Comprehension Instruction

Introduction

Reading is central to learning—in school, in the workplace, and in everyday life. How well children learn to read sets the foundation for their future success. The Texas Reading Initiative began in 1996 in response to then-Governor George W. Bush's challenge to all Texans to focus on the most basic of education goals—teaching all children to read. The goal the Governor set was clear: every child, each and every child, must learn to read.

The Texas Education Agency, in response to Bush's challenge, has worked on a multifaceted effort aimed at providing information, resources, and knowledge to assist parents, educators, school board members, administrators, public officials, and business and community leaders as they seek to meet this goal. The Initiative has been built on years of demonstrated leadership and commitment of the Texas State Board of Education in the areas of reading development and reading difficulties. The Initiative has relied on the convergence of reading research from the past several decades that illuminates the way children learn to read and how to enhance that process.

In 1997, TEA first published the document, *Beginning Reading Instruction, Components and Features of a Research-Based Reading Program,* also known as the "red book." This booklet described important aspects of effective reading instruction, as well as elements of classroom and administrative support for effective instruction.

Since its initial publication, over 260,000 copies of *Beginning Reading Instruction* have been printed and distributed. It has served as the basis for professional development, the development of curriculum standards and instructional materials, as well as the establishment of research-based reading programs in schools. The purpose of the booklet was to provide information which can be used to guide decisions as local school districts and educators worked toward then-Governor Bush's stated goal, "all students will read on grade level or higher by the end of the third grade and continue reading on or above grade level throughout their schooling."

After the initial distribution of *Beginning Reading Instruction,* several projects were undertaken to develop companion documents to the "red book." These first companion documents: *Spotlight on Reading, A Companion to Beginning Reading Instruction; Beginning Reading Instruction: Practical Ideas for Parents;* and *Instrucción Para Comenzar a Leer: Ideas Prácticas Para Padres de Familia,* were published. In addition to these documents, the Agency, in collaboration with the University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts, has worked on additional booklets that provide information on reading topics such as vocabulary development, comprehension, and content-area reading.

Governor Rick Perry continues to support the goal that all children will learn to read. This "Red Book Series" serves as a resource to our schools and all stakeholders interested in meeting the Governor's goal.

This booklet, *Comprehension Instruction,* would not be possible without the contributions of the consultants and staff of the University of Texas Center for Reading and Language Arts and the staff of the Texas Education Agency. A special thanks goes to Jean Osborn, Center for the Study of Reading, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and Fran Lehr.

Comprehension Instruction

The purpose of reading is comprehension, or to get meaning from written text.[1] Without comprehension, reading is a frustrating, pointless exercise in word calling. It is no exaggeration to say that how well students develop the ability to comprehend what they read has a profound effect on their entire lives.[2]

A major goal of reading comprehension instruction, therefore, is to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences they must have if they are to become competent and enthusiastic readers.

Over the past few decades, research has revealed a great deal of information about how readers get meaning from what they read, and about the kinds of instructional activities and procedures that are most successful in helping students to become good readers.

The first part of this document looks at some of the important ideas about reading, comprehension, and comprehension instruction that have emerged from this research. The second part describes what comprehension instruction based on this research can look like, and the third part provides specific research-based instructional activities and procedures that can be used as part of comprehension instruction.

What Research Tells Us About Reading, Comprehension, and Comprehension Instruction

For many years, reading instruction was based on a concept of reading as the application of a set of isolated skills such as identifying words, finding main ideas, identifying cause and effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, and sequencing. Comprehension was viewed as the mastery of these skills. One important classroom study conducted during the 1970s found that typical comprehension instruction followed what the study called a mentioning, practicing, and assessing procedure. That is, teachers **mentioned** a specific skill that students were to apply, had students **practice** the skill by completing workbook pages, and then **assessed** them to find out if they could use the skill correctly.[3] Such instruction did little to help students learn how or when to use the skills, nor was it ever established that this particular set of skills enabled comprehension.

At about this time, a group of psychologists, linguists, and computer scientists began to focus research attention on how the mind works—how people think and learn. A goal of this new research movement, called **cognitive science,** was to produce an applied science of learning.

In the field of reading, a number of cognitive scientists focused their attention on how readers construct meaning as they read. Specifically, they studied the mental activities that good readers engage in to achieve

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1 In this booklet, the term *text* is used to mean any type of written material. A text can be, for example, a page in a novel, an entire short story, an article in a newspaper or magazine, the print on a computer screen, the words on a sign, or a chapter in a school textbook.

2 Anderson, R. C., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J. A., & Wilkinson, I. A. G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading.* Washington, DC: The National Institute of Education.

3 Durkin, D. (1978–1979). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 15,* 481–533.

comprehension. From these studies an entirely new concept emerged about what reading is. According to the new concept, reading is a complex, active process of constructing meaning—not skill application.[4]

The act of constructing meaning is:

- **interactive**—it involves not just the reader but also the text and the context in which reading takes place[5];
- **strategic**—readers have purposes for their reading and use a variety of strategies and skills as they construct meaning[6]; and
- **adaptable**—readers change the strategies they use as they read different kinds of text or as they read for different purposes[7];

While cognitive science research was producing valuable information about comprehension processes, reading education researchers were reporting important findings about what comprehension instruction looks like in the most effective reading classrooms.

The convergence of these strands of research has provided a wealth of information about what good readers do as they read, about how good and poor readers differ, and about the kind of instruction that is needed to help students to become good readers.

What Do Good Readers Do As They Read?

One way that researchers have studied what good readers do, has been to ask them to think aloud as they read. From these studies, researchers have determined that the seemingly effortless activity described as "good reading" is made up of a set of highly complex, well developed, and well practiced skills and abilities. Particularly impressive is the way in which good readers actively and consciously coordinate these skills and strategies before, during, and after reading a text.[8]

Before reading, good readers tend to set goals for their reading. They note the structure or organization of the text, and often create a mental overview or outline of the text to help them decide whether it is relevant to their goals.

During reading, good readers read words accurately and quickly, and simultaneously deal with the meanings of those words—as well as the meanings of the phrases and sentences into which the words are grouped. Good readers connect the meaning of one sentence to the meaning of another. If something is confusing to them, they use their background knowledge to try to clarify the meanings of words and phrases. Sometimes good readers interact with the text by asking themselves questions about its content and reflecting on its ideas. They are adept at using their background knowledge to make predic-

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4   Dole, J. A., Duffy, G. G., Roehler, L. R., & Pearson, P. D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 61,* 239–264.

5   Heilman, A. W., Blair, T. R., & Rupley, W. R. (1998). *Principles and practices of teaching reading.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice-Hall.

6   Baker, L., & Brown, A. L. (1984). Metacognitive skills in reading. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 353–394). New York: Longman; Paris, S.G., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1991). The development of strategic readers. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 609-640). New York: Longman.

7   Dole et al., 1991.

8   Pressley, M., & Afflerbach, P. (1995). *Verbal protocols of reading: The nature of constructively responsive reading.* Hillsdale NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

tions about what might happen next and to understand ideas as they encounter them. Good readers continually evaluate their predictions and revise them as needed.[9]

Good readers are selective as they read. They are likely to focus more of their attention on the parts of the text that are most closely tied to their reading goals. They may decide to skip some parts of a text because they already understand the content or because they do not think the parts are important to what they need (or want) to learn from the text. They may decide, after reading several pages, to skip the rest of a chapter because they recently read something similar. On the other hand, they may decide—either because they do not clearly understand the content or because they find the topic interesting—to reread a passage or chapter before going on. They also may summarize the content of a passage as they read it. In doing so, they may consciously determine what is important, what is supportive, and what is less important.

As they read, good readers often make inferences. They may draw on their background knowledge or look for clues in the text to supply information about characters or events that the author has not provided directly. Some good readers may also create mental images, or visualize a setting, event, or character to help them understand a passage in a text.

Good readers monitor their comprehension as they read.[10] When they realize that they do not understand what they are reading, they apply procedures to "repair" or "fix-up" their lack of understanding. For example, they may ask themselves questions about the meaning of what they are reading, they may rephrase a passage in their own words, they may look up the meanings of difficult words, or they may outline the content of the text.[11]

After reading, good readers often think about or reflect on what they read. They may mentally summarize major points or events in the text, or even go to other sources to find additional information about the text's topic.

In short, good readers are most often **strategic** readers. That is, they use a number of **comprehension strategies** to get meaning from text. **Comprehension strategies** are conscious plans or procedures that are under the control of a reader, who makes decisions about which strategies to use and when to use them.

In addition, good readers engage in **metacognition** as they read. **Cognition** refers to mental functions such as remembering, focusing attention, and processing information. **Metacognition** refers to people's awareness of their cognition; that is, their thoughts about their own thinking.[12] From an array of possibilities, for example, readers with metacognitive awareness are able consciously and automatically to select the appropriate comprehension strategies for use with a particular text.

9   Paris, S. G., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1991). The development of strategic readers. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 609–640). New York: Longman.

10 Paris, S. G., Lipson, M. Y., & Wixson, K. K. (1983). Becoming a strategic reader. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 8,* 293–316.

11 Palincsar, A. S., & Brown, A. L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition & Instruction, 2,* 117–175.

12 Palincsar & Brown, 1984.

How Do Poor Readers Differ From Good Readers?

In contrast to good readers, most poor readers do not read strategically. Nor do they have sufficient metacognitive awareness to develop, select, and apply strategies that can enhance their comprehension of text.

Typical poor readers rarely prepare before reading. They often begin to read without setting goals. They seldom consider how best to read a particular type of text.[13]

During reading, poor readers may have difficulty decoding, and so have difficulty reading the words of their texts accurately. In addition, some poor readers read too slowly, or lack fluency. As a result of their slow, labored reading, they often do not comprehend much of what they read, and the attention they have to give to figuring out the words keeps them from understanding the text's message.[14]

All too often poor readers lack sufficient background knowledge about the topic of a text. They may have trouble connecting the ideas of a text. They often are not familiar with the vocabulary they encounter, and have trouble determining word meanings. Further, even when poor readers possess relevant background knowledge, they frequently are not able to activate it to help them understand what they read.

Some poor readers also are unaware of text organization. They do not know enough about the organizational structure of narratives or the various organizational structures of expository texts to help them read and understand.

After reading, poor readers typically do not think about or reflect upon what they have read. They almost never seek out additional information about a topic.

The cumulative effect of these difficulties is that poor readers often lose confidence in their ability to read. Because reading is difficult for them, poor readers cannot and do not read widely. As a result, they are exposed to much less text than are good readers and so receive much less practice reading. Further, the practice they do receive is often frustrating, because many of the texts they are asked to read are too difficult for them.[15]

The question then is: How can classroom reading instruction help poor readers—indeed, all students—become more like good readers? Research suggests that the answer may lie in providing students with instruction that both teaches them the comprehension strategies that work so well for good readers, and helps them to develop the necessary metacognitive awareness of how and when to use these strategies.

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13 Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995.

14 Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print.* Cambridge MA: MIT Press.

15 Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (1998). What reading does for the mind. *American Educator, 22,* 8–15.

What Are the Key Comprehension Strategies to Teach?

Studies on good readers have identified a number of comprehension strategies to be highly useful. These strategies range from the simple to the complex. From the array of strategies examined by researchers, the following strategies have been shown to be especially helpful and to lend themselves particularly well to instruction.[16]

Activating and Using Background Knowledge

This strategy requires readers to activate their background knowledge and to use that knowledge to help them understand what they are reading. **Background knowledge** is made up of a person's experiences with the world (including what he or she has read), along with his or her concepts about how written text works, including word identification, print concepts, word meaning, and how text is organized. Research has established that readers' existing knowledge is critical for them to comprehend what they read.[17]

Schema theory is one of the most important contributions made by cognitive scientists to the understanding of how comprehension works.[18] This theory is based on how people organize and activate their knowledge.

According to schema theory, as people learn about the world, they develop a large network of knowledge structures, or **schemas,** with each schema connected to many others. These schemas grow and change as a person acquires new information through experience and reading. For example, a very young child's schema for *dog* might contain only her or his understanding of the family pet—something white, furry, and fun to play with. As the child gains more experiences with a variety of dogs in a variety of settings, the dog schema will expand and be refined. It may connect to other schema—types of dogs; colors of dogs; foods dogs eat; places where dogs stay when the family is on vacation; dangerous dogs; who veterinarians are; and locations of important dog shows.

When they applied schema theory to reading comprehension, cognitive scientists found that good readers constantly connect their background knowledge to the new knowledge they encounter in a text. In fact, they appear to activate a schema as soon they begin to read. The initial schema then activates others, thus directly affecting how readers understand and react to a text.[19]

Schemas that are related to text organization are especially important to comprehension. Having knowledge of a text's organization improves students' understanding of that text.[20]

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16 Dole et al., 1991.

17 Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading. In P. D. Pearson, R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, & P. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255–292). New York: Longman.

18 Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Anderson, R. C., Reynolds, R. E., Schallert, D. L., & Goetz, E. T. (1977). Frameworks for comprehending discourse. *American Educational Research Journal, 14,* 367–382.

19 Pichert, J. W., & Anderson, R. C. (1977). Taking different perspectives on a story. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 69,* 309–315.

20 Armbruster, B. B., Anderson, T. H., & Ostertag, J. (1987). Does text structure/summarization instruction facilitate learning from expository text? *Reading Research Quarterly, 22,* 331–346.

Generating and Asking Questions

This strategy involves readers asking themselves questions throughout the reading of a text. The ability of readers to ask themselves relevant questions as they read is especially valuable in helping them to integrate information, identify main ideas, and summarize information. Asking the right questions allows good readers to focus on the most important information in a text.[21]

Generating good questions may also lead readers to focus on problems with comprehension and to take actions to deal with these problems.[22]

Making Inferences

This strategy requires readers to evaluate or draw conclusions from information in a text. Authors do not always provide complete descriptions of, or explicit information about, a topic, setting, character, or event. However, they often provide clues that readers can use to "read between the lines"—by making inferences that combine information in the text with their background knowledge.

It has been shown that when readers are taught how to make inferences, they improve their abilities to construct meaning. Indeed, research indicates that the ability to make inferences is crucial to successful reading.[23]

Predicting

This strategy involves the ability of readers to get meaning from a text by making informed predictions. Good readers use predicting as a way to connect their existing knowledge to new information from a text, to get meaning from what they read.[24] Before reading, they may use what they know about an author to predict what a text will be about. The title of a text may trigger memories of texts with similar content, allowing them to predict the content of the new text.

During reading, good readers may make predictions about what is going to happen next, or what ideas or evidence the author will present to support an argument. They tend to evaluate these predictions continually, and revise any prediction that is not confirmed by the reading.

Summarizing

This strategy involves the ability of readers to pull together, or synthesize information in a text so as to explain in their own words what the text is about. Summarizing is an important strategy because it can enable readers to recall text quickly. It also can make readers more aware of text organization, of what is important in a text and of how ideas are related.[25]

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21 Wood, E., Woloshyn, V. E., & Willoughby, T. (1995). *Cognitive strategy instruction for middle and high schools.* Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.

22 Pressley, M., Symons, S., McGoldrick, J. A., & Snyder, B. L. (1995). Reading comprehension strategies. In M. Pressley & V. E. Woloshyn (Eds.), *Cognitive strategy instruction that really improves children's academic performance. Cambridge,* MA: Brookline Books.

23 Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Hansen, J., & Pearson, P. D. (1983). An instructional study: Improving the inferential comprehension of fourth grade good and poor readers. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 75,* 821–829.

24 Gillet, J. W., & Temple, C. (1994). *Understanding reading problems: Assessment and instruction* (4th ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

25 Honig, W., Diamond, L, & Gutlohn, L. (Eds.). (2000). *Teaching reading sourcebook for kindergarten through eighth grade.* Novato, CA: Arena Press; National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Effective summarizing of expository text may involve such things as condensing the steps in a scientific process, the stages of development of an art movement, or the episodes that led to some major historical event.

Effective summarizing of narrative text can involve such things as connecting and synthesizing events in a story line or identifying the factors that motivate a character's actions and behavior.

Visualizing

This involves the ability of readers to make mental images of a text as a way to understand processes or events they encounter during reading. This ability can be an indication that a reader understands a text. Some research suggests that readers who visualize as they read are better able to recall what they have read than are those who do not visualize.[26]

Visualizing is especially valuable when it is applied to narrative texts. In reading narratives, readers often can develop a clear understanding of what is happening by visualizing the setting, characters, or actions in the plot. However, visualizing can also be applied to the reading of expository texts, with readers visualizing steps in a process or stages in an event, or creating an image to help them remember some abstract concept or important name.[27]

Comprehension Monitoring

This involves the ability of readers to know when they understand what they read, when they do not understand, and to use appropriate strategies to improve their understanding when it is blocked.[28] Comprehension monitoring is a form of metacognition. Good readers are aware of and monitor their thought processes as they read. In contrast, poor readers "just do it."[29]

The strategies employed by good readers to improve understanding are called "repair" or "fix-up" strategies. Specific repair strategies include rereading, reading ahead, clarifying words by looking them up in a dictionary or glossary, or asking someone for help.[30]

In general, good readers use a variety of strategies such as the ones just discussed to construct meaning as they read. However, not all good readers use the same strategies; good readers tend to develop and practice those strategies that are most useful to them. Further, good readers are flexible in their strategy use: they switch from strategy to strategy as they read; they use different strategies with different kinds of texts.

The point is, because good readers have conscious control of their strategy use, they are able to make decisions about which strategies to use and when to use them. Most good readers do this with little or no explicit strategy instruction. Most students, however, can benefit greatly from organized, explicit instruction that teaches them to use specific strategies for understanding text.

The good news is that specific comprehension strategies can be taught and learned—and that their deliberate use by readers improves comprehension.[31]

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26 Pressley, G. M. (1976). Mental imagery helps eight-year-olds remember what they read. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 68,* 355–359.

27 Gambrell, L. B., & Bales, R. J. (1986). Mental imagery and the comprehension-monitoring performance of fourth- and fifth-grade poor readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 21,* 454–464.

28 National Reading Panel, 2000.

29 Dole et al., 1991; Palincsar & Brown, 1984.

30 Paris, S. C., Wasik, B. A., & Turner, J. C. (1991). The development of strategic readers. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 2, pp. 609–640). New York: Longman.

31 National Reading Panel, 2000.

What Is Effective Comprehension Instruction?

Effective comprehension instruction is instruction that helps students to become independent, strategic, and metacognitive readers who are able to develop, control, and use a variety of comprehension strategies to ensure that they understand what they read. To achieve this goal, comprehension instruction must begin as soon as students begin to read and it must:

- be explicit, intensive, and persistent;
- help students to become aware of text organization; and
- motivate students to read widely.

Explicit, Intensive, Persistent Instruction

To become good readers, most students require explicit, intensive, and persistent instruction.[32] In explicit comprehension strategy instruction, the teacher chooses strategies that are closely aligned with the text students are reading. The teacher models and "thinks aloud" about what a given strategy is and **why** it is important, helps students learn **how, when,** and **where** to use the strategy, and gives students opportunities to apply the strategy on their own.

Modeling is followed by **practice,** guided by the teacher, who works with students to help them figure out how and when to use the strategy themselves. As students read, the teacher provides **feedback** and engages them in discussion. In subsequent lessons, the teacher asks students to **apply** the strategy on their own to other texts.[33]

Students are encouraged to plan before reading so that reading has a clear goal or purpose, to continually monitor their understanding during reading, and to apply repair strategies when breakdowns in understanding occur. To improve self-monitoring, the teacher may model for students how to do one or all of the following:

- think about what they already know before they start reading and during reading;
- be aware of whether they understand what they are reading;
- employ strategies to identify difficult words, concepts, and ideas;
- ask themselves: "Does this make sense?"; and
- be aware of how a particular text is organized.

One of the most important features of explicit instruction is the teacher's gradual release to students of responsibility for strategy use, with the goal that students apply strategies independently. However,

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32 Pearson, P. E., & Gallagher, M. C. (1983). The instruction of reading comprehension. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 8,* 317–344; Rosenshine, B., & Stevens, R. (1984). Classroom instruction in reading. In P. D. Pearson, R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, & P. B. Mosenthal (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 745–799). New York: Longman.

33 Honig et al., 2000.

teachers do not ask students to work on their own until the students have demonstrated that they understand a strategy and how and when to use it.[34]

Awareness of Text Organization

Text organization refers to the physical patterns and literary conventions of a particular text structure, or genre. The ability to identify and take advantage of text organization can contribute to students' comprehension.[35]

The two major text structures, **narrative** and **expository,** place different demands on readers' comprehension.

Narrative Text. Broadly defined, narrative text tells a story. It is found in the form of short stories, folktales, tall tales, myths, fables, legends, fantasies, science fiction—even in the reporting of news stories or in biographies and autobiographies. The narrative structure most often features a beginning, a middle, and an ending. It most often also features clear story elements, or **story grammar,** including:

- characters,
- settings,
- themes,
- a central problem, or conflict,
- a sequence of events that form a story line, or plot, and
- a resolution to the conflict.

Helping students learn to identify recurring story grammar elements provides them with a story schema. When they encounter a new narrative text, students can then call on this story schema to make predictions about what might happen in the story, to visualize settings or characters, or to summarize plot events.

Instructional practices that facilitate students' understanding of narrative text include:

- focusing discussions on story elements and encouraging students to relate story events and characters to their own experiences;
- encouraging students to compare the structure of one story to that of other stories they have read; and
- preparing visual guides, such as story maps of the structure of a story, to help them recall specific story elements.

Expository Text. Broadly defined, **expository text** is factual. Its primary purpose is to inform, explain, or persuade. Examples of expository texts are textbooks, biographies and autobiographies, newspapers, diaries, journals, magazines, brochures, and catalogues.

Most of the reading students do throughout their schooling—indeed, throughout their lives—will involve expository text. Without an understanding of the organization of such text, students often have difficulty understanding what they read. Unlike a narrative, an expository text has no familiar story line to guide students' reading. To read expository texts successfully, students must learn that authors may

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34 Dole et al., 1991.

35 Dickson, S. V., Simmons, D. C., & Kame'enui, E. J. (1998). Text organization: Research bases. In D. C. Simmons & E. J. Kameenui (Eds.), *What reading research tells us about children with diverse learning needs: Bases and basics.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

use a variety of structures to organize their ideas, including cause and effect or compare and contrast relationships, time and order sequences, and problem-solution patterns. Indeed, students need to know that authors may use some or all of these structures in any given chapter or section of a text.

Students also need to learn that expository text can differ from narrative text in the way it is presented on a page. For example, expository text may be organized by means of text headings and subheadings, and may contain extensive graphics, such as tables, charts, diagrams, and illustrations.

Instructional practices that facilitate students' understanding of expository text include helping them learn how to:

- chunk information in a text by grouping related ideas and concepts;
- summarize important information in a text by grouping related ideas and concepts;
- integrate information in a text with existing knowledge;
- apply information in a text to real-world situations;
- interpret and construct graphics such as charts, tables, and figures;
- synthesize information from different texts; and
- develop presentations about the text.

Motivation to Read Widely

Motivating students to read widely is integral to comprehension instruction. Motivation plays an important part both in helping students learn to read and in promoting higher levels of literacy.[36] Wide reading experiences enhance students' abilities to comprehend an increasingly wider array of text types and texts of increasing difficulty.

It is no surprise that students who are good readers read a great deal—both in school and on their own. They read a variety of texts for a variety of purposes—to learn, to keep informed, to satisfy curiosity, and to entertain themselves.

The reading experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of students determine the ways in which they perceive the purpose of reading and value its benefits.

Instructional practices to promote students' motivation to read widely include:

- providing daily opportunities for students to read both self-selected and teacher- and peer-recommended texts;
- providing frequent opportunities for both student- and teacher-led discussions of what students are reading;
- organizing cooperative learning groups in which students can discuss what they read, and help each other choose the strategies that are most appropriate for a specific text;
- encouraging students to read so as to learn about a concept or topic that is meaningful to them;
- involving students actively in reading-related activities;
- encouraging for students to read independently; and
- providing opportunities for students to choose from texts that reflect different genres and reading levels.

36 See, e.g., Turner, J. C., & Paris, S. G. (1995). How literacy tasks influence children's motivation for literacy. *The Reading Teacher, 48,* 662–675.

Instructional Procedures That Promote Comprehension

As part of reading comprehension instruction, some of the following instructional activities and procedures may be used. Based on research and effective practice, the activities and procedures are intended to help students learn how to coordinate and use a set of key comprehension strategies as they read a variety of texts.

General Instructional Activities

To correspond with a typical reading lesson, comprehension strategy instruction can be organized into a three-part framework, with specific activities used before, during, and after reading. Providing instruction such as that in the following example allows students to see, learn, and use a variety of comprehension strategies as they read.

Note, however, that the framework is a general one and represents an array of strategies. All of the strategies in this framework do not have to be used with every text or in every reading situation.

Before Reading

Before reading, the teacher may:

- Motivate students through activities that may increase their interest—book talks, dramatic readings, or displays of art related to the text—making the text relevant to students in some way.
- Activate students' background knowledge important to the content of the text by discussing what students will read and what they already know about its topic and about the text organization.

Students, with some help from the teacher, may:

- Establish a purpose for reading.
- Identify and discuss difficult words, phrases, and concepts in the text.
- Preview the text (by surveying the title, illustrations, and unusual text structures) to make predictions about its content.
- Think, talk, and write about the topic of the text.

During Reading

During reading, the teacher may:

- Remind students to use comprehension strategies as they read and to monitor their understanding.
- Ask questions that keep students on track and focus their attention on main ideas and important points in the text.
- Focus attention on parts in a text that require students to make inferences.

- Call on students to summarize key sections or events.
- Encourage students to return to any predictions they have made before reading to see if they are confirmed by the text.

Students, with some help from the teacher, may:

- Determine and summarize important ideas and supportive details.
- Make connections between and among important ideas in the text.
- Integrate new ideas with existing background knowledge.
- Ask themselves questions about the text.
- Sequence events and ideas in the text.
- Offer interpretations of and responses to the text.
- Check understanding by paraphrasing or restating important and/or difficult sentences and paragraphs.
- Visualize characters, settings, or events in a text.

After Reading

After reading, the teacher may:

- Guide discussion of the reading.
- Ask students to recall and tell in their own words important parts of the text.
- Offer students opportunities to respond to the reading in various ways, including through writing, dramatic play, music, readers' theatre, videos, debate, or pantomime.

Students, with some help from the teacher, may:

- Evaluate and discuss the ideas encountered in the text.
- Apply and extend these ideas to other texts and real life situations.
- Summarize what was read by retelling the main ideas.
- Discuss ideas for further reading.

Activities and Procedures for Use with Narrative Texts

The following are some examples of specific procedures that you can use to help students improve their comprehension of narrative texts.

Retelling

Retelling involves having students orally reconstruct a story that they have read. Retelling requires students to activate their knowledge of how stories work and apply it to the new reading. As part of retelling, students engage in ordering and summarizing information and in making inferences. The teacher can use retelling as a way to assess how well students comprehend a story, then use this information to help students develop a deeper understanding of what they have read.

The teacher uses explicit instruction, explaining why retelling is useful, modeling the procedure, giving students opportunities to practice, and providing feedback.

As the following chart shows, students' retellings should become more detailed as they become better readers.

Types of Retelling

Simple retelling

The student can:

- identify and retell the beginning, middle, and end of a story in order;
- describe the setting; and
- identify the problem and the resolution of a problem.

More complete retelling

The student can:

- identify and retell events and facts in a sequence;
- make inferences to fill in missing information; and
- identify and retell causes of actions or events and their effects.

Most complete retelling

The student can:

- identify and retell a sequence of actions or events;
- make inferences to account for events or actions; and
- offer an evaluation of the story.

Story Maps

Story maps are visual representations of the elements that make up a narrative. The purpose of a story map is to help students focus on the important elements of narratives—theme, characters, settings, problems, plot events, and resolution—and on the relationship among those elements.

Story maps to be used with younger students can be very simple—like the one that follows. These maps focus on a single element, such as the sequence of a simple plot. With older students, the maps can be more complicated, focusing on several elements.

As with retellings, the teacher uses explicit instruction to introduce the procedure, explaining why story maps are useful, then modeling the procedure, giving students opportunities to practice, and providing feedback.

Simple Story Map -

Story Title: _____

Beginning → Middle → End

The story starts when—   After that—   The story ends—

Story Frames[37]

Similar to story maps, story frames are visual representations that focus students' attention on the structure of a story and on how the content of the story fits its structure. Students use story frames as a way to activate their background knowledge of the elements of story structure and thus to organize and learn new information from a story.

Simple story frames require students to provide basic information about the sequence of events in a story:

The problem in the story is _____ .

This is a problem because _____ .

The problem is solved when _____ .

In the end _____ .

More complex frames might involve having students supply more detailed information by summarizing sequences of actions or events, or providing factual information to explain problems or motivations.

The procedure encourages students to interact with each other, asking questions, seeking clarifications, and sharing evaluations.

Again, as with story maps, the procedure can be simplified for use with younger students—it has been used successfully with grade-one students—or made more sophisticated for use with older students.

And again, as with the other procedures that have been described, the procedure is introduced through explicit instruction, with the teacher first explaining why story frames are useful, then modeling when and where to use them, guiding students through practice opportunities, and providing corrective feedback along the way.

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37 Cudd, E. T., & Roberts, L. L. (1987). Using story frames to develop reading comprehension in a first grade classroom. *The Reading Teacher, 41,* 75–79.

Directed Reading and Thinking Activity (DRTA)[38]

This procedure focuses on reading as a thinking process. Its intent is to teach children to make predictions throughout reading. Before reading, the teacher asks students to form a purpose for reading and to make predictions about the content of the story to be read.

During reading, the teacher stops students at strategic points in the story to ask students to make additional predictions and to verify, reject, or modify their purposes and predictions.

After reading, the teacher asks students to find and read aloud any part of the text that supports their predictions. Students must use the text to explain their reasoning and to prove whether their predictions are accurate or not.

Often teachers have students use charts such as the following to record their predictions and information from the text that proves the prediction's accuracy:

38 Stauffer, R.G. (1975). *Directing the reading-thinking process.* New York: Harper & Row.

Activities and Procedures for Use with Expository Text

The following are some procedures teachers use to help students improve their comprehension of expository texts.

K-W-L[39]

The purpose of the K-W-L procedures is to help students become good readers by learning to do the things that good readers do. Specifically it helps students learn to activate their background knowledge and to set purposes for reading.

KWL stands for determining What I Know, What I Want to Learn, and reviewing What I Have Learned. The following chart shows the steps in each part of the procedure:

What I Know	What I Want To Learn	What I Learned
Students discuss what they already know about a topic in the text they will be reading. The teacher has students list ideas and concepts related to the topic, then has them organize their ideas into broad categories.	Students discuss what they want to learn from reading the text and write down specific questions that they think may be answered in the text.	After reading the text, students discuss what they learned from it. They next write what they learned and answer student-generated questions about topics that were addressed in the text.

As they confirm the information in the **Know** column of the chart, students relate new information gained from their reading to knowledge they already have. As they generate questions for the **Want** column, they learn to set their own purposes for reading. Further, because they are reading to answer their own questions, students are more likely to actively monitor their comprehension. By putting information in their own words for the **Learned** column, students better understand what they know and what they do not know. Proceeding through these steps reinforces students' learning from text, involves them in doing what good readers do, and teaches them about their own reading processes.

39 Ogle, D. M. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text. *The Reading Teacher, 39,* 564–570.

Ogle, D. M. (1989). The know, want to know, learn strategy. In K. D. Muth (Ed.), *Children's comprehension of text: Research into practice* (pp. 205–233). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Questioning the Author[40]

The Questioning the Author procedure involves discussion, strategy instruction, and self-explanation. It encourages students to reflect on what the author of a selection is trying to say so as to build a mental representation from that information. Teacher and students work collaboratively, reading to resolve confusion and to understand the meaning of the text.

Focusing on a segment of text, the students respond to teacher questions such as the following:

- What is the author trying to say?
- What does the author mean by this?
- Why is the author saying this?
- What is the author getting at?

Through modeling, the teacher helps students to understand that some parts of a text can cause confusion and hinder comprehension. The teacher then discusses with students what they can do when comprehension problems occur. Students learn to "grapple" with text by emulating the teacher's questioning techniques.

Reciprocal Teaching[41]

Reciprocal Teaching is the name for a teaching procedure that is best described as a dialogue between the teacher and students. "Reciprocal" means simply that each person involved in the dialogue acts in response to the others. The dialogue focuses on a segment of a text the group is reading and is structured by the use of four comprehension strategies:

- asking questions,
- clarifying difficult words and ideas,
- summarizing what has been read, and
- predicting what might come next.

The teacher first models and explains how to apply a comprehension strategy, then gradually turns over the activity to the students. As the students become more competent, the teacher requires their participation at increasingly challenging levels.

Reciprocal Teaching provides students with opportunities to observe the value of applying strategies in their "real" reading. In addition, it allows the teacher to identify problems individual students might have in using strategies and to provide instruction that is geared to individual needs.

Transactional Strategy Instruction[42]

Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI) is a procedure that involves teaching students to construct meaning as they read by emulating good readers' use of comprehension strategies. TSI helps students (1) set goals and plan for reading, (2) use background knowledge and text cues to construct meaning

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40 Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., Hamilton, R. L., & Kucan, L. (1997). *Questioning the author: An approach for enhancing student engagement with text.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

41 Palincsar & Brown, 1984.

42   Brown, R., & Coy-Ogan, L. (1993). The evolution of transactional strategies instruction in one teacher's classroom. *The Elementary School Journal, 94,* 221–233; Pressley, M., El-Dinary, P.B., Gaskins, I., Schuder, T., Bergman, J., Almasi, L., & Brown, R. (1992). Beyond direct explanation: Transactional instruction of reading comprehension strategies. *The Elementary School Journal, 92,* 511–554.

during reading, (3) monitor comprehension, (4) solve problems encountered during reading, and (5) evaluate progress. To accomplish these tasks, students are taught to use a set of reading strategies. The strategies typically include:

- predicting based on prior-knowledge activation,
- generating and asking questions,
- clarifying,
- visualizing,
- relating background knowledge to text content, and
- summarizing.

Instruction occurs in small-group settings, with the strategies used as vehicles to coordinate dialogue about text as students read aloud. In their groups, students are encouraged to relate a text to their background knowledge, to summarize text, to describe any mental images they make during reading, and to predict what might happen next in the text. As students read aloud, they engage in and exchange individual interpretations of and responses to the reading.

The I-Chart Procedure[43]

The I-Chart Procedure is a technique that promotes critical thinking by encouraging students to apply reading strategies to learn from content-area texts.

The procedure is organized into three phases: Planning, Interacting, and Integrating and Evaluating. Students begin the Planning phase by using content-area texts to identify a topic of study. They then generate questions they want to answer as they read. Next, they construct a large chart, similar to the following, on which to record information as they gather it. They complete the Planning phase by collecting materials about the topic.

In the Interacting phase, students record their background knowledge of the topic, as well as other information they might gather. In addition, the teacher elicits and records relevant student questions. Finally, the students read and discuss, with teacher guidance, the sources of information.

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43 Hoffman, J. V. (1992). Critical reading/thinking across the curriculum: Using I-Charts to support learning. *Language Arts, 69,* 121–127.

Teacher Questions and Student Questions -

	Topic	1.	2.	3.	4.	Other Interesting Facts/Figures	Other Questions
Sources	**What We Know**						
	1.						
	2.						
	3.						
	4.						
	Summary						

In the final phase, Integrating and Evaluating, students make summaries for each question on the chart, incorporating information they have gathered. Next, they compare their summaries with background knowledge, clarify statements as necessary, and discuss new knowledge they have acquired. Finally, they locate new information to address any unanswered questions and report their findings to the group.

In this procedure, the teacher directs and models the phases of the procedure. Gradually, however, the teacher releases responsibility for managing the procedure to students. The goal is for the reader to satisfactorily apply these comprehension strategies independently.

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