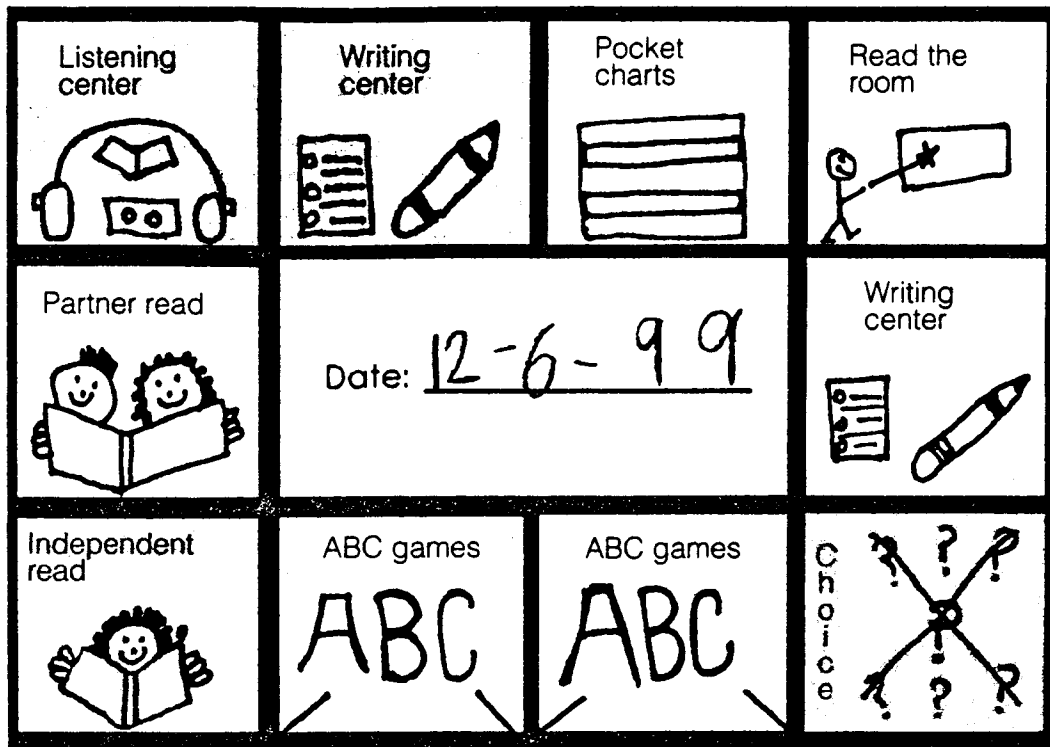


Figure 2
A student's center card



instruction that minimizes concerns, confusion, and chaos along the way. After they have been established and practiced with teacher guidance, routines can be performed without teacher guidance. The gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) gives the teacher greater assurance that the activities students are expected to complete independently are within their reach.

Centers that meet established criteria

The following section describes nine centers that meet the criteria we have discussed. They each build on classroom routines to encourage independent use by students and efficient use of teacher preparation time. While the structure of the center can stay the same, the activities within them can change with relative ease. Each center is designed to be accessible for all students and provide for individual differences because of

the level of sophistication each learner brings to the task. Each can be linked to what the teacher knows about students as readers, writers, and learners as well as to standards, curricula, and assessments. With simple structures, transition time can be kept to a minimum, equitable use can be encouraged, and accountability can be ensured.

Listening post: The listening post provides learners with additional practice with print. By placing a story on tape and multiple copies of the text at the center, the teacher can easily create a changeable center that gives learners an opportunity to warm up before, review after, or extend beyond a guided reading session. One teacher we observed intensifies the practice at the listening post for a longer period of time by encouraging students to work through an identified routine that involved repeated practice of the text in a variety of ways (see Figure 3). Accountability can be built in by inviting students to orally perform a selection practiced at

the listening post at the end of the language arts block.

Readers Theatre: Like the listening post, a Readers Theatre center can be easily created by a classroom teacher by designating a practice space, providing multiple texts, and identifying guidelines for practicing. Like with the listening post, it can be used as a warm-up, review, or extension from the guided reading instruction. It can also allow more heterogeneously grouped students to work together because appropriate parts can be assigned to students of differing abilities. A sequenced routine (see Figure 4) can engage students for longer periods of time as they practice for a performance, which can serve as an accountability check. This type of practice provides a purposeful opportunity for building fluency, oral performance skills, and confidence. The addition of simple props, masks, or puppets can make the production of plays from practiced texts another way to engage students.

Reading/writing the room: This is often a popular way to become familiar with a print-rich room environment. Students can be encouraged to choose partners and use special pointers and glasses to “read the room”—one student points to words in the environment as the partner reads them. Clipboards and scrap paper might be available for students to use in “writing the room”—copying words from the environment. To engage students in a more challenging activity, teachers can easily create a scavenger hunt (see Figure 5) that invites students to look for specific examples to explore concepts of print, letter names, word identification, and vocabulary elements more closely grounded in curricular needs. These can be easily changed and designed in varying degrees of difficulty for diverse learners. It leaves a “paper trail” from the students’ efforts that can be collected and quickly reviewed by the teacher.

Pocket chart: Any instructional tool and space used in large-group instruction can easily become a center for more independent activity during guided reading instruction. In one classroom the pocket chart was used to introduce common core poems used at the line, phrase, word, and word-part levels (Ford, 1996). When a poem was initially introduced on the pocket chart, the teacher used sentence strips to go through the verse line by line. Children were invited to point to different lines and read the

Figure 3
Listening post routine

-
1. Listen to the story on tape and follow along.
 2. Listen to the story on tape and read along.
 3. Turn off the tape and read together.
 4. Turn off the tape and read with a partner.
 5. Turn off the tape and read on your own.
 6. Listen to the story on tape and read along again.
 7. Talk about your improvement.
 8. Be ready to share the story with the class.
-

Figure 4
Readers Theatre routine

-
1. Leader reads the story aloud.
 2. Everyone reads the story together.
 3. Partners read the story together.
 4. Everyone is assigned a part.
 5. Students practice their parts on their own.
 6. Students practice their parts together.
 7. Students share the story with the class.
-

Figure 5
Scavenger hunt routine

Find three words in our room that...

1. Have more than six letters.
 2. End in *-ing* where the final letter was doubled.
 3. Mean the same as *said*.
 4. Have the same sound pattern as *boat*.
 5. Are words from math.
 6. Start with *sh*.
 7. Have the same spelling pattern as *nice*.
 8. Are contractions.
 9. Rhyme with *she*.
-

words on the sentence strip for that line. The teacher would also say a line, and children would have to come up and point to it. The teacher would hand out copies of the sentence strips, and children would match them to the lines on the pocket chart or put the poem back together in order. As children showed mastery of the poem at the line level, the teacher would cut up the sentence strips into smaller chunks—phrases—and guide students through similar activities, requiring greater attention to print details and finer visual discrimination skills. As children showed mastery of the poem at the phrase level, the teacher would cut up the phrase strips into individual words.

Using the pocket chart as an independent center, students can conduct activities modeled by the teacher in large-group settings. One regular activity that can be linked to pocket charts that contain poems is providing students with blank paper grids and inviting them to copy each word from the poem in a box on the grid. Students can cut the words apart and create a set of word cards that can be used to independently reconstruct the poem or to create innovations by changing the words around. Working with partners, students can play common word card games, which provide opportunities for independent skill practice. Activities chosen by students can vary in difficulty according to their needs. The introduction of a new poem provides new material and another opportunity to repeat the activity.

Poems/story packs: In another classroom, when the teacher retires a poem or story from large-group practice situations she places the words, phrases, or sentences created for word study in a large see-through envelope. These packs of story and poem parts are placed in a basket and made available to students during center time. Because they represent materials created from texts of varying difficulties, students can select packs appropriate for their level. Students find a quiet place to shake out the parts and engage in a variety of activities including reconstructing or innovating on the language of the familiar text. Working with partners or independently, they can engage in a variety of classifying and sorting activities that call attention to words and their features. Color-coding the parts for each text makes it easy to get the right parts back into the right pack.

Big Books: Again, teachers have discovered the importance of letting students independently explore materials previously introduced in large- and small-group settings. For example, revisiting Big Books used in shared reading experiences provides a natural opportunity for students to explore print more independently. Big Books placed in an easily accessible center can be made more inviting by giving students access to teaching tools like pointers, word frames, adhesive notes, and correcting tape so they can conduct activities modeled by the teacher in the large-group setting. As anyone who has worked with young children knows, children thoroughly enjoy taking on the role of teacher.

Responding through art: We have already noted concern about the difference between activities that generate excitement and those that actually engage students in reading and writing. Response activities placed in centers for students to work on independently may be a better use of limited class time than having students do activities as a whole group. We would argue, however, that response activities need to be designed in a way that minimizes teacher's preparation time. Planned, pre-cut, prepared art projects may not be necessary for response. In one classroom, Shel Silverstein's (1974) poem "Spaghetti" was featured. The response center contained a variety of bags of pasta and large sheets of colored construction paper. Students designed projects as creative as any teacher-prepared art project might have been. By labeling pictures, adding talking bubbles, or writing descriptive sentences, the teacher could use these student responses to create a print-rich bulletin board, and later bind them into a book for the class reading center.

Writing: There is no question that one of the best ways to engage children with text is to have them generate their own. Writing demands much critical thinking in that the writer must organize ideas and use specific words to express thoughts to create text that is meaningful to self and others. Other times, writing is a form of response that enables the writer to show what was of personal value in the text or what was remembered. It is also a way for the writer to apply all known print conventions. The centers can be easily created by supplying students with access to a variety of writing tools, formats, and resources. Students can engage in writing activities that differ in their demands. The writing projects can be shared publicly and reviewed privately to hold students accountable.

Reading: We cannot emphasize enough that the best activity for students to become involved in away from the teacher is reading. Students should always be encouraged to read when they are waiting for instruction with the teacher. This can be done individually, with a classmate, or with a more competent coach. Teachers can easily create inviting reading centers that provide easy access and inviting opportunities to independently explore texts (Morrow, 1997). This exploration can be one additional way to warm up, review, or extend texts from guided reading instruction. In one classroom, students are

encouraged to grab a text, a buddy, and a carpet square; find a quiet corner; and read to each other. Some teachers have developed structures to maximize the value of buddy reading (Samway, Whang, & Pippitt, 1995). Finally, additional people in the classroom may provide the students with the possibility of additional contact with a competent reader (an older student or adult classroom volunteer). These individuals may not be capable of conducting a separate guided reading group, but can certainly listen to individuals read texts. Like writing, practiced reading can be shared publicly or recorded in simple logging formats.

Instruction away from the teacher needs to be as powerful as instruction with the teacher. Like instruction with the teacher, it needs to be grounded in knowledge of the children—their reading and writing abilities and their degree of independence. It needs to be sensitive to the external demands of standards, curricula, and assessments. It should involve children in an ongoing cycle of self-improvement by continued engagement with print-rich activities. Children and adults must see learning experiences away from the teacher as accessible and purposeful. Such activities must set up children for success so that they see themselves as independent readers—the ultimate goal of guided reading.

Ford is Associate Dean at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh (NE 113, College of Education and Human Services, Oshkosh, WI 54901, USA). Opitz teaches at the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado, USA.

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