

Comprehension Strategy Instruction: An Essential Element of Every Child's Learning Experience

The What and Why of Comprehension Strategy Instruction

- We have 35 years of research that shows that children who receive strategy instruction are far more successful at both fluency and comprehension than non-strategy peers
- Comprehension strategy research focused on what proficient readers do well, rather than studying what can go wrong for readers.
- Strategies help students become more active and reflective about their reading.
- Strategies become a common language teachers and children use to discuss books and learning.
- Strategy instruction helps us teach comprehension explicitly—making meaning is taught not caught!
- Strategies helps us raise expectations for all children.
- Strategies help students to read with depth and focus.
- Strategies help us focus our instruction on the reader, not just the text.
- Strategies help children build a vast bank of content area knowledge.

What are the comprehension strategies?

Monitoring for Meaning

- Knowing when, as a reader, you fully understand
- Knowing when, as a reader, you don't understand
- Knowing what you need to understand
- Knowing a wide range of fix-up strategies to repair comprehension

Use Schema

- Relate the new to the known - activate prior knowledge to help understand new information
- Make connections between texts, portions of the same text, the text and broader knowledge and the text and the reader
- Create schema using in a variety of ways if, as a reader, you realize that you lack necessary schema to understand a text or concept

Infer

Predict

- Make independent decisions about inexplicit meanings
- Create meaning to fill in gaps in the text
- Form opinions and defend them
- Draw conclusions and defend them

Ask Questions

- Generate questions before, during and after reading
- Use questions to focus on one aspect of the text, delve more deeply into its meaning and extrapolate to insights within and beyond the text
- Create Images
- Use images that emanate from all five senses to understand more vividly, more deeply
- Use images that emanate from the emotions to understand more vividly, more deeply

Determine Importance

- Make decisions about which ideas and/or concepts are most important in a text
- Articulate why those ideas are most important and what influenced you, as a reader, to focus on them
- Identify key themes and series of events in text
- Extrapolate to less explicit meaning or larger ideas within and beyond the text

Synthesize

- Be aware of the evolution of thought during reading - how your thinking changes as you read
- Create a cogent expression of key points after reading - this expression may contain information from a variety of sources outside the current text

What does Instruction Look Like?

Teachers model and think aloud to show:

- How proficient readers use one or more strategies while reading text, particularly challenging text;
- How proficient readers use comprehension strategies as thinking strategies across the curriculum;
- How readers interact, using the strategy language, with others and/or use writing to better understand the ideas in a given text;
- How readers and writers set and/or use a particular purpose for reading and writing;
- How readers enhance comprehension because of and in conjunction with the interpretations of others;
- readers assume a stance or bias with respect to the author, the text, other readers;
- readers create models (oral, written, artistic and dramatic) to show thinking about text.

The Nitty Gritty

- Select a strategy
- Study the key points related to the comprehension strategy -what will you teach during the strategy study?
- Read adult text; scrutinize your own use of the strategy
- Consult the gradual release of responsibility continuum for early phase preparation
- Select texts from which to think aloud - become very familiar with the text
- Begin thinking aloud, gradually inviting the children to participate through turn and talk and trio share
- Encourage the children to immediately apply the strategy in independent reading
- Confer to assess progress in using the strategy and to set new goals - use the book the child is reading or the book used in the think aloud
- Continue thinking aloud; use more difficult texts and new genres
- Plan on 4 - 6 weeks per strategy study

