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Reading comprehension: Strategies for intermediate whole language teachers

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Reading comprehension: Strategies for intermediate whole language teachers

Abstract

The term "whole language" appears in journal articles, in textbook ads, in workshops, and in school district adoptions. Many teachers are being required to apply whole language approaches in their classroom. The Council Bluffs Community School District, for example, recently adopted a whole language approach to teaching language arts K-6. The intermediate educators in this district want to know more about whole language and are concerned about the effect of using a whole language approach on the ability of the reader to comprehend what is read.

Reading Comprehension: Strategies
for
Intermediate Whole Language Teachers

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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Reading Comprehension: Strategies
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The term "whole language" appears in journal articles, in textbook ads, in workshops, and in school district adoptions. Many teachers are being required to apply whole language approaches in their classroom. The Council Bluffs Community School District, for example, recently adopted a whole language approach to teaching language arts K-6. The intermediate educators in this district want to know more about whole language and are concerned about the effect of using a whole language approach on the ability of the reader to comprehend what is read.

Much of the literature presently available on reading comprehension discusses reading comprehension as it was taught prior to the onset of the whole language philosophy. It seems the literature about whole language, on the other hand, focuses mostly on suggestions for using whole language techniques with primary students who are primarily involved in learning how to decode. A concern arises from this literature: Are there whole language strategies for teaching comprehension that the intermediate teacher can use?

This paper reviews the literature to find out what changes have occurred in the thinking about reading instruction. It looks at such questions as the following: What is whole language? What are the current views on comprehension? What strategies can the intermediate teacher use to teach comprehension through a whole language approach?

What Is Whole Language?

Whole language is a philosophy of teaching rather than a set of practices (Perkins, 1989). Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated into a literary program. Language is presented by using meaningful, predictable, authentic text (Goodman, 1989). It is kept whole and in context (Heymfeld, 1989; Perkins, 1989; Goodman, 1986). It is based on the theory that children learn language by actually using it as they are involved in language learning experiences. Finally, the emphasis is on meaning. Children are encouraged to develop their own strategy for making sense of and through print (Perkins, 1989). Psycholinguists believe reading and writing skills are acquired in much the same way as learning to speak. The children begin to understand language as early as birth by being surrounded by a meaningful,

language-rich environment. They learn to make associations between sounds and meaning in a relatively short time. Adults reinforce the children's attempts to communicate. Language is presented in a holistic form not broken down into bits and pieces (Fountas and Hannigan, 1989). Children learn by constructing their own knowledge from the world around them. They develop functions and purposes for using language before they develop the form. Teachers strive to keep language whole and involve children in using it functionally and purposefully to meet their own needs (Goodman, 1986).

Preschoolers know much about reading. They can distinguish between print and drawing, realize that a book is read from front to back, and know that print carries meaning (Kline, 1988). John O'Neil (1989) describes whole language as a holistic view that capitalizes on literacy abilities young students are already developing. He notes that Jerome Harste feels the whole language teacher's job is to support learning already in place and advance it. In whole language, children acquire abilities through experiences with whole text. They solve problems of learning to read as they construct their knowledge of written language. Only the child can determine what can be assimilated

and accommodated within her/his own cognitive structure (Tunell & Jacobs, 1989).

The learners participate in deciding what will be learned and relate what they are learning to what they already know. The knowledge children have before they read influences what they will understand. Much has been written about the importance of linking children's reading to their prior knowledge (Goodman, 1987). Children must be interested in a story before they begin reading. Pearson and Johnson (1978) note that students understand better when they read material that interests them. Children must interpret and change what they read in accordance with prior knowledge of the topic. Baldwin, Peleg-Bruckner, & McClintock (1985) separated the effects of prior knowledge and topic interest on reading comprehension; the results of this study suggested that both were autonomous factors which influenced reading comprehension.

Children learn best by being active participants in language arts (Homon, Karl, Vega & Edgecomb, 1990). They learn by speaking, writing, and reading. Knowledge in one area extends to all the rest. As a result one major premise is that all three areas need to be integrated (Goodman, 1986). Teaching each area

separately could lead to misunderstandings about language learning (Farris, 1989).

A classroom that uses a whole language approach will be a safe place to take risks. Readers must predict and guess as they try to make sense of print (Goodman, 1986). Children should be encouraged to try hard things and guess when they are not sure. The whole language teacher will help children understand that they can grow from their mistakes (K. Goodman, 1987; Y. Goodman, 1989).

A variety of strategies appear and reappear in the literature about whole language. They include shared book experiences, Sustained Silent Reading, read alouds, process writing and the availability of a variety of books and printed material.

A shared book experience involves reading a "big book" which is big enough for all students to see. The teacher introduces the book, then asks the children to predict what they think the book is about and what might happen. She/he then reads the book pointing to the text while she/he reads. The students read along as the book is reread. The book is reread several times (Farris, 1989).

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) is important because the more reading is used the better the reader becomes. SSR allows children to practice reading without pressures (Farris, 1989). Jim Trelease (1985) cites a study on reading for recreation which was conducted in the School District of Philadelphia. Results showed that when more time was spent on SSR achievement actually went up. It is especially important for the teacher to also read during SSR. Students tend to imitate teachers' reading habits. SSR also works at home. The child needs to be involved in setting up guidelines for SSR. SSR allows children to practice reading without pressures (Farris, 1989).

Self-selection is an integral part of a whole language approach (Anderson, 1984). Students have a personal interest in their reading and it is more meaningful if they have selected their own reading material. It reduces the humiliation of the struggling reader by eliminating the need for ability groups (Fuhler, 1990).

Reading aloud by the teacher is noted as an important part of reading. Hearing the teacher read aloud gives students a model of the reading strategies which a skilled reader uses (Homan, et al., 1990). The

teacher demonstrates how to use expression, intonation patterns, and the pauses which allow a clear understanding of written language.

Trelease (1985) notes a study in which 20 classes of Harlem second graders were read to twenty minutes a day all year long. Higher gains in both vocabulary and reading comprehension were noted. He points out reading aloud provides a good model of the use of language. It shows children that books can be pleasurable. It also exposes students to a rich vocabulary and gives new information. Listening to the teacher read aloud also stimulates imagination, and improves listening comprehension. The more students see or hear someone reading for pleasure and in a meaningful way, the greater chance they will also model the same behavior themselves.

Writing as a process has also been cited in much of the literature as an important part of a whole language program. Reading experiences are followed by output activities. Often these output activities involve process writing (Tunnell & Jacobs, 1989). Goodman (1987) notes that reading and writing mutually aid the development of each other because children learn language as they use it. Freeman and Freeman (1987)

found that children taught through a whole language approach wrote stories that demonstrated an understanding of story structure. They used more complex sentence structure as opposed to children taught from a basal reader. The sentence structure of children taught through a basal reading approach consisted mainly of short declarative sentences.

Richik and McTague (1988) also noted a change in children's writing after they had used a whole language strategy. The children were able to write more complex sentences and to use word endings correctly. In addition, the children in the experimental group began monitoring each other's writing. They also began initiating their own individual writing. Children in the control group did not initiate any writing activities in spite of many opportunities to do so.

Because children in a whole language classroom are engaged in early writing and reading activities the whole language classroom has lots of print. There are messages about activities for the day, examples of child-written work, wall charts, big books, small books. Equipment, shelves, and cupboards are labeled with information about their contents and use.

There may be newspapers, magazines, fiction and nonfiction books, catalogs, comic books, phone books, textbooks, and reference books. Materials to write and illustrate books are usually available. There may be typewriters, tape recorders, and computers (Hayward, 1988).

Whole, meaningful texts provide a reader with four cueing systems: graphophonic (print/sound), syntactic (grammar), semantic (meanings), and pragmatic (whole text) (Anderson, 1984). Students learn to predict words based on these four cueing systems. Students read to confirm or reject a prediction based on subsequent information. A confirmed prediction is integrated into comprehension (Melton, 1988). Goodman places strong focus on oral language experiences and reading aloud to encourage students to use language knowledge to make sensible predictions (Fountas and Hannigan, 1989).

In summary, the teachers who use a whole language philosophy of teaching believe reading, writing, speaking, and listening should be integrated into a literary program. Language is presented through whole, meaningful text. Whole language promotes active reading with the emphasis on meaning.

How do children learn to get meaning from what they read? The next section of this paper looks at the most recent views on how children comprehend what they read.

Current Views on Comprehension

In the past, reading instruction was mainly concerned with how to teach word recognition skills and presenting isolated skill-based reading activities (Mason, 1984). Behavioral psychology from 1915-1970 emphasized the study of observable behavior. Only the aspects of reading that could be observed became the focus of study. This focus led to the view of reading as a set of observable subskills. Much emphasis was placed on phonics at this time (Pearson & Raphael, 1984). If the reader could decode the words, understanding of the text was assumed (Griese, 1971; McNeill, 1984). The college text this writer used in 1967 was concerned only with decoding skills. The only reference to comprehension was auditory comprehension (Spache, 1964).

Comprehension next focused on the product. Teachers asked students questions to find out if they understood and remembered what was read. Other students would listen and it was believed would learn

from their peers' answers (Reid, 1981). This method merely involved evaluating the responses to the questions the teachers had asked their readers, without teaching the readers how to comprehend (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; McNeill, 1984). When Durkin (1978) observed classroom teachers she found that comprehension instruction was given an average of 3.75 minutes or less than one percent of the instruction time. Instruction usually took the form of mentioning the skill followed by instructions for completing worksheets and workbook pages. Teachers spent 12.1% of the reading time asking questions about what had been read. Usually the only answer accepted was the answer given in the manual or the answer the teacher had decided was correct (Tierney, 1990). Mason (1984) also studied the nature of comprehension instruction in the classroom. In third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms, even though teachers felt there needed to be a move from learning to read--to reading to learn, 25% of instruction was preparing students for work. Only half of the time was spent on new or review work. She found that word and sentence level comprehension activities were emphasized the most. Text level comprehension received the least emphasis. Teachers

were asking questions seventy percent of the time, a student responded, and the others listened.

The recent interest in cognitive development has changed the study of comprehension (Guthrie, 1981; Pearson & Raphael, 1984). Today reading is viewed as a complex cognitive process (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; McNeil, 1984). Comprehension is now thought to be essentially the same as thinking (Griese, 1977). It is considered to be one form of problem solving (Pearson & Raphael, 1984). Comprehension is an elusive form; it is difficult to study because it involves processes that are going on inside the reader's mind. Researchers have had to find some means for determining what processes the mind is going through as it takes meaning from the printed text. Only recently have they been able to identify and define basic comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension is constructive. Flood (1984) describes the text as being like building blocks. The writer arranges the words, sentences and paragraphs into patterns to communicate a message. The reader uses the text as a model to guide the construction of a parallel image. Readers and writers work from similar "blueprints" based on knowledge from

school and home. Pearson & Johnson (1978) agree that reading is a dialogue between the writer and the reader. The readers interpret the writing according to what they think the writer is trying to communicate. The words and phrases in the text do not have meaning without the reader forming meaning based on an analysis of the author's intention and the reader's knowledge of the topic (Duffy, Roehler, & Mason, 1984).

Comprehension is an active process. Readers must decode the words, interpret and alter what they read according to the prior knowledge they have about the topic, and they must think while processing the text (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Lapp & Flood, 1984; Goodman, 1988). Teachers can aid comprehension and retention by giving students strategies for relating the text with personal knowledge and experience (McNeil, 1984).

According to Lapp and Flood (1984), before a person can become a proficient reader that person must go through a "learning to read" stage. During this stage the learner acquires and practices strategies needed for the proficient reading stage. Teachers promote active participation by teaching strategies that aid readers in comprehending, making the reader aware of the goals of comprehension, explaining that

activities that foster and encourage concentration and observation are part of the reading process, and providing reading materials that provoke the readers' interest.

Comprehension involves organizing information in terms of previously acquired knowledge (Mason, 1984) and constructing a bridge between what is already known and the elements in the new information (McNeill, 1984). This is called a schema-theoretic view. Schemata (plural of schema) are structured networks where knowledge is stored (Mason, 1984). Smith (1988) says schemata are "abstract descriptions of events or situations with 'slots' for specific detail, which we try to fit in when we want to do or understand something" (p. 226). They contain a network of interrelationships with other concepts (Ferguson, 1985). When readers read they scan their existing schemata to find a place where the new information relates.

The network grows as the reader either assimilates the new information or accommodates conflicting information. When the reader is able to categorize new information as belonging to a preexisting schema, he or she assimilates the new information. Sometimes the

reader has to alter or change his or her schemata when there is a conflict between the existing schema and the *new information*. *This change in our schemata is called accommodation* (Pearson & Johnson, 1978).

Schemata permit the reader to make predictions about future events based on prior knowledge (Church, 1985). The reader is also able to make inferences based on knowledge they have stored. Schemata help the reader separate important ideas from less important ideas. Our interpretation of what we read is stored in our memory. When a schema is activated it helps us recall what we have read. Once an element becomes a part of a schemata it can be understood as it relates to the entire network of knowledge (McNeill, 1984).

Pearson & Johnson (1978) emphasize that relating knowledge to that which is known is the essence of comprehension. The teacher must provide as many experiences for the student as possible. These experiences should ideally be direct experiences. However, every experience cannot be directly experienced so the teacher must also provide many indirect experiences as well.

Schema theory is now being applied to text structure. Recently psychologists and linguists who

have studied how readers make sense of what they read have observed that texts are organized and presented in distinctive and characteristic ways. Each type of text has its own genre scheme. As readers interact with a variety of written materials they internalize the organizational structure into schema for each type of text in order to be able to predict what the texts will be like (Smith, 1988). Comprehension is affected by the correlation of the schema of the structure of the story with the reader's story schema (Reid, 1981). Well-structured texts that conform to story schema are easier to remember. If the text is disorganized or the student does not know the relevant structure the text will not be understood or it will be distorted (Reid, 1981; Smith, 1988).

Genre schema give writers a framework for organizing what the author wants to say. Genre schema allow writers to anticipate what the reader will expect (Smith, 1988; Wilson & Anderson, 1986). When authors compose according to the rules of the genre schema the readers are able to interpret the events and make sense of the relationships among the events. The more the author uses and respects the genre forms that the

readers anticipate the more the reader will be able to understand and remember the text.

Expository texts have discourse structures which are their characteristic internal relationships. The chapters in books, the way paragraphs are arranged, and the headings are all part of the discourse structures of a text. The structures form the bases of prediction for the reader (Smith, 1988).

Story grammars are the conventional ways of telling a story. They are the framework through which the characters, plots, motives, and resolutions are linked together. For a story to sound right to a reader it must be appropriately told and the reader needs to have knowledge of the appropriate framework (Smith, 1988). Wilson and Anderson (1986) feel students need to receive direct instruction in story schema so they will recognize elements in a story.

Krein and Zaharias (1986) found that able readers have a more well-rounded sense of story structure than disabled readers. More able readers were able to recall more propositions and their story predictions were more congruent with the text. Disabled students benefit from hearing stories. They should also be encouraged to retell stories. Teachers should employ

more predictive questioning techniques for the reading disabled students.

Students need to have many experiences with a variety of genres to develop schemata for text. The teacher needs to provide lots of experience through reading, then use that experience to study the various aspects of story structure (Church, 1988). "Children learn structures by being helped to understand the texts in which the structures are employed" (Smith, 1988, p. 43). Teachers can assist comprehension by bringing students' internalized story structure to conscious awareness. The students need to be allowed to do something interesting and purposeful with their knowledge (Church, 1985).

Another aspect of reading comprehension is metacognition. The purpose of reading is to construct meaning from the text. Readers are aware of their cognitive reading abilities and their ability to adjust the processes of comprehension as they read through a text. The awareness of this knowledge is known as metacognition. A good reader is aware that the text is not making sense and is prompted to look for the source of difficulty and remedy the problem (Dewitz, Carr, & Patberg, 1987). The reader is also aware of the text

components and of the explicit and implicit ideas contained in the text. Monitoring comprehension includes setting goals for reading to judge whether the text is giving meaning, integrating prior knowledge with content information, comparing main ideas, and relating details to main ideas. It also involves self-questioning, paraphrasing, summarizing, confirming assumptions, and making predictions. When comprehension breaks down certain strategies are employed to find out why the text is not making sense. These strategies include rereading, backward-forward search, self-questioning, contrasting textual information with prior knowledge, and comparing main ideas with each other and with details to restore comprehension (Haller, Child, & Walberg, 1988).

Brown (1980) describes "debugging" devices, metacognition skills that can be tailored to the purposes of reading. Effective readers use a variety of tactics to ensure efficient comprehension. Brown lists the following activities:

1. Clarifying the purpose of reading, that is, understanding the task demands, both explicit and implicit,

2. Identifying the aspects of a message that are important,
3. Allocating attention so that concentration can be focused on the major content area rather than on trivia,
4. Monitoring ongoing activities to determine whether comprehension is occurring,
5. Engaging in review and self-interrogation to determine whether goals are being achieved,
6. Taking corrective action when failures in comprehension are detected,
7. Recovering from disruptions and distractions that interfere with learning (p.456).

Metacognition improves with maturation and instruction (Baker & Brown, 1984). Haller et al. (1988) found metacognitive instruction is helpful at all grade levels but especially effective for seventh and eighth graders. The most effective skills were awareness of textual inconsistency and the use of self-questioning to monitor and regulate understanding. The more instructional features, the more effective the results because students respond differently to different instructional features. Dewitz et al. (1987) found that when students were taught to monitor their

understanding of text and to use specific strategies to answer comprehension questions changes occurred in the strategies used to justify answers to comprehension questions.

In summary, the view of reading comprehension has changed over the years from one of product to one of process. Reading today is viewed as an active, constructive process by which readers build meaning from what they read depending on the prior knowledge and background experiences they have for that subject. Teachers have to link the students' schema or build schema to aid in the understanding of the new information in the text. The teacher also has to be aware of the readers' schema for story structure as well as the author's use of story structure. Finally, today the teacher must be aware of each student's metacognitive awareness of his/her own reading and be able to build on that awareness. No longer is reading comprehension viewed as passive, receptive, or text-based (Pearson, 1985).

What strategies are available for teaching comprehension in an intermediate whole language classroom? How can a whole language teacher make reading an active process? The next section of this

paper provides the intermediate teacher with some strategies to promote active comprehension skills in a whole language classroom.

Strategies for Teaching Reading Comprehension in the Intermediate Classroom Using Whole Language Experiences

Most of the literature concerning whole language describes strategies that can be used in the primary grades. What strategies can be used in the intermediate classrooms--fourth through sixth? The last section of this paper suggests some strategies that can be used by the intermediate classroom teacher to improve the comprehension of intermediate students.

One aspect of a whole language classroom that the intermediate teacher should use is reading aloud to the students. Reading aloud provides a model for the intermediate students to see the techniques a skilled reader uses. The teacher can model many strategies he or she uses. The strategies of using imaging, monitoring comprehension, making inferences, bringing in background information are but a few of the strategies a teacher can model while reading aloud. Reading aloud also provides more background knowledge, more experiences for children to draw on (Gray, 1987). Reading aloud also can make the students aware of the

possibilities reading holds. The teacher should be sure to include a variety of writings on various topics. (Smith & Barrett, 1979).

Another strategy that should be used in the intermediate class is having children write. Writers discover the importance of communicating meaning. Writing makes children aware that authors have a message to share with others. When children write they become aware of strategies for reading when something doesn't make sense. They should be able to choose their own topic, compose in various genre, and revise by choice. They need to share books and writing with each other. If their peers do not understand what they have written, revising and rereading become necessary (Rubin & Hansen, 1984). By learning to use story grammar in their own writing, students will learn to recognize story structure in stories they read (McNeil, 1984).

Another important component of the whole language program that needs to be continued in the intermediate classroom is the use of Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). The more reading is used, the better the reader. SSR gives even the less-able students time to read. There are variations of silent reading. The reading can be

absolutely uninterrupted (USSR) or students can share their reading. It is very important for some time to be set aside to share so readers can communicate with one another about their reading. The other students might become interested. It is very important for the teacher to read silently during this silent reading time showing the children that reading is very important (Smith & Barrett, 1979; Tierney, Readence, & Dishner, 1980). The students need to have a wide variety of reading materials available from which to choose. Self-selection adds personal interest to their reading and makes the reading more meaningful (Rubin & Hansen, 1984).

Students need to be encouraged to become more active readers. McNeil (1984) says "pupils may fail to become independent readers because they have schematized reading as a passive activity or one in which they must catalog bits of information verbatim to answer teacher's questions" (p.26). The following strategies will provide intermediate teachers with some ideas for getting the students to be more active thinkers.

The most important aspect of reading is the ability to relate prior knowledge to new information in

the text (Vaughn & Estes, 1986). That prior knowledge has to either be activated or built by the teacher.

One activity that activates the students' prior knowledge is clustering. Clustering, developed by Gabrielle Rico, starts with a key word written in the upper third of the paper and circled. Words that come to mind radiate outward from the key word.

Associations that seem related are connected with lines. The ideas are not judged correct or incorrect at this time. Having the students cluster individually or with partners insures that all students will be active participants. The clusters can be formed into a class cluster allowing other students to add those ideas to their knowledge or to recall additional knowledge (Vaughn & Estes, 1986).

When students have little prior knowledge about a subject, an activity that will provide direct and indirect experience is the scavenger hunt (Cunningham, Crawley, & Mountain, 1983). This is a way of gathering objects and pictures to represent concepts that need to be developed. Make a list of unfamiliar vocabulary you need to teach. The scavenger list will consist of those words that can be represented directly or indirectly. Add to those familiar words until you have

a list of 20-25 words. Assign the students to teams. Set a date to bring pictures or objects representing as many of the items on the list as they can find. Allow time to discuss what different words mean and who might be able to find something representing the meaning of each word. Some words may have to have written descriptions instead of pictures or the actual object. Continue to meet as they are scavenging, having them try to keep secret from the other team what they have found and where they found it. On the appointed day allow time to show the pictures and objects. The teacher can devise ways to award points for participation or for successfully completing the hunting tasks. The winners could create a bulletin board. Not only will the students have some background knowledge but they will also be anticipating the beginning of the lesson.

Another activity to activate prior knowledge is called List, Group, & Label. The students list all the words they think of about a certain topic. Then they think of ways they can group the words. Discuss why they put those words together. Then decide what they would label that group (Irwin & Baker, 1989).

The next activity helps the teacher assess how much prior knowledge the students have and gives the students a purpose to read. The students brainstorm for all they know about a particular subject. The teacher writes it all on the board or on chart paper under the heading, "What We Know". The next column is, "What We Want to Learn". The students generate a list of what they would like to find out in the text about the subject. The last heading is, "What We Learned". After reading the text the students share what they have learned and the questions that still need to be answered. This sharing reinforces the concept that each reader brings different interests and background knowledge to reading. Provide library books and other materials so the students can answer the questions that were not answered in the text (Ogle, 1986).

Developing mental associations and visual images helps establish background information (Johnson, 1985). Mental association is connecting a word or a picture to a child's knowledge of the world. This is done by having the students identify with the character or the setting or some aspect of a story. The students can predict what might happen, thus setting a goal or

purpose for reading which is another important aspect of getting ready to read.

Children need to become aware of how authors use inferences when they write. Reading would be very boring if the author wrote down every single detail. Instead, authors assume readers will supply the unstated knowledge. Good readers fill in the gaps with their own knowledge. Poor readers need to be trained to make inferences. Teachers need to model how to look for clues and how to combine them with information in their heads to figure out what the author meant. By asking inferential questions teachers can increase the students' ability to infer what the author intended (Pearson, 1985). The teacher needs to be sure the poorer readers are being asked inferential questions because they are the ones who need the most encouragement to be active readers. Practice with different types of materials aids in the transfer of making inferences in different types of text.

One activity that promotes awareness of inferences is to make two columns on the board. One column is for text explicit information, the other for information that has to be inferred. Students read a paragraph and make two columns--one for the information from the

text, one for their own knowledge and inferences. Ask inferential questions and have students fill in their inference columns. Discuss which information in the text was important and which information in their heads was used to make appropriate inferences.

Another technique is Author's Assumptions. Discuss the fact that authors can not write everything readers need to know in order to understand their writing. Authors assume readers will supply unstated knowledge. Give the students examples of everyday materials that require the reader to make assumptions. Discuss how the author thought the reader should be able to use his or her background knowledge to know what the author inferred. Additional practice sheets can be given as well as textbook assignments. The key to helping the students with inferences would be the discussion of how the inference was made.

To make inferences about characters use character clues. Have students divide a paper in half. On the left side they list ten things the story character did. On the right side they list why the character did each thing. At the bottom they write what these clues tell about the character. Discuss the reasons students

inferred for the character's actions and how they led to students' conclusions about the characters.

Often the setting is inferred by the author. To help students learn how to make inferences about the setting demonstrate the assumptions we often make when reading about where an event took place. Have students work on practice sentences that lead students to infer a place. Have students construct or locate sentences that require the reader to make assumptions about location. These activities can also be used when the story is happening in terms of time or season or period or for telling what the weather is like. The teacher can reinforce the skill of inferencing as he or she is reading aloud to the students by asking inference questions (Irwin & Baker, 1989).

In the past, question-asking has been widely used as a method of teaching comprehension. However, the questions used assessed the students' comprehension rather than taught the students how to comprehend (Durkin, 1978-79; Mason, 1980). Researchers have found that questions are an important part of learning how to comprehend if they do more than merely assess comprehension. Teachers should provide questioning before, during, and after reading the text. Questions

during the reading should follow up on the predictions and goals set in the prereading exercises with new predictions and questions being generated. After the reading, the questions should focus on comparing the material to the students' expectations. Students who have been taught to generate their own questions have shown improved comprehension scores. Having them generate questions is also thought to improve students' ability to analyze materials (Johnson, 1985). One method to use is paired questioning. Explain to the students that the purpose of the activity is to develop self-questioning strategies to help them be aware of what they know and what they do not know. Divide the class into pairs. Each person reads the first section of the story or text and creates three questions about the important information in the text. Repeat the process for another section. Exchange and answer the lists of questions without looking back. Return the papers and exchange feedback on the answers. Reinforce the lesson by restating the importance of asking oneself questions when reading to be aware of what one does or does not know (Fitzgerald, 1983).

Singer (1978) stresses the importance of students learning to ask their own questions and guiding their

own thinking. He recommends teachers use three steps of teaching for the transfer of question-asking. Modeling behavior is provided as teachers ask the kind of questions students should ask themselves and demonstrate the process of thinking needed to read and comprehend text. Then the students are encouraged to ask their own questions as the teacher-questioning is phased out. Active comprehension, the third step, is a continuous process of the students asking questions and searching for answers before, during, and after their own reading. Some techniques teachers can use to teach active comprehension are asking a question that gets a question, taking turns pretending to be the teacher and asking the group questions, and having groups compete in making questions over the title and first paragraph. Students are motivated by their own questions to read and find the answers to their questions.

Palincsar and Brown (1986) have devised a strategy that promotes both comprehension of text and comprehension monitoring. They call the activity reciprocal teaching. The students and the adult take turns being the "teacher". The "teacher" is responsible for leading dialogue about a passage the students are reading. The students work on predicting,

question-generating, summarizing, and clarifying as they read through material. They begin by contemplating what they know about the subject, then predict what they think the author will tell them. This gives them a purpose to read to confirm or disprove their predictions. The predicting strategy also facilitates the use of text structure. Students learn that the title, headings, and subheadings can help predict what might happen next.

Question-generating involves the students in identifying the important information that makes good questions. They are responsible for generating questions which other students answer. This gets all students more actively involved in the reading process. Summarizing integrates information. The students identify the most important content of the paragraph. The teacher will guide them in integrating ideas across paragraphs and sections. Clarifying is especially helpful for those students with comprehension difficulty. It makes students aware of the fact that there are many reasons why the text does not make sense. They are taught to watch out for impediments and take necessary measures to restore meaning. The teacher explains what strategies the students will be

learning, why, and when they will use the strategies. Instruction is then given on the four strategies. After the instruction, the dialogue begins with the teacher modeling how he or she uses the four strategies while reading. The students are encouraged to comment on the teacher's summary, add their own predictions and clarifications, and respond to questions. As the days go on, the teacher transfers the responsibility to the students. Here the students receive guided practice with the teacher monitoring the use of the strategies. Very important here is the teacher's use of praise as students correctly model the use of the strategies. Eventually the students become the "teachers" with the teacher monitoring and taking turns.

Pearson and Johnson (1978) proposed a taxonomy for categorizing questions. Questions are text explicit, text implicit, or script implicit. Raphael (1986) developed a program for teaching question answer relationships (QAR). "In the Book" refers to text explicit questions. "Think and Search" refers to text implicit questions and "In My Head" refers to schema implicit questions. It is divided into groups. "Author and You" answers are not in the story but are dependent on what the author tells in the text along with the reader's own knowledge. "On My Own" answers

are not in the story. The reader has only his or her own experience to answer those questions. QAR helps students realize they can consider both information in the text and information from their own background and knowledge. The teacher introduces the strategies one at a time. It is important for the students to see that the goal is to use these categories as signals for different strategies for seeking information and using their textbooks. Knowing the terms is beneficial to the students.

There are many strategies the intermediate teacher can use to teach the students to become better at comprehending what they read. If the strategies are taught using real, meaningful text they will work in a whole language setting. Many of the components of the whole language program are necessary in the intermediate grades, also. The students need to be active readers. Prior knowledge must be activated or built. Question-asking continues to be an important part of the reading program with a focus on developing more active readers rather than merely assessing comprehension.

The focus of reading has changed over the past years. Hopefully we will be able to produce readers

who will be able to use their reading skills both
recreationally, as well as, functionally.

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