areas does not mean that it is already covered. Indeed, it is important to include intentional instruction specifically planned to target children’s oral language and speaking skills (12).

In order to support all students, you can be a model of language in the classroom by fostering a talking classroom, one in which you are talking and encouraging students to talk whenever possible (14).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 2.1, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (13). What is one idea you will try?



Chapter 3

Fostering Word Knowledge

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to foster word knowledge in your classroom?
- “Children experiment with words all the time as they acquire new language. Sometimes the result of the experimentation is babble, sometimes it’s pairing new words together in unconventional ways like ‘apple spider’, and sometimes it’s getting the meaning and the vocabulary just right” (35). What connections can you make to the text regarding acquiring word knowledge as a result of your own experiences with children in your classroom?
- What are you noticing in terms of word knowledge skills of students that enter your classroom/school?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 42-50 on word walk read-aloud, including “Classroom Vignette: Using Word Walk with *Llama Llama Red Pajama*” (50-51).
- Respond to the excerpt on word walk read-aloud and how this is similar to or different from how you might approach read-aloud with your students.

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Choose a picture book. Make a plan and implement the word walk read-aloud strategy. You might want to select a title from Figure 3.5, “A Sample of Children’s Books for Targeting Vocabulary Instruction” (43).
- Look at Figure 3.6, “Before Reading”; Figure 3.8, “During Reading”; and Figure 3.9, “After Reading” to help you with the planning process.
- Between meetings, try out the lesson with your students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

A child can only experiment with the words he has heard in his native language through exposure from fluently speaking models in his life (36).

Children’s vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in reading success or struggles since it directly impacts their expressive language and reasoning, their relative ease of reading increasingly sophisticated text through grade levels, and, ultimately, their overall reading comprehension (37).

Vocabulary instruction works best when it is integrated, repeated, and meaningful (37).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 3.1, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (38). What is one idea that you will try?

Chapter 4

Learning the Alphabetic Code and Phonological Awareness

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to foster alphabet and phonological awareness in your classroom?
- “Children who lack knowledge of the separate sounds that make up words will struggle with basic decoding and encoding tasks. Looking ahead into their reading career, we also know that deficits in these skills will impact children’s fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and reading motivation” (86). What connections can you make to the text in the areas of learning the alphabetic code and phonological awareness as a result of your own experiences with children in your classroom?
- What are you noticing in terms of alphabet awareness and phonological skills of students that enter your classroom/school?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 70-74 on explicit instruction, including “Classroom Vignette: Small-Group Sound Sort” (73-74).
- Respond to the excerpt on explicit instruction (sorting & segmenting and blending). How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review the instructional method of the sorting sequence outlined on page 70.
- Think of a student or students who might benefit from this strategy. Plan and try out a mini-sort with a partner in the group.
- Between meetings, try out the lesson with a student or students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

Children with a strong foundation in phonological awareness are poised to become independent readers (66).

Too much print becomes overwhelming, but a void of print is not good either. Instead, you want a balance (68).

The key to home-based practice is making the activities fun, engaging, and simple to complete (84).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 4.1, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (67). What is one idea that you will try?



Chapter 5

Word Recognition and Fluency

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to foster word recognition and fluency?
- How do you currently assess word recognition and fluency?
- What connections can you make to the text in the areas of word recognition and fluency as a result of your own experiences with children in your classroom?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 97-100 on reading groups and “Classroom Vignette: Small-Group Word Work” (106-108).
- Respond to the excerpt on the management of reading groups. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review Figure 5.12, “Word Work Homework Menu” (112).
- How might you modify or adapt this idea to fit the needs of your students?
- Between meetings, try out the homework menu with your students. What did you notice?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

Learning to read is one of the most important academic tasks during childhood; therefore, it is one of your most important jobs as a teacher of young children (89).

The most important thing about sight words is automaticity; the reader should recognize sight words in less than one second (90).

Providing a choice of activities helps with student motivation and engagement (111).

Indeed, we advocate that children need a healthy balance of both isolated skills instruction and practice reading real texts (115).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 5.3, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (93).
What is one idea that you will try?



Chapter 6

Developing Comprehension

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to develop reading comprehension?
- How do you currently assess reading comprehension?
- How do you enlist family support to foster the development of reading comprehension?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 128-129 on retelling and “Classroom Vignette: Modeling Comprehension” (133-134).
- Respond to the excerpt on retelling. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Review Figure 6.3, “Dialogic Reading Using CROWD Questions” (122).
- How might you use these questions to target understanding with your students?
- Between meetings, try out the CROWD questions with a student or students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

Young children begin to understand what is read to them long before they read themselves. Listening comprehension precedes and lays the groundwork for later reading comprehension (117).

Readers not only need to know the comprehension strategies but also how to use them and when they are appropriate (118).

Early childhood educators can and should begin comprehension instruction even with the nonreaders in their classrooms (120).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 6.2, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (120).
What is one idea that you will try?



Chapter 7

Writing

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- What strategies do you use to develop writing in young learners?
- How is writing integrated into your overall literacy program?
- How do you incorporate student choice in writing?
- How do you assess writing?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read page 154 on interactive writing and “Classroom Vignette: Whole-Class Interactive Writing” (155-156).
- Respond to the excerpt on interactive writing. How is this similar to or different from your instructional methods used to support young writers?

Toolbox Strategy (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 169-170 on writing conferences and review Figure 7.14, “Example Writing Conference Checklist” (170).
- How might you use a conference checklist to record student conferences?
- Between meetings, try out the writing conference checklist with a student or students. What did you notice? What did you wonder?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

By observing the world around them, young children come to understand writing and its various purposes (149).

The primary goal of kid writing is to get children writing (154).

Writing is closely connected to reading, for as students make decisions about the words they write they are constantly applying the word recognition skills they use when reading (171).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Review Figure 7.2, “Preview of Instructional Methods in This Chapter” (151).
What is one idea that you will try?



Chapter 8

Putting It All Together

Reconnecting (5 Minutes)

Discussion/Sharing (10 Minutes)

- How do you ensure that you are getting in all the essential components of literacy instruction?
- What routines do you have in place that support the integration of key literacy instruction?
- What do you see as your areas of strength as a teacher of literacy? What do you see as areas of weakness?

Reading Excerpt (15 Minutes)

- Read pages 175-181 on global literacy routines.
- Respond to the excerpt on global literacy routines. How might you use selected routines to target multiple literacy skills at once?

Quotes Worth Discussing (10 Minutes)

In the area of literacy where the foundational skills build on one another, there is no way to leave anything out (173).

The biggest decision you can make about your literacy instruction is the decision about what to teach during the whole-group versus small-group formats (174).

Reflection will most certainly benefit your students as you think about what went well in your teaching, what did not go so well, and what you would do differently next time (183).

Putting Ideas into Practice (5 Minutes)

Go back to page 7 in Chapter 1 and reflect on Figure 1.4, “The Components of Early Literacy.” It’s time to put it all together. What are some ideas you will try as a result of reading *Starting Strong*?