

1993

## Strategies and practices to enhance reading comprehension in the elementary classroom

Lois Marie Collins Berger  
*University of Northern Iowa*

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

Copyright ©1993 Lois Marie Collins Berger

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Berger, Lois Marie Collins, "Strategies and practices to enhance reading comprehension in the elementary classroom" (1993). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2074.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2074>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

---

## Strategies and practices to enhance reading comprehension in the elementary classroom

### Abstract

The heart of reading instruction is comprehension. Today, reading is no longer considered a passive activity, but rather an activity that demands active engagement in the search for meaning.

"Comprehension occurs when the reader extracts meaning from the written text rather than when he merely names the words in the text" (Lapp & Flood, 1984, p. 274). Successful readers are actively involved in the comprehension process. They select and use a variety of reading strategies before they read, while they read, and after they read to help them construct meaning.

STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES  
TO ENHANCE READING COMPREHENSION IN THE ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

A Graduate Project  
Submitted to the  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Lois Marie Collins Berger

March 1993

This Graduate Project by: Lois Marie Collins Berger

Entitled: Strategies and Practices to Enhance Reading Comprehension in the Elementary Classroom has been approved as meeting the graduate project requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

May 3, 1993  
Date Approved

Junko Yokota  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Research  
Paper

May 3, 1993  
Date Approved

Junko Yokota  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Advisor

May 3, 1993  
Date Approved

Rick Traw  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Reader

May 3, 1993  
Date Approved

Peggy Ishler  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Head, Department of  
Curriculum and Instruction

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	<b>p. 5</b>
Purpose and Significance of the Review . . . . .	p. 7
Definition of the Terms . . . . .	p. 7
<b>CHAPTER II - REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b> . . . . .	<b>p. 9</b>
A Brief Overview of Research on Comprehension and Instruction . . .	p. 9
Using Existing Knowledge . . . . .	p. 12
Webbing and Semantic Mapping . . . . .	p. 13
KWL . . . . .	p. 15
Talking Drawings . . . . .	p. 18
Promoting Active Engagement With Text . . . . .	p. 20
Thinkalongs . . . . .	p. 20
Induced Imagery . . . . .	p. 22
ARC (Anticipation, Realization, Contemplation) . . . . .	p. 24
Estimate, Read, Respond, Question . . . . .	p. 25
Promoting a Fully Integrated Understanding . . . . .	p. 27
Drama . . . . .	p. 28
Sketch to Stretch . . . . .	p. 29
Readers Theatre . . . . .	p. 30

Discussion Web . . . . .	p. 32
KWL Plus . . . . .	p. 35
Expository Paragraph Frames . . . . .	p. 37
Retelling . . . . .	p. 39
Literature Response Logs . . . . .	p. 41
<b>CHAPTER III - CONCLUSION . . . . .</b>	<b>p. 45</b>
Summary . . . . .	p. 45
Implications . . . . .	p. 48
<b>REFERENCES . . . . .</b>	<b>p. 51</b>

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The heart of reading instruction is comprehension. Today, reading is no longer considered a passive activity, but rather an activity that demands active engagement in the search for meaning. "Comprehension occurs when the reader extracts meaning from the written text rather than when he merely names the words in the text" (Lapp & Flood, 1984, p. 274). Successful readers are actively involved in the comprehension process. They select and use a variety of reading strategies before they read, while they read, and after they read to help them construct meaning.

Traditionally, the passive view of comprehension was reflected in the basal reading programs' scope and sequence of comprehension skills. These skills were presented as isolated activities and practiced with small pieces of texts, usually workbook pages. However, a curriculum derived from today's cognitively oriented research emphasizes getting students actively engaged in the act of comprehending through the use of flexible, adaptable comprehension strategies.

In the schema theory view (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), both learning from text and learning from instruction are active processes of constructing meaning. No longer can teachers simply ask comprehension

questions and supervise completion of workbook pages. Teachers' "instructional actions must include sharing with students explicit information about how expert readers make sense of text and adjusting that information as instruction proceeds to accommodate students' emerging understandings and awareness" (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992). Teacher modeling and explaining of thought processes must replace the earlier focus on didactic telling.

Teachers must bring reading comprehension to their students' awareness by discussing the strategies of successful readers. Through effective modeling, teachers can help students to develop these strategies as they "think aloud" how they make sense of text and how they fix things up when what they are reading does not make sense. As a result of teachers modeling comprehension strategies in authentic situations, students can gain an insight on how and when to use these strategies. Students must be given many opportunities to utilize these strategies in order for them to internalize the processes.

While the pursuit of comprehension strategies seems a rather obvious goal of any literacy program, Tierney and Cunningham's review of instructional research programs (Tierney & Cunningham, 1984) found only a few attempts by teachers to develop these strategies.



### Purpose and Significance of the Review

The purpose of this paper was to describe effective comprehension strategies and practices that enhance comprehension in the elementary classroom. The following guide will serve as a resource for elementary teachers as they implement comprehension strategies and practices to help their students become active, self-directed readers.

### Definition of Terms

The following definitions of terms are relevant throughout this paper. The definitions are based on current understandings in the field of reading.

**authenticity** - how much like real-life reading the school texts and tasks are (Pearson & Fielding, 1991)

**comprehension** - an active interaction between a reader and a text resulting in the extraction of meaning (Lipson & Wixson, 1986)

**metacognition** - the conscious analysis of one's own learning processes and the purposeful application of strategies to facilitate them (Maggart & Zintz, 1992)

**schemata** - relevant prior knowledge which forms mental organizing structures that aid the reader in comprehending text (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992)

**strategies** - conscious and flexible plans that readers use to engage and comprehend text (Pearson, et al., 1992)

**think alouds** - a modeling process in which teachers verbalize their own thought processes while reading (Davey, 1983)

**transmediation** - the process of moving information from one communication system to another, such as moving from reading to drama or art (Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988)

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review begins by presenting an overview of the research on reading comprehension and instruction. Then the review focuses on instructional strategies that enhance three key comprehension processes utilized by expert readers: using existing knowledge, promoting active engagement with text, and promoting a fully integrated understanding.

#### A Brief Overview of Research on Comprehension and Instruction

The comprehension curriculum of the 1940's (Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992) was dominated by the teaching of specific skills. Comprehension was broken down into sets of subskills which, by the early 1950's, resulted in the development of the scope and sequence charts found in basal reading programs. The next three decades witnessed the expansion and refinement of skills as researchers tried to determine the "real" skills involved in reading comprehension. In the late 1970's, Durkin (1978-79) announced that there was nothing instructive about comprehension instruction. Comprehension instruction merely provided

opportunities for students to demonstrate whether they could perform various comprehension tasks by answering questions, completing workbook pages, and taking tests. Teachers rarely gave students guidance on how to carry out the comprehension skills. Durkin's paper (Durkin, 1978-79) provided the momentum for researchers to design and carry out "instructive" comprehension instruction (Pearson & Fielding, 1991).

Within the last decade, researchers and educators have reached a new understanding about the reading process. Reading comprehension is no longer thought of as a series of discrete skills to achieve comprehension, but rather comprehension is viewed as a complex process involving active interactions between readers and texts in various contexts for various purposes (Lipson & Wixson, 1986). The schema theory view of the reading process (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) views reading as an active process of constructing meaning by connecting prior knowledge with the new information encountered in the text. Readers build meaning through the continuous and recursive interaction between the text information and the reader's prior knowledge. This schema theory has provided the foundation for recent research on the comprehension processes of expert readers. Pearson, Roehler, Dole, and Duffy (1992) characterize active, thoughtful readers as readers who:

1. Use existing knowledge to make sense of texts.
2. Monitor their comprehension throughout the reading process.
3. Repair their comprehension once they realize they have failed to understand something.
4. Distinguish important from less important ideas in texts they read.
5. Synthesize information when they read.
6. Draw inferences during and after reading to achieve a fully integrated understanding of what they read.
7. Ask questions of themselves, the authors they encounter, and the texts they read.

A curriculum derived from the cognitively oriented research of the past decade is characterized by a range of flexible, adaptable reading strategies rather than as a scope and sequence of skills. Pearson, Roehler, Dole, and Duffy (1992) point out several key differences between strategy and skills instruction. First, strategies emphasize conscious plans under the control of the reader, while skills are used without conscious planning. Second, strategies emphasize the reasoning process readers go through as they comprehend text, while skills seldom involve such self-awareness. Third, strategies emphasize the adaptable nature of the

comprehension process, while skills imply automatic, consistent behavior.

The drill and practice instructional models have become inadequate for the new comprehension curriculum. As a result of the schema theory view (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), teachers have begun to guide students to discover the active processes of comprehension through modeling and thinking aloud.

### Using Existing Knowledge

Readers' background knowledge and experiences affect what they comprehend and remember from the text. Rosenblatt (1978) views comprehension as a two-way process involving the "transaction" between the readers and the text. What the readers bring to the text will affect the readers' interpretation of the verbal cues. The text activates the readers' past experiences with both literature and life. Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick, and Kurita (1989) point out a number of ways prior knowledge affects comprehension:

- 1) It creates expectations.
- 2) It permits inferential elaboration of the text. Using prior knowledge, the reader fills in informational gaps in the text.
- 3) After reading, prior knowledge facilitates recall and

reconstruction of text. New information is learned and remembered best when it is integrated with relevant prior knowledge.

Pearson and Fielding (1991) also stress the powerful role of background knowledge which sensitizes students to story structure, activates and builds on their knowledge and experiences related to story themes, and increases their opportunities to think inferentially.

Schema theory states that comprehension is directly related to what we already know and bring to a given situation. "When new information meshes with known information, it clicks into place, is more firmly based, and is also easier to remember because it makes sense to the learner"(Bromley, 1991, p. 4). "Poor readers need to be taught that they already have ideas in their heads, and that they can use those ideas to help them understand what they read" (Pearson, et al., 1992, p. 156).

**WEBBING AND SEMANTIC MAPPING.** Webbing and semantic mapping are teaching strategies which promote comprehension because they allow the new to be related to the known. "Children learn new words and concepts effectively when they can relate them to words or notions they already understand" (Olson & Gee, 1991, p. 301). Webbing, a graphic organizer, consists of a core concept or idea in the center of the web and

strands placed at various points around the core to represent different categories of information related to the core (Bromley, 1991). Similarly, in semantic mapping, words are graphically displayed in categories, showing their relationship to each other. Semantic mapping and webbing are effective strategies which encourage brainstorming and vocabulary development. Olson and Gee (1991) suggest the following steps for creating a semantic map:

- 1) The teacher selects a word representing the major subject or theme.
- 2) The teacher writes the word in the center of the board or chart paper.
- 3) Students brainstorm words related to the subject word.

Brainstorming can be done in small groups or as a whole group activity. Students help the recorder group the words into categories around the subject word.

- 4) Small groups share their lists with the whole class, helping the recorder to categorize them on the map. The teacher may add additional words to aid comprehension of the material.
- 5) The teacher facilitates discussion as words are included on the semantic map, noting aspects of the subject word.



6) After the map is completed and the passage read, new information can be added.

"The discussion and questions the teacher asks as the map is completed are the heart of the strategy" (Olson & Gee, 1991, p. 302).

Bromley (1991) also stresses the importance of active student participation and discussion, "webbing promotes comprehension because it builds personal involvement with text" (p. 4). Research and theory support the belief that generating illustrative material, such as semantic webs, enhances comprehension and learning (Bromley, 1991).

KWL. As a result of the research findings that stressed the importance of a readers' background knowledge and the concern that teachers were neglecting to activate readers' prior knowledge and interest, Ogle (1986) developed the KWL strategy. The KWL strategy provides teachers with a framework to elicit students' background knowledge and engage interest. Ogle believes in the need for group, as well as individual activities to help scaffold students' own ideas and interests. Thus, in the first two steps of the KWL strategy, the teacher and students engage in discussion followed by individual responses. In the final step, the students make their own personal responses both during and after reading, followed by group discussion.

KWL helps students combine new information with their background knowledge to build concepts and vocabulary. Specifically, KWL provides opportunities for students to brainstorm, preview vocabulary and concepts, develop interests and curiosities to provoke questions for reading, and discuss information acquired. The brainstorming which precedes the reading activates prior knowledge which will help students interpret what they read. The stimulation of questions and uncertainties is a key part of the brainstorming and helps students create a purpose for reading. Opportunities to discuss what we think we know help us discover what we don't know. Ogle (1986) contends that using KWL allows teachers to model the active thinking students should use when engaged in reading for information.

The steps in the KWL strategy include:

STEP K - WHAT WE KNOW. To facilitate the group process, and instill in students the concreteness of the steps, it is desirable for students to create a strategy sheet by dividing a paper into three columns as the teacher draws three columns on the board or chart paper. The columns are labeled *K (What We Know)*, *W (What We Want to Find Out)*, and *L (What We Learned and Still Need to Learn)*. Then

students brainstorm what they know about the topic and record the information in the first column. While recording the students' contributions, the teacher helps them organize their information into categories. To help students begin to think in categorical terms, teachers model the categorization process by thinking aloud while identifying categories and combining and classifying information. At other times, the teacher might find it worthwhile to relate what they will read to other topics they have learned and the types of information they acquired. "By inducing a sense of categorical expectations at the outset, KWL enhances awareness of content and how it might be structured" (Carr & Ogle, 1987, p. 627).

STEP W - WHAT WE WANT TO FIND OUT. As a result of the brainstorming and category development, students begin to develop interests and curiosities. Their interests and curiosities reflect their uncertainties, as well as a desire to learn more about certain aspects of the topic. Thus, the teacher points out gaps or disagreements in the recorded information and helps students create purposes for reading. After discussing various possible questions for the group, the teacher encourages students to formulate their own questions, recording them in the second column of their

strategy sheet. In this way, students develop personal commitment that will guide their reading.

STEP L - WHAT WE LEARNED. As students read, they can jot down answers to questions, as well as other information they don't want to forget. After reading, students can review what they have learned and complete the third column. If students discover that their reading did not answer all their questions, further reading to fulfill their desire to know should be stimulated by the teacher.

Ogle stresses going beyond the single selection to ensure the "clear priority of their personal desire to learn over simply taking in what the author has chosen to include" (Ogle, 1986, p. 567).

Informal evaluations of the KWL strategy by classroom teachers were very positive (Ogle, 1986). Teachers commented that information taught using the KWL strategy was well remembered by their students.

TALKING DRAWINGS. Suzanne McConnell (1993) has developed Talking Drawings, a strategy which can be used to develop and refine real purposes for reading, as well as assist learners to draw on, organize, and reflect on their prior knowledge. Talking Drawings involves translating mental images into simple drawings. The drawings provide a basis for

exploring students' understanding and serve as a means for aiding and enhancing comprehension. The steps used with Talking Drawings include:

- 1) What do we already know? Students activate their prior knowledge as they draw their impressions of a specific subject, character, or setting.
- 2) Talking about what we know. Students share drawings with at least two other students to look for and discuss similarities and differences between their drawings.
- 3) How do we know what we know? A whole group discussion focuses on what was known and how this was known.
- 4) Organizing what we know in words. A concept map is developed by the group to be referred to and added to by the students.
- 5) Reading to learn. Students read new information and relate it to previous understandings.
- 6) Integrating learning. After discussing the reading, students revise their drawings to reflect their new knowledge.
- 7) Sharing and comparing. Students share their before and after drawings, focusing on the alterations made and the reasons for their changes.

The drawings provide a visible record of learning which can be

reflected on, altered, and developed. McConnell (1993) points out that Talking Drawings helps students "to accept and value the knowledge and understandings of each person and to recognize, accept, and value the range of understandings within a group" (p. 269).

### Promoting Active Engagement With Text

Teachers must help students to become aware of the comprehension processes utilized as expert readers comprehend. Expert readers are actively reading and thinking about the text. They make predictions and alter them as they read, visualize, make connections with what they already know, ask questions of the text, and monitor their own comprehension so that fix-up strategies can be used when comprehension breaks down. "Readers need to know that they play a crucial role in the process of comprehension and that what they comprehend from text depends on their prior understandings and experiences" (Vaughan & Estes, 1986, p. 86). The following strategies foster active engagement with text, thus enhancing comprehension.

**THINKALONGS.** Thinkalongs (Glazer, in press) are a means for guiding readers to strategically read for meaning. The teacher thinks aloud while reading; sharing images, predictions, and reading strategies. The students

generate a list of the strategies the teacher uses. This list is used to create a checklist to stimulate student involvement and verify that readers were implementing the strategies. According to Davey (1983), "the modeling process is founded on the belief that if teachers describe their own thoughts about a text, the students will realize how and when to do the same" (p. 45).

The Thinkalongs steps include:

- 1) The teacher reads a story to the class, sharing images, predictions, and reading strategies aloud. Upon completion of reading and thinking aloud, the students generate a list of the strategies that they observed their teacher using.
- 2) The teacher creates a checklist from the students' list.
- 3) While the teacher reads another story, the students check those thinkalongs that they see their teacher using.
- 4) Finally, students model their thinkalongs in pairs, to each other, or as the leader in front of a group.

Thinkalongs help students realize that print should make sense, that comprehension requires active engagement with text, and that appropriate fix-up strategies must be applied when comprehension breaks down.

Davey (1983) points out five weak points in the reading strategies used by poor readers:

- 1) Poor readers do not make good predictions about the text before reading.
- 2) They do not develop images during reading.
- 3) They do not link prior knowledge with the new information from the text.
- 4) They do not monitor how well they're comprehending as they go along.
- 5) When they encounter a comprehension problem, they don't try to correct the problem.

Thus, as teachers implement Thinkalongs, their thinking aloud should reflect making predictions, describing visual images, showing how prior knowledge applies, and demonstrating fix-up strategies.

INDUCED IMAGERY. "People who are good readers and enjoy reading tend to rely heavily on their own imaginations to make books come alive" (Maggart & Zintz, 1992, p. 272). Induced Imagery is a reading strategy for guiding students to make mental images about what they read as a means of enhancing comprehension. Gambrell, Kapinus, and Wilson (1987) cite two great values for students' imaging. "They provide a framework for



organizing and remembering information from text, and when students induce images, they expend more energy for integrating information across text" (p. 639).

The steps for facilitating Induced Imagery include:

- 1) Teacher Modeling. The teacher explains to students that they will be making pictures in their mind. When readers make pictures in their minds of the characters and actions in the story, they can better understand and remember what they have read. The teacher models imaging by thinking aloud about a brief passage which includes description and detail. Students should be given a copy of the passage or the passage should be placed on the overhead.
- 2) Guided Practice. The teacher models imaging the first part of a passage and then discusses with students the nature of their images. Students share and compare their images, understanding that there may not be a single, correct image. However, some of the students' details will probably be similar.
- 3) Independent Practice. Students practice with additional passages that lend themselves to mental imagery. Students should be encouraged to use imagery in both content and leisure reading. Through modeling, students can learn to use other comprehension

strategies such as predicting, summarizing, and self-questioning to complement imaging.

Induced Imagery fosters active and engaged reading. The pictures students create in their minds help them to link their prior experiences to new ideas, thus building a richer schemata for enhancing comprehension.

ARC (ANTICIPATION/REALIZATION/CONTEMPLATION). ARC (Vaughan & Estes, 1986) is a comprehension strategy for study based on *anticipation*, *realization*, and *contemplation*. Students *anticipate* categories and concepts within a passage, *realize* the meaning of the passage through the use of a coded response system, and *contemplate* the relationships between their predictions and the new information read.

The procedure for facilitating the ARC strategy includes:

- 1) *Anticipation*. Students anticipate what they are going to read by becoming aware of what they know, believe, and feel about a topic. Prereading discussion activates prior knowledge and builds a proper mental set for reading. Students brainstorm everything they know about the topic and list their ideas on a chalkboard, overhead, or chart. Next, students categorize the information.
- 2) *Realization of Meaning*. Comprehension is the realization of meaning in text. Children silently read the passage and use a coded

response system to mark their text, thus promoting active engagement with the text. The coded response system should vary with the content of the selection and the purposes for which the students are reading. A coded response system utilized for a Social Studies lesson might include a check for ideas that a student knows, an exclamation point for ideas that the student agrees with, an x for ideas that disagree with the class list, a star for ideas that strike the student as very important, and a question mark for things that are unclear. New words could be circled and new and interesting information highlighted.

3) *Contemplation*. Contemplation is the postreading discussion which focuses on checking predictions from the Anticipation Stage and discussing new information learned. Students confirm correct predictions and change incorrect predictions to correct statements. They make individual or group lists of the facts they already knew and the ideas that are new.

ESTIMATE, READ, RESPOND, QUESTION. ERRQ (Cairney, 1990) requires active engagement with text as students link new information with background knowledge. During ERRQ, readers actively engage in a

recursive process of reading, writing, and talking. The steps of this strategy are:

- 1) Scan the text by looking at the subheadings, illustrations, and diagrams, and reading the first few sentences of several sections. Estimate what the text is about. Brief comments are written down on the top of the first page.
- 2) Read the whole text through. Cairney (1990) points out "that as the text is read it is important to think of ideas it triggers, previous texts that have been read or seen, images that come to mind, ideas they find hard to understand or agree with, and so on" (p. 75).
- 3) Respond to the text by sharing your thoughts during reading. If there is no one to share your ideas with, the ideas may be written down and shared later or reread to reflect upon one's reading.
- 4) The last step is self-questioning. Questions such as, "What was it about?", "What was its big idea?", and "What am I still puzzled about?" monitor comprehension through active interaction between the text and reader. Through self-questioning the readers discover their own understanding. Students can use this strategy in pairs; individually; or group sharing after estimating, reading individually,

responding as a group and pooling questions. With some changes, ERRQ can be adapted for narrative texts, as well.

### Promoting a Fully Integrated Understanding

Readers deepen and extend their interpretations of literature when they are given many opportunities to respond to literature in a variety of ways over a period of time. Teachers should provide opportunities for both verbal and nonverbal responses. Transmediation is a process of moving information from one communication system to another (Harste, Burke, & Short, 1988). As students create new forms of expression through the arts, they reflect on what they know, generate new meanings, and expand existing ones. Transmediation is the essence of literacy (Harste et al., 1988). It offers students important scaffolding, a frame of reference for assimilating new information. Transmediation facilitates building and sharing meanings.

Students explore the meanings of text through the arts in drama, Sketch to Stretch (Harste, et al., 1988) and Readers Theatre. As a result of transmediation, these practices enhance student understanding and motivate interest in interpretation. Students discover new meanings and expand their understandings of what they have read as they move from

reading to discussing and writing. The oral language opportunities provided in Retellings, the Discussion Web (Alvermann, 1991), and Expository Paragraph Frames stimulate thinking as students engage in conversation about what they have read. Writing enhances comprehension as students reflect on what they have learned and express what they have learned in their own words. KWL Plus (Carr & Ogle, 1987), Expository Paragraph Frames, and Literature Response Logs extend the meaning of the text through writing.

**DRAMA.** In whole group dramatics, students portray body movement and sound effects as their teacher reads a story. Students become sensitive to the description used in the story as they really "feel" such things as the scorching sun or icy wind.

Small groups of students can bring literature to life through dramatic interactions which give them the opportunity to use actions and sounds to communicate their understanding. Students find joy in dramatizing, so an audience is unnecessary. "Transmediation occurs as they translate their knowledge into motion and verbal interpretation" (Hoyt, 1992, p. 581).

After dramatic activities, students can be encouraged to retell a story through pictures or print. The students' retellings often reflect

specific details about the setting and mood, as a result of the dramatic interaction. Hoyt (1992) points out that the combination of drama, body movement, and discussion lays a strong foundation for writing and helps students verify their information through several communication systems before committing it to print.

SKETCH TO STRETCH. "Classrooms that offer children a variety of communication systems facilitate learning in ways that stimulate the imagination, enhance language learning, and deepen understanding" (Hoyt, 1992, p. 584). Sketch to Stretch is a strategy which encourages students to go beyond the literal understanding of what they've read, as they explore the meaning of the text through their drawing.

Students are divided into small groups of four or five. After reading a story, poem, or informational selection, students think about what they've read and sketch their own interpretations. Students should be reminded that there are many ways to capture the meaning of the text. "Often as students draw, they generate new insights of their own" (Harste et al., 1988, p. 353).

The teacher should model Sketch to Stretch by creating a personal sketch on the overhead or chalkboard, emphasizing how the sketch helped to organize and explain what was read rather than the artistic qualities of

the sketch itself. Sketching helps students to clarify, reflect, and consider relationships before students share their information verbally (Hoyt, 1992).

Students share their sketches with the other members of their group. Each group member examines the sketches and explains what they think the artist is trying to express. After all the members of the group have given their interpretations, the artist's own personal interpretation is explained. The artist notes what the sketch represents and its relationship to the text, as well as the personal meanings that were constructed. "This verbal explanation becomes more important to extending comprehension than the text itself" (Shanklin & Rhodes, 1989, p. 498). Through group interaction, students are exposed to a variety of interpretations which often result in students revising and extending their original text (Hoyt, 1992). To conclude this activity, each group selects one sketch to share with the entire class using the overhead projector. Again, students share their interpretations of the sketch before the artists and their group members share their interpretation.

**READERS THEATRE.** Readers Theatre is an instructional strategy which encourages children to explore text comprehension through drama. Shanklin and Rhodes (1989) state that, "Developing a Readers Theatre



script from a text encourages children's divergent and elaborative responses to text, their decisions as to what is important to portray, and their organization of meaning" (p. 499). As students design their scripts, they reread and rethink about the text, extending their comprehension.

The readers bring the characters to life through their voice and gestures, capturing the attention of their listeners. Listeners are led to imagine the characters, scenes, and action of a story, thus extending their understanding. As a thinking, reading, writing, speaking, and listening experience, Readers Theatre offers many opportunities for sharing and extending comprehension.

Readers Theatre involves students from start to finish when students are asked to create their own text. Hoyt (1992) points out, "While there are many published scripts which turn favorite literature selections into Readers Theatre, the most effective scripts are designed by students" (p. 582). The lesson involves four basic steps:

- 1) Read the story. Students read the entire story from which a selection will be taken, considering the story's theme and the scene that would best capture the spirit of the story.
- 2) Transform the story into script. Students reread the portion selected and mark the lines that need to be kept so that the scene

can be understood by the audience. Unnecessary descriptions and narration should be omitted. Students write in narrator speeches to bridge gaps, show lapses of time, or summarize action. At the beginning of the scene, the characters should be introduced, usually by the narrator. The final version of the script should be typed. The characters' names should precede their lines of dialogue. A description of the tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions can be placed in parentheses following the character's name to assist the reader in interpreting the script. A copy of the script for each character should be prepared by highlighting the lines spoken.

3) Rehearsal. The readers practice the script focusing on reading rate, intonation, and emphasis on the meaning bearing cadences of language to bring the print to life. Readers Theatre demands stricter attention to voice since there is limited physical action and little or no dependence on props and costumes.

4) Performance. Students perform the script for an audience by reading it.

**DISCUSSION WEB.** The Discussion Web (Alvermann, 1991) is a special kind of graphic aid which helps students to look at both sides of an issue before drawing conclusions. It incorporates all four of the language

arts - reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The Discussion Web requires students to work in cooperative learning groups because group discussions stimulate thinking.

The five step procedure for completing a Discussion Web is:

- 1) Prepare students to read a selection by activating prior knowledge, introducing vocabulary, and setting purposes for reading.
- 2) After students have read the selection, introduce the Discussion Web. A question in which pros and cons can be discussed is written in a box centered in the middle of the paper. Columns on either side of the question allow students to list the pros and cons. Students in workable partnerships engage in critical thinking as they look at both sides of an issue. For example, Alvermann (1991) stimulates thinking with the question, "Did Willy deserve to win?" after students read "The Race" in Stone Fox (Gardiner, 1980). Students take turns jotting down key words or phrases in the YES and No columns which reflect the reasons they believe Little Willy did or did not deserve to win the race. Students should be encouraged to develop an equal number of pros and cons.
- 3) After students have had a sufficient amount of time to jot down their reasons, the partners pair up with a different set of partners.

The new group of four students work toward consensus by eliminating inconsistencies and contradictions in their thinking.

The group of four decide which ideas a spokesperson from the group will share in whole class discussion.

4) Select a group spokesperson or allow the groups to select their own. The group spokesperson reports the reason which best supports their group's conclusion. Spokespersons should also mention any dissenting viewpoints in their groups.

5) As a follow-up activity, individual students write their answers to the Discussion Web question. Students should be encouraged to include their own ideas, as well as reflect on ideas expressed by others.

The Discussion Web can be modified and adapted to fit the needs of different levels, content areas, and objectives. It can function as a prereading strategy or a postreading strategy. Alvermann (1991) suggests the possibility of using the Discussion Web to stimulate students' predictions about Stone Fox by changing the question to "What do you think will happen next?" The two columns could be labeled PREDICTION 1 and PREDICTION 2. After determining their predictions, students could brainstorm reasons, based on previous events in the story, for supporting

one prediction over another. Teachers have commented on the flexibility of the Discussion Web and pointed out that "students don't always reach a conclusion, sometimes because of time limitations and other times because of teachers' concerns for children's feelings" (Alvermann, 1991, p. 98). After students have had experiences using Discussion Webs, they take ownership of the strategy and construct their own questions for the webs.

The Discussion Web provides opportunities in which students examine more than one point of view, enriching and refining their understanding of what was read. By talking with partners and pairs of partners prior to engaging in whole class discussion, active student participation is encouraged.

KWL PLUS. Carr and Ogle (1987) developed the KWL Plus strategy, which added mapping and summarizing to the original KWL strategy. The expanded strategy which engages students in writing through concept mapping and summarizing, expands independent learning by helping students to think critically about information as they organize, restructure, and apply what they've learned.

Using their KWL strategy sheet, students can easily produce maps. First, students categorize the information listed under L by asking

themselves what each statement describes. Students use the passage title as the center of the map and the categories developed from the KWL strategy become the map's major concepts. The information categorized on the strategy sheet becomes the supporting data on the map.

The second technique for supplementing KWL is writing a summary. Preparing a summary requires students to reflect on what was learned and to express the information they have learned in their own words. "KWL Plus improves students' summarization skills because important information has been selected during KWL and organized and intergrated during mapping" (Carr & Ogle, 1987, pp. 629-630). Students can use the map to organize the information for the summary. The categories on the map can be numbered to indicate sequence of the summary. Each category corresponds to a paragraph topic, and students can use the supporting details in each category to expand their paragraphs.

Carr and Ogle (1987) point out that "providing for transfer of learning is crucial to the ultimate usefulness of KWL Plus" (p. 630). It is important for students to develop the ability to transfer, and thus become independent learners, as teachers gradually shift the responsibility for implementing the strategy to the students.

EXPOSITORY PARAGRAPH FRAMES. "When children retell what they have read, comprehension is improved" (Olson & Gee, 1991, p. 304).

Expository paragraph frames provide students with opportunities for retelling. Expository paragraph frames help students develop a schemata for expository paragraph structures which enhance their retellings. Cudd and Roberts (1989) state that expository paragraph frames can be used to "review and reinforce specific content and to familiarize students with the different ways in which authors organize material in order to inform" (p. 392). A knowledge of text structure aids comprehension.

Ideas in informational text can be arranged in a number of ways. Piccolo (1987) suggests six expository text patterns an author may choose to express ideas. *Descriptive patterns* which present a specific topic followed by its attributes; *enumeration patterns* which state the main idea followed by supporting details that do not necessitate a definite sequence; *sequence patterns* which state a main idea supported by details that need to be presented in a specific order; *cause/effect patterns* in which an action and its effect are revealed; *comparison/contrast patterns* which show how subjects are either alike, different, or both; and *problem/solution patterns* where a problem is introduced and followed by a solution.

Olson and Gee (1991) suggest the following steps for implementing expository paragraph frames:

- 1) The teacher creates a paragraph frame based on an informational selection. The frame uses a cloze procedure which provides sentence starters consisting of specific signal words or phrases and blanks within the frame for students to add information. A frame can be organized around one of the expository text patterns listed above using signal words for the particular text pattern.
- 2) The students read the selection, after which they retell what they have read to a partner.
- 3) The teacher gives students a paragraph frame and asks them to fill in the missing information. Students develop a well-structured paragraph that reinforces the important information from the selection.

Cudd and Robert's (1989) model for the expository frame does not include retelling. Their model stresses the use of writing to enhance comprehension. Like the model presented by Olson and Gee (1991), starters which include specific signal words or phrases are provided. Students complete the paragraph frames which follow one of the organizational patterns commonly used in informational writing. Cudd and



Roberts (1989) have found success with reaction frames, which are an offshoot of the enumeration frame. The reaction frame gives students the opportunity to react to what they have learned. "Completing a reaction frame helps them understand that they have, indeed, learned something about a topic, that ideas often need to be discarded or revised after reading new information, and that content learned or deemed important often varies from individual to individual" (Cudd & Roberts, 1989, p. 396). Research suggests that information presented with illustrations is recalled more completely, consequently the final step is to illustrate the paragraph frame.

Expository paragraph frames provide students with a structured way of using writing as a tool for learning. Writing facilitates comprehension and retention, as well as introduces students to various organizational structures authors use to convey meaning.

RETELLING. Story retelling has traditionally been viewed as an effective strategy for evaluating comprehension. However, Morrow's (1985) studies show the usefulness of retellings to improve story comprehension. Retellings help children learn about typical story structure, as well as provide a tool for planning and organizing their own comprehension when they listen to or read stories.

Oral language opportunities which engage students in conversation about what they read appear to enhance reading comprehension. "Retelling is a strategy which requires the reader to construct a personal rendition of the text by making inferences based on the original and their own prior knowledge" (Koskinen, Gambrell, Kapinus, & Heathington, 1988, p. 895).

A typical retelling activity involves having students work together in pairs. One partner becomes the storyteller who retells the important points of the story, while the other partner takes on the role of listener.

The steps to implement retellings include:

- 1) Share a rationale for retelling. Students need to know the purpose of the activity. Share with students that they will be retelling a story to develop storytelling skills and that retelling will also help them check to see if they understood what they read.
- 2) Model retelling. Teachers read a brief passage and then retell the passage, emphasizing the important parts.
- 3) Guide students' practice. Ask students to read a passage, keeping the important ideas and events in mind so that they can retell the story. Guide students in group retellings using question prompts before providing opportunities for partner retelling. Guided

questioning forces students to rethink the passage which can substantially improve retellings.

4) Allow for independent practice and application.

After students have become proficient at using the retelling strategy, they need to become aware that retelling is a strategy they can use when they want to better understand and remember what they have read. Tell students that they can retell stories "in their heads" as an independent strategy to help them remember what they've read.

LITERATURE RESPONSE LOGS. The Literature Response Log is a journal for writing down reactions to literature. It connects reading and writing, extends the meaning of the text, and gives readers ownership of the literacy experience. "Responding in writing to a question, impression, mood, or reaction generated by the reading seems to promote critical thinking" (Routman, 1991, p. 103). Students interact with the text, using their prior experiences and the passage to interpret and construct meaning.

Students may respond to open-ended questions, vocabulary, illustrations, or develop their own reflective response to the literature. When the Literature Response Log is used in whole class or small group discussion, "it encourages students to assume responsibility for the

discussion" (Routman, 1991, p. 105). Since students have already reflected on the questions, they build self-confidence and are more likely to participate in discussion.

When Literature Response Logs are introduced to students, teachers must model for students, by *thinking aloud and writing in front of them*, how they would respond to a question or would personally react to the text. The following strategies can be modeled for use with the Literature Response Log:

- 1) Respond to an open-ended question. The question should reflect the overall theme or feeling of the text. The question may call for prediction before reading, a reaction after reading, or a response during reading. One question is usually sufficient. Routman (1991) also points out that "the question should be genuine; that is, one right answer is not already in the teacher's head" (p. 107).
- 2) Reflect on your personal reactions while reading. The teacher thinks out loud, writing down the personal thoughts which occurred while reading. Familiarity with possible beginnings such as I was surprised by..., I noticed that..., and I didn't understand when..., helps students get started.

- 3) Choose several unknown vocabulary words. Teachers can model for students by choosing several words that they would like to know the meaning of. They write down the word, page number that the word was found on, and what they think the word means. Later during discussion, students can refer to the specific line in the text and utilize the context to determine the meaning.
- 4) Illustrate a part of the text. Allow time for artistic interpretation as another vehicle for response. Teachers can use the overhead projector to underline the parts of a paragraph depicting the story's setting that they would consider using in their illustration. This strategy directs the reader's attention back to the text in a careful, critical manner.
- 5) Examine the author's style and motives.
- 6) Free write. Students write anything they would like to about what they've read. To encourage personal response, teachers can model how the reader might begin with such "I statements" as I noticed or I disagree.
- 7) Imagine another point of view. Teachers can model writing a diary entry from the point of view of a story character, writing a

letter to a main character, or imagining if they were the main character and discussing what they would do.

8) Make up one or more questions for discussion. "Even primary grade students can be expected to formulate their own high-level, open-ended questions once the teacher has done lots of modeling" (Routman, 1991, p. 114).

9) Respond to a final question when the book is completed. "Broad-based open-ended questions encourage a variety of responses and are probably the highest-level questions teachers can ask. They encourage thinking on many levels, value students' background knowledge and experiences, and allow readers to go beyond the text in making meaning" (Routman, 1991, p. 117).

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION

This chapter begins by briefly summarizing the research on the teaching of comprehension in the elementary classroom. The chapter concludes with implications for comprehension instruction.

#### Summary

Current reading instruction has been greatly influenced by the schema theory based view of comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). Comprehension is viewed as a continuous and recursive interaction between the text information and the reader's existing knowledge or between the text and the reader.

A curriculum derived from today's cognitively oriented research emphasizes the use of flexible, adaptable comprehension strategies. Through modeling and the use of think alouds, teachers can share with students explicit information about how expert readers make sense of text. Students can be guided to understand when and why comprehension strategies are useful as teachers provide feedback at key points in the learning process.

The schema theory based view of comprehension has been the foundation for recent research on the comprehension processes utilized by expert readers. A comprehension curriculum based on this research should provide students with many opportunities to practice strategies which activate their existing knowledge, promote active engagement with text, and promote a fully integrated understanding.

Readers' background knowledge and experiences greatly influence how readers interpret what they've read and what they learn from reading. Teachers must model how they use their own existing knowledge to make sense of the text. They must provide strategies which encourage students to activate their own prior knowledge. Some suggested strategies include webbing and semantic mapping, KWL (Ogle, 1986), and Talking Drawings (McConnell, 1993). Webbing and semantic mapping allow students to relate the new to the known through graphically displayed words which show their relationship to each other. KWL (Ogle, 1986) provides a framework to activate students' background and interest. Talking Drawings (McConnell, 1993) activates students' prior knowledge as they draw their impressions of a specific subject, character, or setting.

Teachers must help students become aware of how expert readers are actively reading and thinking about the text. They must model, through



thinking aloud, the processes they use while reading. Thinkalongs (Glazer, in press), Induced Imagery, ARC (Vaughan & Estes, 1986), and ERRQ (Cairney, 1990) are strategies which foster active engagement with the text. In Thinkalongs (Glazer, in press), students create a list of strategies that they observe their teacher use while reading. The list serves as a checklist later, when students implement the reading strategies. Induced Imagery is a reading strategy for guiding students to make mental images about what they read to enhance comprehension. ARC (Vaughan & Estes, 1986) promotes active engagement with text through the use of a coded response system during silent reading. ERRQ (Cairney, 1990) promotes active engagement in reading as students share ideas that the text triggers, previous texts that have been read, images that come to mind, ideas that they question, and so on.

Transmediation promotes a fully integrated understanding as students create new forms of expression through the arts. Students explore the meanings of text through the arts in drama, Sketch to Stretch (Harste, Burke, & Short, 1988), and Readers Theatre. As students create new forms of expression, they reflect on what they know, generate new ideas, and expand existing ones.

Students discover new meanings and expand their comprehension of the text through discussing and writing. Retellings, the Discussion Web (Alvermann, 1991), and Expository Paragraph Frames provide oral language opportunities which stimulate thinking as students engage in conversation about what they have read. Writing extends the meaning of the text as students reflect upon what they have read and express what they have learned in their own words. KWL Plus (Carr & Ogle, 1987), Expository Paragraph Frames, and Literature Response Logs are some useful strategies which extend the meaning of the text through writing.

### Implications

Reading comprehension will continue to be the ultimate goal of reading instruction. Teachers must strive to provide the most effective instruction to enhance reading comprehension. This means that traditional reading teachers who have relied on the drill and practice model of instruction must begin to change. Teachers must learn to relinquish their role as deliverers of explicit instruction and become facilitators of learning. Teachers must reexamine the types of questions they ask, no longer relying on the "one correct answer only" often found

in the teacher's manual. They must learn to accept alternative interpretations of text that students can substantiate.

As a result of the impact of the schema theory view (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), teachers have begun to help students understand the active process of constructing meaning from the text through modeling and thinking aloud. Teachers should no longer assume that students know what goes on in the heads of expert readers. As teachers read with their students, loud thinking the cognitive processes they use to comprehend text, students will realize how expert readers predict, make connections with what they already know, visualize, ask questions of the text, and monitor their comprehension throughout the reading process so that fix-up strategies can be used when the text doesn't make sense.

Strategies can not be taught quickly. It is only through continued practice in authentic situations that students begin to understand the value of comprehension strategies and can eventually be expected to apply those strategies independently.

The literature includes a variety of effective strategies and practices. Readers of all ages should be given opportunities to engage in these strategies. Comprehension strategies are important for not only the expert reader, but the beginning reader as well. First graders' questions

will not reflect the sophistication of the expert readers' questions, but first graders can ask something, and what they ask will most likely be important to them.

Reading can and should be more enjoyable and rewarding for students than it often is. Thus, reading can no longer be equated with isolated skills on workbook pages. Teachers must be encouraged to provide students with a rich literature environment where there are many opportunities for comprehension strategies to be modeled and used in authentic situations. It is within this reading environment, that students will become excited about learning and begin to value reading for both enjoyment and knowledge.

While the research of the last decade has revealed much about the nature of comprehension and comprehension instruction, there is even more to learn. Research needs to continue to investigate which strategies are most useful to students, how students master particular strategies, and which strategies are most helpful in enhancing the comprehension of the slow learner. Researchers need to examine concurrently the social factors and cognitive outcomes of comprehension practices, looking at what is learned when students and teachers work together or when students work cooperatively, rather than alone on cognitive tasks.

## REFERENCES

- Alvermann, D. E. (1991). The discussion web: A graphic aid for learning across the curriculum. The Reading Teacher, 45(2), 92-99.
- Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), Handbook of reading research (pp. 255-292). White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.
- Bromley, K. D. (1991). Webbing with literature. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cairney, T. H. (1990). Teaching reading comprehension. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.
- Carr, E., & Ogle, D. (1987). KWL plus: A strategy for comprehension and summarization. Journal of Reading, 30(7), 626-631.
- Cudd, E. T., & Roberts, L. (1989). Using writing to enhance content area learning in the primary grades. The Reading Teacher, 42(6), 392-404.
- Davey, B. (1983). Think aloud-Modeling the cognitive processes of reading comprehension. Journal of Reading, 27(1), 44-47.
- Durkin, D. (1978-79). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. Reading Research Quarterly, 15, 481-533.
- Gambrell, L., Kapinus, B. A., & Wilson, R. M. (1987). Using mental imagery and summarization to achieve independence in comprehension. Journal of Reading, 30, 638-642.
- Glazer, S. M. (In press.) Reading comprehension: Helping children understand literature. New York: Scholastic Professional Books.
- Gardiner, J. R. (1980). Stone fox. New York: Harper & Row.
- Harste, J. C., Short, K. G., & Burke, C. (1988). Creating classrooms for authors. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.

- Hoyt, I. (1992). Many ways of knowing: Using drama, oral interpretations, and the visual arts to enhance reading comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 45, 580-584.
- Koskinen, P. S., Gambrell, L. B., Kapinus, B. A., & Heathington, B. S. (1988). Retelling: A strategy for enhancing students' reading comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 41(9), 892-896.
- Lapp, D., & Flood, J. (1984). Promoting reading comprehension: Instruction which ensures continuous reader growth. In J. Flood (Ed.). Promoting reading comprehension (pp. 273-288). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Lipson, M. Y., & Wixson, K. K. (1986). Reading disability research: An interactionist perspective. Review of Educational Research, 56(1), 111-136.
- McConnell, S. (1993). Talking drawings: A strategy for assisting learners. Journal of Reading, 36, 260-269.
- Maggart, Z. R., & Zintz, M. V. (1992). The reading process: The teacher and the learner. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown Communications, Inc.
- Morrow, L. M. (1985). Retelling stories: A strategy for improving young children's comprehension, concept of story structure, and oral language complexity. Elementary School Journal, 85, 647-661.
- Ogle, D. M. (1986). KWL: A teaching model that develops active reading expository text. The Reading Teacher, 39(6), 564-570.
- Olson, M. W., & Gee, T. C. (1991). Content reading instruction in the primary grades: Preceptions and strategies. The Reading Teacher, 45(4), 298-307.
- Pearson, P. D. & Fielding, L. (1991). Comprehension instruction. In R. Barr, M. L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), Handbook of reading research (pp. 815-860). White Plains, NY: Longman Publishing Group.

- Pearson, P. D., Roehler, L. R., Dole, J. A., & Duffy, G. G. (1992). Developing expertise in reading comprehension. In S. J. Samuels & A. Farstrup (Eds.), What research has to say about reading instruction (pp. 145-199). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Piccolo, J. (1987). Expository text structure: Teaching and learning strategies. The Reading Teacher, 40(9), 838-847.
- Pressley, M., Johnson, C. J., Symons, S., McGoldrick, J. A., Kurita, J. A. (1989). Strategies that improve children's memory and comprehension of text. The Elementary School Journal, 90(1), 3-32.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). The reader, the text, the poem. Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Routman, R. (1991). Invitations. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Shanklin, N. L., & Rhodes, L. K. (1989). Comprehension instruction as sharing and extending. The Reading Teacher, 42(7), 496-500
- Tierney, R. J., & Cunningham, J. W. (1984). Research on teaching reading comprehension. In P. D. Pearson (Ed.), Handbook of reading research (pp. 609-651). New York: Longman
- Vaughan, J. L., & Estes, T. H. (1986). Reading and reasoning beyond the primary grades. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.