

1989

## Prereading strategies and activities to improve reading comprehension in elementary school-aged students

Paula Dunham  
*University of Northern Iowa*

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

Copyright ©1989 Paula Dunham

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



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Dunham, Paula, "Prereading strategies and activities to improve reading comprehension in elementary school-aged students" (1989). *Graduate Research Papers*. 2176.

<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/2176>

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).

---

## Prereading strategies and activities to improve reading comprehension in elementary school-aged students

### Abstract

The dominating trend in reading research in the past two decades has focused on the study of reading as a process. Basic theoretical research replaced applied research even though many federally funded projects in the area of reading called for improvement of teaching strategies. Applied research was dismissed as unimportant and theorists rushed to define, build, and verify theories of the reading process (Vacca & Vacca, 1982).

PREREADING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE READING  
COMPREHENSION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED STUDENTS

A Research Paper  
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

Paula Dunham

July 1989

This Research Paper by Paula Dunham

Entitled: PREREADING STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO  
IMPROVE READING COMPREHENSION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED  
STUDENTS

has been approved as meeting the research paper  
requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in  
Education

Ned Ratekin

July 26, 1989  
Date approved

\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Research Paper  
Ned Ratekin

July 26, 1989  
Date approved

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Adviser

July 27, 1989  
Date approved

Marvin Heller

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Faculty Reader

Roger A. Kueter

July 27, 1989  
Date approved

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

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
CHAPTER I--INTRODUCTION.....	1
Recent Trends in Reading Comprehension Research.....	1
Purpose of the Paper.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	5
CHAPTER II--REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH.....	7
Purpose Setting.....	7
Student Motivation.....	8
Students' Prior Knowledge.....	9
Prereading Learning Activities and Strategies.....	11
Text-Centered Prereading Activities.....	13
Learner-Centered Prereading Activities.....	21
CHAPTER III--REVIEW OF PREREADING ACTIVITIES IN BASAL READERS.....	27
Purpose Setting in Basal Readers.....	28
Student Motivation in Basal Readers.....	30
Basal Reader Provision for Students' Prior Knowledge.....	31
Text-Centered Prereading Activities in Basal Readers.....	32

Learner-Centered Prereading Activities in Basal Readers.....	35
CHAPTER IV--CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING BASAL READER PROVISIONS FOR PREREADING ACTIVITIES.....	39
Suggestions for Further Research.....	45
REFERENCES.....	47

## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Recent Trends in Reading Comprehension Research

The dominating trend in reading research in the past two decades has focused on the study of reading as a process. Basic theoretical research replaced applied research even though many federally funded projects in the area of reading called for improvement of teaching strategies. Applied research was dismissed as unimportant and theorists rushed to define, build, and verify theories of the reading process (Vacca & Vacca, 1982).

Reading research in the 1970s can be characterized as an era in which methodology was questioned. New qualitative and naturalistic inquiry methods were developed which gave researchers alternative ways to study educational problems. For the first time researchers began an indepth investigation into the reading process which lead to a renaissance in research practices. While favorable consequences of these studies produced a means for educators to understand better and evaluate reading comprehension, Vacca and Vacca (1982) pointed out that an unfavorable consequence of these studies was the de-valuing of

reading instruction research. Goodman (1979) noted that "despite the importance of federal research funding and its justification in improvement of teaching and learning, few researchers are seriously interested in reading instruction" (p. 142).

Although reading research in the past has added much to our knowledge base of reading comprehension, it has only had a slight impact on improving actual teaching practices. Durkin (1978) reported that there was very little time spent on the teaching of reading comprehension in classrooms.

Today, society's push for improved public school education has driven the research pendulum back toward applied research instead of pure investigation into basic theories and reading processes. Current research continues to bridge the gap between basic and applied research in reading to meet better the needs of the practitioner. Pearson (1979) suggested that reading research should focus more on classroom-centered research, and that the knowledge acquired in those studies would lead to knowledge about the reading process. He concluded that all "too often we have assumed that we must settle issues of basic research before we can tackle issues of applied research . . . a delay in facing applied research questions may be inadvisable as well as unnecessary" (pp. 166-167).

Some reading researchers have taken Pearson's suggestions seriously, and moved toward studies in which the classroom teacher has an integral role in the research. The trends in reading research for the 80's better reflects the needs of teachers. More and more articles are being published that include practical suggestions for improved comprehension instruction in the classroom.

One area of reading research that reflects the needs of classroom teachers is prereading strategies and activities that describe numerous ways to prepare students to learn from printed materials. These activities are based on the principle that prereading preparation is essential for effective comprehension of text.

Today basal readers dominate reading instruction in the United States. In many cases they are the only guide for teaching reading in the elementary school classroom. This paper reviews current basals to discover if the instructional format reflects recent research concerning use of prereading strategies and activities that teachers can employ to prepare students to comprehend text better.

#### Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to compare recommendations for prereading strategies and

activities in current research to the strategies and activities in basal readers, as a means of identifying provisions teachers can employ to supplement suggested instruction in basal manuals to prepare students to comprehend text better.

This paper includes three procedures to carry out the above stated purpose. The first procedure is to review prereading strategies and activities in current research. This procedure includes an indepth look at activities which elaborate upon students' prior knowledge. An investigation and categorization of these activities indicates a strong relationship between the level of prior knowledge and ability to comprehend effectively.

The second procedure is a review of prereading activities and strategies used in the Houghton Mifflin (Durr, Pikulski, Bean, Copper, Glaser, Greenlaw, & Schoepfoerster, 1989) and the Silver Burdett and Ginn (Pearson, Johnson, Clymer, Indrisano, Venezky, Baumann, Hiebert, & Toth, 1989) basal reader series. The categorization scheme for judging prereading activities found in the basals will correspond with the findings in current research. The investigation of current basals will focus on comparing basal reader provisions for: purpose setting, motivation, and prior knowledge in relation to recent research.

The third procedure recommends provisions for prereading activities to help improve reading comprehension in elementary school-aged students. A final note is included that responds to a need for further research to be done in this area.

#### Definition of Terms

To facilitate the reader's understanding of this paper an explanation of a variety of terms describing prereading strategies follows. Researchers use a plethora of terms all of which refer to prereading activities. The following is a list of these terms or phrases: prereading activities, prereading strategies, advance organizers, anticipatory guides, and anticipatory sets. Dean, Vacca, and Vacca, (1986) described an anticipation guide as a "prereading phase of a lesson to draw upon whatever relevant background knowledge the reader possesses in relation to a particular reading selection" (p.198). Proger, Carter, Mann, Taylor and Bayuk (1973) described advance organizers as "experimental structuring mechanisms" (p. 451). For the purpose of this paper all the above terms will be used interchangeably.

The above terms are sometimes interpreted narrowly to include only specific steps or strategies designed to be used before reading to enhance the students' ability to comprehend written materials. This paper

will use a broad interpretation of these terms; it will include all instruction prior to reading (prereading) which may aid reading comprehension in elementary school-aged students.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

Prereading instruction emphasizes three major elements that affect learning from text (a) purpose setting, (b) student motivation, and (c) students' prior knowledge. Teachers can promote students' ability to gain knowledge from text by employing a variety of prereading learning activities and strategies that simultaneously attend to these three major elements. Learning activities and strategies are the devices that provide the reader with the opportunity to set purposes, become motivated, and connect prior knowledge with new knowledge.

#### Purpose Setting

Purpose setting is one element in the integrated comprehension process that is very important for teachers to clearly explain to students before reading. Students should be told exactly what they are expected to learn from reading a particular story or passage. Teachers should set expected learning outcomes in relation to the abilities and skills of their students. Before students read, teachers must ensure that students understand that the basic purpose of reading is to gain meaning from print.

Teachers should not assume that students will realize the purpose of a particular reading assignment. They must guide their learning by explaining the purpose for reading, and model the expected learning outcome. For example, if the purpose of reading a passage is to summarize the passage after reading, then the teacher should model this procedure using an alternative passage. The teacher should "think aloud" to show students how to summarize a passage. If the purpose of reading is to figure out the meaning of new vocabulary words, then the teacher must prepare students for doing so by modeling how they determine the meaning of a new word. Students must obtain a clear understanding of what is required of them in order to gain understanding from print.

#### Student Motivation

In addition to purpose setting, the motivation readers have in regard to a particular passage or story greatly influences learning. Educators always hope that with a little excitement building on their part, students will be eager to dive into any reading activity. Unfortunately this is not always the case. There are sometimes students who are not interested in reading because, to them, it is a frustrating and unenjoyable task. There are also students who can read

but who are apathetic learners and choose not to be interested in any school related activity.

Teachers can motivate their students "by guaranteeing success, providing clear feedback, and maintaining a positive outlook" (Moore, Readence, & Rickelman, 1989, p. 5). Success breeds success. Any positive reading experiences that occur will feed the student's desire to have another such successful experience. Teachers can also motivate students by providing clear feedback. Students look to teachers for guidance. They want and need feedback in regard to their achievements. All educators should know that their attitude toward learning will be reflected by their students. If a teacher is excited about an activity the students will be excited about it, too. If the teacher maintains a positive outlook toward learning, the students will also be motivated to learn.

#### Students' Prior Knowledge

Assuming that the teacher has identified the purpose of a learning activity and adequately motivated the students, successful learning still relies heavily upon the students' prior knowledge. The idea that a reader's knowledge prior to reading affects comprehension has been well documented (Alvermann, Smith, & Readence 1985; Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert & Goetz 1976; Hacker 1980; Wilson 1983). Some research

findings have suggested that the graphic representations depicted on a page are only symbols and do not themselves carry meaning. It is the reader's prior knowledge that allows anticipation of the author's message which in turn provides the means for the reader to comprehend text (Langer & Nicholich, 1980). The reader uses an interactive model between the ideas represented on the page, and mental associations with those ideas to process print.

Information is learned most effectively when the reader has ideas related to the print already available within his memory. Prior knowledge serves as a passageway for the reader to connect the known to the new.

Knowledge is incorporated into memory structures that have unique properties. These structures are often termed schemata. A schema represents a set of knowledge that is generally believed to be true of a class of things, events, or situations (Anderson et al., 1976). Langer (1981) suggested that "a highly sophisticated 'cross-referenced' network of associations permit a reader to retrieve specific information according to the organization and structure of that knowledge" (p. 153). A schema can be thought of as a knowledge structure which indicates typical relations among its components.

Schema provides a cognitive template against which incoming information can be matched and in terms of which it can be comprehended (Hacker 1980).

Comprehension is a construction of correspondence between the template created between the structure of memory and the author's message.

Reading theorists have attempted to design a theory base for reading comprehension in which instructional practices could be developed. Teachers can set the stage for students to understand text better by employing prereading activities that help learners improve their schema structures. Since considerable prior knowledge is often needed to comprehend new information, educators should give prereading activities serious attention.

Reading comprehension is a complex process which must incorporate the use of schemata as key units in combination with the reader's knowledge of graphemic, semantic, and syntactic clues in order to understand print. Reading instruction must include assisting students in applying their prior knowledge when they attempt to comprehend written material.

#### Prereading Learning Activities and Strategies

Good readers have already learned how to use self-monitoring prereading learning activities and strategies that incorporate purpose setting,

motivation, and development of background knowledge to aid their comprehension of text. Poor readers, on the other hand, have not internalized any personal self-monitoring prereading strategies. They have not learned strategies which help them gain meaning from text.

It is essential that practitioners teach students how to develop and use prereading, self-monitoring activities. Students must have a means to set purposes, become motivated, and develop their prior knowledge before reading.

The importance of prereading activities for an instructional lesson cannot be overemphasized. Prereading activities represent an essential stage in the learning process because they provide a framework for new knowledge (Wood & Robinson, 1983).

Prereading activities appear to fall into two broad categories: text-centered activities and learner-centered activities. In text-centered activities teachers generally focus on vocabulary/language development and organization of the text. Learner-centered activities help students become aware of their prior knowledge and link what they already know with concepts presented in the text. A more extensive discussion of each of these categories of prereading activities and strategies follows.

## Text-Centered Prereading Activities

### Vocabulary and Language Development

Professional literature includes a variety of activities recommended to increase students' vocabulary. Some strategies suggest students should keep vocabulary notebooks, while others suggest new terms should be discussed before reading. Many of these strategies include developing background knowledge prior to reading. Moore et al. (1989) suggested that prereading activities for helping students learn new vocabulary are divided into two areas. Those which focus on helping students infer meanings of words by using context, and those which focus on categorizations of words.

An example of a prereading activity which emphasizes inference is the vocabulary, oral language, prediction approach (VLP) created by Wood and Robinson (1983). The VLP approach provides a means for preteaching vocabulary before reading while emphasizing the use of vocabulary as a means for predicting what might happen in the reading selection. The VLP approach includes the following steps. In the first step, vocabulary, teachers determine which words may cause students difficulty, identify skills which may need review in regard to the chosen words, put words on flash cards, and display words for students. In the

second step, language, the teacher asks questions about the structure of words. In the third step, prediction, students are asked to predict and infer what they think their story may be about. The purpose of this strategy in the prereading phase of instruction is to provide students with use of the actual vocabulary from the passage in a meaningful context to help them better comprehend. The strategy uses questions posed by the teacher to guide their ability to infer meaning from words. The VLP strategy familiarizes students with words before reading so they will not struggle with word meaning while reading; this frees the student's cognitive abilities for the act of comprehension.

Another vocabulary prereading strategy that emphasizes inferencing is contextual redefinition (Cunningham, Cunningham, & Arthur, 1981; Moore et al., 1989). This strategy provides students with a framework for realizing the importance of context in comprehending written material. Contextual redefinition includes (a) teacher selection of words which are unfamiliar to students but essential to comprehend text, (b) teacher written sentences using appropriate clues to the word's meaning, (c) words presented in isolation while students work in groups to write their own definition, (d) words presented in a sentence for a second time, and students guess and

defend meanings of the words, and (e) students check a dictionary to verify the meaning. Contextual redefinition is designed to introduce only new vocabulary words. It reinforces the idea that the context provides clues to the meaning of the words, and that simply guessing the meaning of the word in isolation is not very accurate (Moore et al., 1989).

Moore and Moore (cited in Moore, Moore, Cunningham, & Cunningham, 1986) created the Possible Sentences Strategy which is also a prereading vocabulary activity that emphasizes inferencing through use of a prediction strategy designed to aid students in becoming familiar with new words and guiding them in verifying word meanings. When using possible sentences (a) the teacher lists and pronounces key vocabulary, (b) the teacher models and guides students in eliciting sentences using key words, (c) the students read to verify accuracy of their possible sentences, (d) the students evaluate sentences, and (e) the students generate new sentences and check for accurate word meanings. Possible sentences is one of the many kinds of strategies that help students practice their language skills and experience the meaning of words. In this activity students have the opportunity to use their critical thinking to evaluate new vocabulary and

practice other possible sentences which will allow them to expand and reinforce their meanings for new words.

Prereading vocabulary strategies such as the VLP, contextual redefinition, and possible sentences strategies, all serve as vehicles for using context to hypothesize meanings of unknown words. Although all these strategies can help determine meanings by use of context, they may not always reveal meanings (Johnson & Pearson, 1984).

Another type of prereading vocabulary activity focuses on the categorization of words. These strategies can help students clarify meanings through the understanding of vocabulary terminology. Duffelmeyer (1985) listed four strategies for teaching vocabulary that incorporate teacher and student interaction so that students have the opportunity to experience vocabulary development before reading.

Duffelmeyer's four categorization strategies include the concepts of synonyms, positive and negatives, examples and definitions, and definitions and use of a word. In each of the strategies the teacher first selects a word they wish to teach and illustrates the concept in a sentence. In each case the teacher involves the students in a questioning dialogue to ensure the student has experience with the meaning of a word. The key to these strategies lies

within the word experience. They all incorporate teacher examples that elicit student experiences with vocabulary.

Several researchers have noted that experience is the cornerstone of vocabulary development (Beck, Perfetti, & McKeown, 1982; Duffelmeyer, 1985). Teachers need to provide students with exposure to vocabulary before reading so that word meaning will become automatic, and the student will not have to struggle with word meanings which limit their comprehension.

Feature analysis is also a type of prereading vocabulary strategy that focuses on organizing vocabulary concepts through categorization (Johnson & Pearson, 1984). This complex procedure includes (a) category selection, (b) list of category terms, (c) list features of categories, (d) indicate feature possession, (e) add terms/features, and (f) complete and explore matrix. These steps help students explore, organize, and verify vocabulary concepts through categorization of new vocabulary words.

Any categorizing word strategy deserves consideration as instructional strategy because "the expected learning outcome resulting from these strategies is that students will be able to use categorization as a means to understand new vocabulary

and accompanying concepts" (Moore et al., 1989, p. 43). It should be remembered, however, that students have a variety of learning styles, and use of just one kind of prereading vocabulary strategy may not be sufficient to prepare students for comprehension.

### Organization of Text

Before starting to read, students need to have some idea of what to expect in order to comprehend the text more effectively. Moore et al. (1989) reported that "if the information being read is expected, the reading process is fluid with optimal comprehension" (p. 25). Before reading text, readers formulate hypotheses about what they expect to be in the text by anticipating structure. There are a variety of prereading strategies that can help improve comprehension by introducing students to the structure within the text before reading. Stein developed an approach for introducing students to a text before reading, called the Visual Reading Guide (VRG) (cited in Moore et al., 1989). The VRG is based on the graphics contained in the text. This strategy includes three major steps in which the teacher selects visuals from the text that map the information. Only the graphic material that is essential to understanding text is used in the VRG strategy. The steps include (a) teacher's explanatory statement regarding

importance of selected graphics, (b) students' analysis of the importance of graphics, and (c) group discussion of graphic information wherein students formulate and verify evidence that supports their concluding statement.

The VRG is a text-centered strategy based on the teacher's selection of important visuals. As the class identifies, analyzes, and discusses each visual, the information they obtain helps each individual reader to understand what information they can expect to acquire from reading the text. Discussion helps students anticipate the relationship among ideas in the text. This strategy is especially useful for students who have difficulty understanding graphs, maps, and charts. The more information the reader can gain before reading, the better they will be able to comprehend.

The graphic-organizer (Baron & Earle, 1973), is another type of text-centered prereading organizer that provides a structured overview of information to students before they read. Here again it is the teacher or text that provides the rationale for reading. First the key concepts and terms to be taught are identified by the teacher. Second, the key terms are arranged into a diagram which parallels text structure. Third, this diagram is presented to the

students. Finally, the teacher explains the diagram and encourages the class to discuss any unclear terms.

Outlining is also a text-centered skill. It is a type of graphic organizer in which major concepts and details are represented. Moore et al. (1989) noted that "outlines presented before a reading task facilitate student comprehension" (p. 57).

An example of a specific outlining activity is an expectation outline (Spiegel, 1981). This prereading outlining activity is designed for use with factual stories. Students are asked to preview the material to be read and predict what they expect to learn from the story. Students generate questions and the teacher directs a discussion to categorize and identify headings for those questions. The expectation outline is one type of prereading self-monitoring activity that gives students a means of comprehending text better.

The VRG, graphic-organizer, and outlining strategies are all text-centered structures that can be used before reading to allow students to organize information for reading. If the information to be read by the student is expected, the reading process will occur smoothly, and the reader will be able to comprehend text more effectively.

### Learner-Centered Prereading Activities

Learner-centered activities help students become aware of their existing knowledge and tie what they already know to new concepts presented in the text. Many of the learner-centered activities involve learners in the generation and testing of predictions.

Current research in reading reinforces the idea that the reader's prior knowledge is an important determiner of comprehension (Langer, 1981). The idea behind the learner-centered prereading strategies is not only to organize activities around a structured framework, but to expand understanding of how knowledge is remembered, retrieved, and used to facilitate comprehension. Learner-centered prereading activities include questioning and predicting, and graphic mapping activities.

#### Questioning and Predicting Strategies

While there are several questioning strategies that can be used before reading to enhance comprehension, most of these activities are not strictly prereading activities. Most are activities designed to be used both before and during reading to help students develop independent reading strategies which will improve their comprehension.

Manzo developed a reciprocal questioning strategy (ReQuest) that has been included in this paper because

its reciprocal nature of questioning differentiates it from a variety of other teacher directed questioning strategies. (Palinscar & Brown, 1984). The ReQuest strategy is unlike other questioning strategies in that it provides a format for the learner to be actively involved in learning.

The ReQuest learner-centered activity helps students assume responsibility of their own questioning technique to improve their comprehension. Before the students read, the teachers acquaint students with the new vocabulary and develop background knowledge. Then the students read the title and share what they know about the topic. After reading, students and teachers ask questions of each other. Finally, predictions are generated, justified, and discussed. Students learn how to formulate their own questions by becoming actively involved in the reading process before reading.

Although the ReQuest strategy was first designed for middle-school students it has become a successful strategy for improving comprehension with first and third grade students who engaged in the activity during group reading time (Palinscar & Brown, 1984).

Use of the ReQuest procedure provides a framework for teachers and students to work together to understand what is read. What makes it so successful

is its emphasis on discussion and critical thinking rather than on isolated reading skills. The strategy continually emphasizes that the purpose of reading is to understand what you are reading.

There are a variety of prereading strategies that focus on both questioning and prediction. The PreReading Plan (PREP) developed by Langer (1981) is an example of this type of strategy. It involves three phases of instruction to be used before assigning reading selections to students. The first phase is initial associations with the concept. In this phase the teacher invites students to elaborate about their prior knowledge on the topic. During this phase, students have the opportunity to find associations between central concepts and their prior knowledge. In the following example, the topic of study is Canada. The teacher asks each student to tell what ideas initially come to mind. Some initial responses might be parliament, French, and Quebec. The teacher then records these responses. The second phase is reflecting on initial associations. During this phase, students are asked to respond to ideas generated in phase one. The teacher continues to use questions to help students clarify ideas and develop an awareness of the associations between ideas. The third phase is reformulation of knowledge. During this phase the

teacher asks if the students have any new ideas based on the discussion in phase one and two. This phase allows students to verbalize and elaborate associations while adding, deleting, or modifying ideas. Langer (1984) reported that "the PReP activity had a positive effect on the comprehension of average achieving readers and somewhat more differential effect on the comprehension of the better readers" (p.480). Although Langer (1984) suggested that further research was necessary to test the reliability of the PReP activity, it has been shown to help students become aware of what they already know about a topic and help generate new concept awareness through group discussion.

The Directed Reading Activity (DRA) developed by Betts and the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DRTA) developed by Stauffer (cited in Moore et al., 1989) are both learner-centered strategies that help students activate their prior knowledge and set purposes for reading. The DRA strategy involves a prereading stage which activates students' prior knowledge relating to the text and the setting of a purpose for reading. Teachers ask experience and text-based questions to engage students' prior knowledge and motivate students' interest in the topic.

The DRTA is designed to help students refine their purposes for reading and use their prior knowledge to

understand text. The strategy begins with the student's generation of hypotheses and continues with the confirmation or changes in hypotheses as new information is acquired from the text. The reader asks, tests, and modifies predictions as reading progresses. Teachers divide the text into segments and guide students to establish, evaluate, and revise purposes for reading. Ultimately students learn to use self-questioning strategies to establish their purposes for reading independently.

#### Graphic Mapping Activities

There are several graphic mapping activities that are learner-centered because of their emphasis on connecting the learner's prior knowledge with the information in the text. Semantic webbing is one method of visually graphing ideas to help students connect relationships between known and new information. Moore et al. (1989) reported that "webs can be effectively employed during prereading to focus students' attention on the main ideas, vocabulary, and structure of the text" (p. 52).

Another type of graphic mapping is the Word Map, developed by Pearson and Johnson, (cited in Pearson, 1979) which is designed to graphically represent the definition of a word. It is based on the concept that in order for students to comprehend effectively, they

must be able to identify and define new words independently using prior knowledge and context clues. The steps needed to teach students this strategy were identified by Schwartz and Raphael (1985). First, the general class in which a word belongs is identified. Second, the important properties of the word are identified. Finally, examples of the concept are added. This strategy helps students practice identifying unknown words by using their prior knowledge.

## CHAPTER III

## REVIEW OF PREREADING ACTIVITIES IN BASAL READERS

For the purpose of this paper teachers' manuals of two basal reading series, levels kindergarten through six, were reviewed. This study examined current basals to discover if the instructional format reflects recent research concerning use of prereading activities and strategies. The two series reviewed were: the Houghton Mifflin Reading series (Durr et al., 1989), and the Silver Burdett and Ginn Reading series (Pearson et al., 1989). This chapter will include an investigation and description of prereading activities included in these basals.

In the Houghton Mifflin series the lesson plans for prereading activities include two parts: Part 1, Prepare, which focuses on skills and vocabulary/concept development, and Part 2, Read, which focuses on preparing students to read, building background, thinking and predicting, and purpose setting.

In the Silver Burdett and Ginn series the lesson plans for prereading activities also include two parts: Part 1, Vocabulary Strategies, which focuses on

concept and vocabulary, and Part 2, Guiding Comprehension which emphasizes building backgrounds and developing a purpose for reading.

A more complete summary of these prereading activities follows. Categorization of these activities corresponds to those cited in Chapter II.

#### Purpose Setting in Basal Readers

*Students who are good readers are strategic readers* (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). They are able to establish, for themselves, clear purposes for reading. But not all readers, especially young readers, have learned to automatically use a plan to create expectations for reading. Both of the reading series reviewed include ways for students to learn how to set purposes before reading.

The Houghton Mifflin series has a section entitled Purpose for Reading the Selection that occurs before every reading selection. In this section the manual generally includes a statement to share with students. For example, before the selection "Baby Moose" in the fourth grade book, Caravans, the teacher is to direct the students to read to learn more about a baby moose. Sometimes the Purpose for Reading the Selection, suggests that teachers help students to think of questions before reading to help predict what might happen as they read the story.

In the Silver Burdett and Ginn series there is a section entitled Developing the Purpose for Reading. This section is to be covered before the students read. Instruction for teachers in this section includes two options. The first option includes both an oral and written activity which is designed to have students themselves set purposes for reading. For example, before the selection, "Animal Facts and Fiction" located in the second grade book, Going Places, children are asked to brainstorm ways to tell if something is fact, true, fiction, or untrue. Then students are asked to make a list of things they think are fact or fiction. The second option suggests the teacher should set the purpose. Here children read to find out whether a statement is fact, or fiction.

Another example of these prereading purpose setting activities appears in the manual of the fourth grade book. It describes the prereading experiences before the students are to read the story, "Animal Lookalikes." In the first option, where students set purposes for reading, they are to preview the selection and orally predict animal differences. Then they are to write down their predictions. The second option directs the teacher to tell students to read to discover how certain animals that look alike are really quite different.

### Student Motivation in Basal Readers

The investigation of both the Silver Burdett and Ginn and Houghton Mifflin reading series revealed that neither series identified specific motivation activities to be employed before reading. Instead both pointed out ways to get students more involved in reading. Both series indicated that by building background knowledge and setting purposes for reading, students will have the experiences that will lead them to want to read new material.

It appears that the authors of these basals assume that all students will be motivated to read the stories. Perhaps they believe their books look so appealing that no one could resist them. Practitioners know better.

Moore et al. (1989) noted that students are motivated when teachers guarantee success and provide clear feedback. Since these basals provide a variety of nongraded levels, students are able to be successful readers if they are placed in an appropriate level. Both basal series provide a wide variety of opportunities for discussion before reading takes place to help ensure students receive clear feedback, which hopefully leads to a better understanding of concepts and more effective comprehension.

### Basal Reader Provision for Students' Prior Knowledge

Recalling what is already known about a topic before reading allows students to better internalize new knowledge. Teachers need to help students make predictions before reading so they can develop a mental picture to which they can easily add. Both reading series focus on developing student's prior knowledge to enhance their ability to comprehend text.

In the Houghton Mifflin series, Part 2, Read, two sections: building background, and thinking and predicting, focus on building students' background knowledge. An example of the building background section, in the level D book, Trumpets, is to be used before the story, "What Is a Robot?" The manual suggests that the teacher ask children to name machines they see or use often. The teacher is to lead a discussion illustrating the concept that machines cannot think. In the thinking and predicting section, in this same book, students are asked to think what they might learn about robots.

Before each reading selection in the Silver Burdett and Ginn series, two lessons, Part 1, Vocabulary Strategies, and Part 2, Guiding Comprehension include activities that develop students' prior knowledge. In Part 1, a section called developing concepts, includes strategies to help tap

students' prior knowledge. These activities are most often structured around discussions and teachers' questions. They are designed to provide a common experience on a topic before reading. An example of the developing concepts activity, in the preprimer book, All Through the Town, that is to be used before the story, "I Can Ride," suggests that the teacher begins a discussion by asking children, "Who can ride a bicycle?" Another example of the developing concept activity, in a third grade book, Castles of Sand, to be used before the story, "Forecast," suggests that the teacher ask students to name some kinds of weather and discuss and chart what they know about weather. The purpose of these activities is to tap into the student's prior knowledge before reading to help prepare them to internalize new information.

#### Text-Centered Prereading Activities in Basal Readers Vocabulary and Language Development

Research has shown that whether or not students understand word meanings makes a great difference in their ability to comprehend text. If students face even several unknown words in a reading selection their frustration builds and their motivation for reading wanes (Harris & Sipay, 1975).

The Houghton Mifflin series utilizes a lesson plan for each selection that begins with a section called

Prepare. This section is to prepare students for reading by introducing key vocabulary words. The manual lists numerous questions about key vocabulary words but does not suggest any particular strategies that teachers should direct to teach students how to gain meaning for words. For example in the sixth grade book, Celebrations, teachers are instructed to point out the words in a selection that may be new to students. The directions are not specific as to how this is to be done. Students then are asked to read the words and come up with a definition on their own. The directions point out important concepts for language development, but never specifically explain any strategies or steps that could be used to learn the new vocabulary words.

The authors of the Silver Burdett and Ginn series note that building a solid vocabulary is a key element for a child in developing a positive attitude toward reading. This reading series emphasizes the importance of teaching students critical words before reading begins. The series utilizes an instructional model that includes three approaches for successful vocabulary instruction. A senior author for the series, Johnson, noted that "teaching new vocabulary is easier when you use definition, context, and concept

associations to help children construct meaning" (Pearson et al., 1989, p. M10).

The text-centered vocabulary instruction in the Silver Burdett and Ginn series, begins with the teacher being instructed to teach vocabulary by reading each new word in a context sentence. The teacher is directed to ask students a question that draws upon their prior knowledge, to help them understand the new word. For example in second grade book, Garden Gates, one of the words introduced before the story, "Keep the Lights Burning, Abbie," is the word oil. The teacher is first to remind students that oil was once used to light lamps. The teacher asks, "What is oil used for today?" (p. 126). Then the students are to practice identifying the definition of a word on a worksheet. The prereading text-centered vocabulary instruction has included use of definition through a worksheet, use of context in sentences, and use of concept associations through use of teacher questions.

#### Organization of Text

Although there are a variety of prereading strategies that can help improve comprehension by introducing students to the structure within the text before reading, neither reading series reviewed formally incorporated these kinds of strategies into their program. Each series mentioned using text

structure in a variety of places, but they did not include specific steps for using headings, outlining, graphics, maps, or charts. Often, use of these structures was included in the extension sections of the text.

### Learner-Centered Prereading Activities in Basal Readers Questioning and Predicting Strategies

While both basal series purport to include the use of a variety of questioning and predicting strategies that can be used to enhance comprehension, neither include specific strategies for prereading. The Houghton Mifflin series suggests that a variety of comprehension strategies are built into their lesson plans. While it is true that it does include a variety of comprehension strategies none ever seem to be explained specifically. They usually consist of questions for teachers to ask students. Houghton Mifflin lists the following comprehension activities which are included in the series: Preview and Predict; Be a Story Detective; Choral Reading; Think, Wink, Decide; Story Frames; Question-Answer Relationships; SQRRR; and Pinwheel Discussions. All of these strategies are suggested for use, but they do not appear in the regular daily lesson plans.

The Silver Burdett and Ginn series also claimed to incorporate many questioning and predicting strategies

before reading to enhance comprehension. They reported that "child-centered prereading activities enlist students' prior knowledge of key concepts to prepare them for successful reading" (Pearson et al., 1989, p. m11). Yet, use of specific questioning and predicting strategies are practically nonexistent within the regular lesson plans. Within each unit there are particular thinking strategies presented, but the directive to apply that strategy is not included in the directions for teaching each reading lesson.

#### Graphic Mapping Strategies in Basals

The Silver Burdett and Ginn series employs a variety of prereading graphic strategies to introduce concepts before reading. The strategies that are used throughout the series are designed to build on the students' prior knowledge. Concept development may include use of the following strategies: feature-analysis, semantic mapping, and classification charts. An example of feature-analysis is incorporated in the fifth grade book, Dream Chasers, before the story, "The Thanksgiving Play." The feature-analysis chart taps students' prior knowledge to discuss different kinds of performances. The students are asked to think of headings, indicating different kinds of performances. Then they are to discuss and chart some factors that these performances have in common,

such as music, scenery, and costumes. This charting activity helps students draw upon their own experiences to develop new concepts.

Semantic mapping is used frequently to help students recall experiences that relate to what they will read. In the third grade book, Castles of Sand, before the students read the story, "The Sea of Gold," students are asked to map things that you can see or do on a fishing boat. The words fishing and boat are written and circled on the board or on paper. The students are then asked to name things they see at sea, jobs they might do, or places they might see while on a fishing boat. Student's ideas are recorded under appropriate headings. The idea behind the strategy is to build their prior knowledge about the topic and, thus, to prepare them for more effective comprehension.

Classification charts are often incorporated into prereading lessons to categorize predetermined people, places, or things. All these strategies are employed to help students connect their prior knowledge to the new concepts in order to comprehend text more effectively.

The Houghton Mifflin series also uses semantic mapping, word maps, word webs, semantic feature analysis, and preview and predict strategies to introduce concepts before reading. In this series,

however, the strategies are found mostly in the upper primary books, and in the extension activities. In general these activities are employed after reading.

## CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING BASAL READER PROVISIONS FOR  
PREREADING ACTIVITIES

In the past decade researchers have made substantial advances in understanding the process of reading. Many researchers agree that reading is a process of constructing meaning from text (Anderson et al., 1985). Part of a student's ability to gain meaning from print is determined by his or her ability to set a purpose for reading. Jones (1976) has observed "that providing purpose setting directions frequently increases the level of reading achievement and also defines that which is to be remembered" (p. 405).

Both researchers and basal authors have identified purpose setting as an important element of the integrated reading process. The basals reviewed for this paper did include general suggestions to teachers to help students develop purposes for reading.

Purpose setting before reading is an essential element of the reading process, yet it can be done in a simple and general way. The suggestions reviewed in the basals, to simply ask students to think about a teacher made statement before reading, is a sufficient

way to set purposes for reading. Students must know why they are reading, and what they are supposed to get from it. This can also be accomplished by simply asking students questions before reading to help them focus on the upcoming topic.

Rothkopf and Kaplan (1972) studied the effect of specific and general instructional objectives given before reading took place. They concluded that at the elementary level, general prereading statements, which focused on single items of information facilitated reading retention better than those objectives which focused on several specific ideas for purpose setting.

In addition to purpose setting, the motivation readers have in regard to a particular passage or story greatly influences learning. In the basals reviewed, little was specifically done to ensure student motivation. Students must be personally involved in the reading process in order to successfully comprehend text. Teachers need to do more to motivate students' interest in reading. Probably one of the greatest challenges facing educators in the 80s is to keep students interested in learning. Today teachers have to compete with the high-tech fast-moving world in which students thrive. Educators can catch students' interest by encouraging them to become personally involved in learning. Tapping the ideas and concerns

that interest students can motivate them to want to read to learn.

Even if the teacher has identified the purpose for reading and adequately motivated the students, successful learning still relies heavily upon the students' prior knowledge. Both basals that were reviewed included activities to help students build their prior knowledge before reading. The majority of these activities were most often structured around discussions and teacher questioning. Teachers need to do more to help students personally develop their own backgrounds for reading. Each individual has different experiences. Teachers must draw out these experiences and help students bridge the gap between what they know and the new information presented. Educators who want to help their students comprehend text as successfully as possible must help them retrieve prior knowledge by creating a means by which appropriate schemata can be accessed.

Teachers must keep in mind that reading is a highly personal, subjective process. They must not expect students' responses to questions to correspond to their own.

In order to facilitate students' ability to comprehend, both text-centered and learner-centered prereading activities should be incorporated into all

reading activities. A variety of prereading activities should be used before students read.

In the text-centered area of instruction prereading activities to help students internalize new vocabulary should include, activities that focus on helping students infer meanings of words by using context, and activities which focus on categorization of words. Effective prereading vocabulary instruction calls for an eclectic approach since students learn in a variety of ways. Although both basals reviewed emphasized vocabulary development, not enough of the suggested activities focused on use of vocabulary and language development within context. Too much time was spent practicing identification of those words on worksheets. Teachers should use the ideas in the basals as the basis for the discussion of words. They should refrain from using worksheets in which students merely circle or mark words without reference to context.

Another text-centered area of instruction that should occur before reading is a discussion and review of how text is organized. Both basals did a poor job of introducing text structure to students before reading. Assessing the reading task before reading is essential to comprehension. Students must know how to recognize different types of writing in order to know

how to prepare to comprehend the text. Teachers must help students learn to recognize different types of writing and the demands associated with them. They need to demonstrate for students how to look over reading assignments, note headings, graphs, and charts, to help them create a framework for receiving detailed information. Teachers must explain text-structure and not assume students already understand it.

Once readers have determined goals and evaluated the reading tasks, they must choose appropriate strategies to prepare for reading comprehension. Learner-centered prereading activities should include an emphasis on questioning and predicting strategies and graphic mapping activities. While both basals included many questioning and predicting strategies, those which were included were generally not used as prereading activities. Instead they were activities suggested for use in the extension area of the basal. Teachers need to remind students to elaborate on their prior knowledge before reading. Simple discussions and questioning techniques should be included in every prereading lesson. Strategies such as modeling, mental imagery, and prediction need to be explained step by step to students. Students need more specific steps to follow.

If for example, a teacher says to students before reading, "Think about what you know on this topic before reading," the strategic reader will be able to do as requested. The poor reader, however, will not be able to do this. They have no strategies in their mind to follow. Teachers must provide a model; they must "think aloud" and tell students what the steps are in answering that question. In this way students can experience the necessities of being prepared to comprehend text.

Both basals reviewed employed the use of graphic mapping strategies, such as semantic mapping and word maps. These types of strategies are being incorporated into reading programs more frequently than in the past. There is, however, a lack of frequent use of them before reading begins. They are very effective prereading strategies that help students organize their thoughts before reading. Teachers should continue to experiment using these strategies before all kinds of reading activities.

In conclusion, educators must teach students to use prereading self-monitoring strategies that provide them with a means of internalizing purpose setting, motivation, and prior knowledge, as a means of comprehending text more effectively. The following prereading activities must be incorporated into the

prereading activities suggested in basal readers in order to provide students with improved strategies for comprehending: (a) provide experiences which gives students provisions to set purposes, develop motivation, and access relevant memory structures, (b) encourage discussion in which students can evaluate concepts, (c) provide experiences in which students develop an awareness of vocabulary/language development and organization of text, (d) provide opportunities for students to become more aware of their own personal knowledge through questioning and predicting strategies, and (e) encourage students to strengthen their anticipation and expectation skills through use of graphic mapping activities. Ultimately the best prereading self-monitoring activities provide students with a means of elaborating on their prior knowledge; this heightens their expectations about text and leads to a more efficient processing and recall of text.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

The gap between reading research and reading activities in the classroom is just beginning to narrow. Theorists and researchers are finally acknowledging the need to include classroom-teacher input in their study of the reading process. Basals do not yet include all the prereading strategies that researchers believe are essential to comprehension.

Although basals have moved away from their emphasis on isolated aspects of language, they have not yet focused enough of their prereading activities on meaning. Since reading is such a complex, integrated act in which students are personally involved, prereading instructional strategies must include a greater emphasis on recognizing personal goals before reading, and establishing frameworks for connecting known knowledge to new knowledge.

Researchers have only begun to investigate the many effects of prereading strategies on students' ability to comprehend. More research is needed in this area to determine more specifically what kinds of activities better enhance a student's ability to comprehend text.

## REFERENCES

- Alvermann, D. E., Smith, L. C., & Readence, J. E. (1985). Prior knowledge activation and the comprehension of compatible and incompatible text. Reading Research Quarterly, 20, 420-436.
- 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: National Institute of Education.
- Anderson, R. C., Reynolds, R. E., Schallert, D. L., & Goetz, E. T. (1976). Framework for comprehending discourse. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, Center for the Study of Reading. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED 134 935)
- Baron, R. F., & Earle, R. A. (1973). An approach for vocabulary instruction. In H. L. Herber and R. F. Barron (Eds.), Research in reading in the content areas: Second year report (pp. 84-100). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University, Reading and Language Arts Center.
- Beck, I. L., Perfetti, C. A., & McKeown, M. G. (1982). Effects of long-term vocabulary instruction on lexical access and reading comprehension. Journal of Educational Psychology, 74, 506-522.
- Cunningham, J. W., Cunningham, P. M., & Arthur, S. V. (1981). Middle and secondary school reading. New York: Longman.
- Dean, R., Vacca, J. L., & Vacca, R. T. (1986). The influences of an anticipation guide on readers' response to a basal short story. Reading Horizons, 26, 197-201.
- Duffelmeyer, F. A. (1985). Teaching word meaning from an experience base. Reading Teacher, 39, 6-9.
- Durkin, D. (1978). What Classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. Reading Research Quarterly, 16, 481-533.
- Durr, W. K., Pikulski, J. J., Bean, R. M., Copper, D. J., Glaser, N. A., Greenlaw, J. M., & Schoephoerster, H. (1989). Houghton Mifflin Reading, Reading Basal Series, Teachers' Manuals. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin

- Goodman, K. S. (1979). Bridging the gaps in reading: Respect and communication. In J. Harste & R. Carey (Eds.), New perspectives on comprehension. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University School of Education.
- Harris, A. J., & Sipay, E. R. (1975). How to increase reading ability (6th ed.). New York: David McKay.
- Johnson, D. D., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). Teaching reading vocabulary (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Jones, M. B. (1976). The effect of specificity of reading purposes on children's reading achievement. Journal of Reading Behavior, 8, 405-413.
- Langer, J. A. (1981). From theory to practice: A prereading plan. Journal of Reading, 25, 152-156.
- Langer, J. A. (1984). Examining background knowledge and text comprehension. Reading Research Quarterly, 19, 468-481.
- Langer, J. A. & Nicholich, M. (1980). Prior knowledge and its effects on comprehension (Report No. CS 005 459). New York: New York University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 186 874)
- Moore, D. W., Moore S. A., Cunningham, P. M., & Cunningham J. W. (1986). Developing readers and writers in the content areas. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Moore, D. W., Readence, J. E., & Rickelman, R. J. (1989). Prereading activities for content area reading and learning. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Palinscar, A. S., & Brown, A. L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension: Fostering and monitoring activities. Cognition and Instruction, 24, 117-175.
- Pearson, P. D. (1979). Methodology concerns in comprehension research. In J. Harste & R. Carey (Eds.), New perspectives on comprehension. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University School of Education.

- Pearson, P. D., Johnson, D. D., Clymer, T., Indrisano, R., Venezky, R. L., Baumann, J. F., Hiebert, E., & Toth, M. (1989). World of Reading, Reading Basal Series, Teachers' Manuals. Needham, M.A: Silver Burdett & Ginn.
- Proger, B. B., Carter, C. E., Mann, L., Taylor, R. G., & Bayuk, R. J. (1973). Advance and concurrent organizers for detailed verbal passages used with elementary school pupils. The Journal of Educational Research, 66, 451-457.
- Rothkopf, E. & Kaplan, R. (1972). Exploration of the effect of density and specificity of instructional objectives on learning from text. Journal of Educational Psychology, 63, 295-302.
- Schwartz, R. M., & Raphael, T. E. (1985). Concept of definition: A key to improving students' vocabulary. The Reading Teacher, 39, 198-205.
- Spiegel, D. L. (1981). Six alternatives to the directed reading activity. The Reading Teacher, 34, 914-920.
- Vacca, R. T., & Vacca, J. L. (1982). Two less than fortunate consequences of reading research in the 1970's. Language Arts, 59, 382-383.
- Wilson, C. R. (1983) Teaching reading comprehension by connecting the known to the new. The Reading Teacher, 24, 382-390.
- Wood, K. D., & Robinson, N. (1983). Vocabulary, language and prediction: A prereading strategy. The Reading Teacher, 36, 392-395.