Supporting students' reading skills

Many students from refugee backgrounds may have had little or no previous formal schooling or have had significant interruptions to their schooling. Such experiences impact on important language and literacy education and as a result some students may not be literate in their first language. For students whose education pathways have been constant, but are learning English as an additional language, focusing on reading skills is also of great importance. Explicitly focusing on the literacy skills involved in reading is needed if all students are to reach their full potential.

Providing support with reading to students from migrant and refugee backgrounds involves a wide range of approaches and strategies. Which ones you use as a tutor will depend on the skill level of your student and your confidence with the strategies. For a broad introduction to supporting students with reading, watch the 'Tips for Tutors: Reading and Vocabulary' videos.

The following information on this sheet provides an introduction to literacy development, followed by a breakdown of strategies to be used before, during and after reading.

Becoming literate

To read English for its content and then use it within an academic school context and beyond, each student needs to be able to undertake the four elements detailed in Luke and Freebody's 'The Four Resource Model'. Luke and Freebody define literacy in terms of a repertoire of capabilities[1]. Being literate means being able to decode written text, understand and compose meaningful texts, use texts functionally and analyse texts critically. All four elements are of equal importance as readers engage in several practices together.
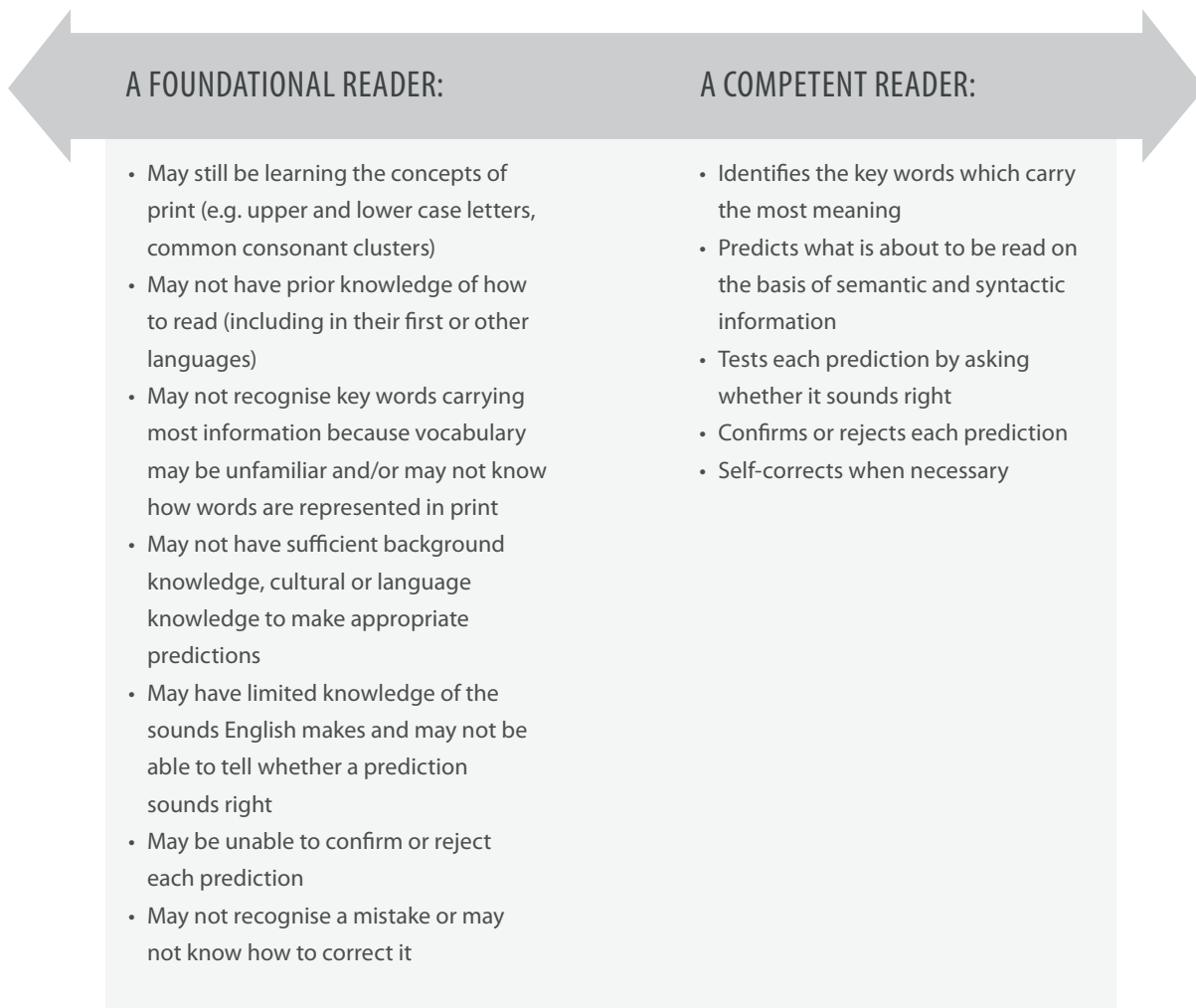
A successful reader is a:

CODE BREAKER	MEANING MAKER
• Break the code *This involves understanding the sound/symbol relationships, the left-to-right and top-to-bottom direction of text, the alphabet and punctuation. This should be introduced in real contexts not in isolation. Breaking the code involves relating the text to spoken language.*	• Connects with the text to make meaning *This involves matching the reader's background and content knowledge with the text.*
TEXT USER	TEXT ANALYST
• Use texts appropriately for a number of purposes	• Analyse texts, critically and question assumptions as well as identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the text. • Make and check predictions about the text.

Four Resource Model

1 Luke, A. & Freebody, P. (1999) Further Notes on the Four Resources Model, Reading Online.

Assessing your student's level of literacy

To target support appropriately, reflect on where your student is on the literacy continuum.

A FOUNDATIONAL READER:

- May still be learning the concepts of print (e.g. upper and lower case letters, common consonant clusters)
- May not have prior knowledge of how to read (including in their first or other languages)
- May not recognise key words carrying most information because vocabulary may be unfamiliar and/or may not know how words are represented in print
- May not have sufficient background knowledge, cultural or language knowledge to make appropriate predictions
- May have limited knowledge of the sounds English makes and may not be able to tell whether a prediction sounds right
- May be unable to confirm or reject each prediction
- May not recognise a mistake or may not know how to correct it

A COMPETENT READER:

- Identifies the key words which carry the most meaning
- Predicts what is about to be read on the basis of semantic and syntactic information
- Tests each prediction by asking whether it sounds right
- Confirms or rejects each prediction
- Self-corrects when necessary

Supporting students during different stages of reading

Spending time with students supporting their readings skills can involve a wide range of activities in addition to reading the actual text. The following stages and strategies explore how assisting students with their reading goes beyond reading to them, or having them read to you.

Before reading

Tutor Strategies

- Show your enthusiasm for the text and stimulate the student's interest: discuss what the text may be about or what interests them about the text
- Show the student the book or text and discuss the purpose and intended audience of the text (see 'Using Text Types' for more information')
- Access prior knowledge: ask them if they have seen/ heard / know anything about the topic of the book before
- Predict and discuss the content:
    - » from title and the cover;
    - » from key or other visuals;
    - » based on the topic; and
    - » from key words and other words that might be in the book.
- Discuss idioms or language structures that may be unfamiliar
- Encourage students to share existing knowledge and build on this (e.g. by using visuals and

introducing new vocabulary and language features)
- Develop glossaries of words in the book with the student
- Put these words on flashcards and use them for games
- Prepare students for any features present in texts (e.g. captions, headings, subheadings, diagrams, tables, chapter headings) by checking their understanding of them and explaining their purpose and function
- Pose a closed question about the text's overall message: 'will the girl find her lost toy / tell her friend she is important to her etc'

Student activities

- Use concept maps, sunshine wheels or word charts for key topics, characters or other elements of the text
- Discuss reader questions including brainstorming possible ideas
- Play vocabulary games with flash cards for recycling of recently acquired vocabulary that connects to the text

During reading

Tutor Strategies

- Be positive and encouraging, asking students to read all, or some of the text, and taking it in turns with you if necessary
- Discuss what the student is reading to consolidate their learning and confirm comprehension: ask specific questions about the text as it progresses, and what is happening in the story, how the characters are feeling, etc
- Encourage the student to use the pictures to support their reading
- Pause and ask students to predict what will happen next
- Ignore mistakes that do not affect the meaning
- Develop the student's understanding and use vocabulary and language structures by highlighting them in the text as they occur
- Demonstrate strategies for reading for different purposes (e.g. skimming for the sense and scanning for specific information
- Model and provide practice in re-reading for detail
- If the student does not recognise a word when reading aloud:
    - » encourage picking up the clues from the illustration;
    - » ask questions to highlight context;
    - » encourage re-reading the sentence to refresh context;
    - » read to the end of the sentence and then come back to the unknown word;
    - » provide sufficient time so student can work out the word independently;
    - » cover part of the word to make it easier to recognise; and/or
    - » provide the word so the student does not lose the meaning

Student activities

- Directed reading and thinking activity: provide closed questions (Yes/No, True/False) to answer from the text
- Vocabulary extension: provide a context for the new word; examine the sentence for meaning
- Encourage student to 'work it out' using clues (visual, context, previous content)
- Directed silent reading

After reading

Tutor Strategies

- Confirm the answer to the initial and following closed questions to clarify basic text comprehension of the main idea and other aspects of the text
- Discuss the text: ask the student which part of the story or character they liked and why
- Focus on sound patterns that students are having difficulty with and make lists of words with the same patterns
- Reinforce particular language features that are used in the text: tense; cohesive devices; modals etc
- Help the student to organise and express their responses to the text
- Re-read it together until the student can read it independently
- Practicing other similar or well known books to encourage enthusiasm and fluency

Student activities

- Re-read / revisit the text
- Answer open questions about the text (why / how did something happen)
- Retell the story / text either orally or in writing
- Write about a similar event and use visuals to support the story
- Undertake sentence reconstructions
- Engage in cloze activities
- Write a book report
- Innovate on the text by rewriting parts of it, or changing the ending
- Draw a picture from the story, create a Story Map of the plot and events, or draw a comic strip
- Act out the story
- Write a letter to a character
- Explore character descriptions
- Make a game based on the book
- Reconstruct the text
- Create timelines: characters' lives; events in the text
- Make word lists: vocabulary lists; consonant or phonic groups
- Match pictures and sentences
- Play language games relevant to the text: bingo; word find puzzles; miming words

Conclusion

Becoming an enthusiastic reader is one aim of primary years schooling and takes much time and input over a number of years. If students have not had access to the process of learning to become an active reader, support can be offered to encourage the pleasure and enthusiasm for reading. Choosing topics and formats of the written word that students connect with will encourage greater engagement with reading. In addition, students should be made aware that becoming a more fluent and enthusiastic reader not only can bring pleasure, but also helps improve writing skills.