



NSW Centre for Effective Reading

Middle Years

Comprehension – Background Information

Introduction

As text becomes more complicated in the middle years and high school, and as the demands for learning from text (particularly information texts) increase, students must become more sophisticated in both the range and the flexibility of their reading comprehension strategies to maintain or accelerate their level of reading proficiency (Duke & Pearson, 2002, in Academic Literacy Instruction for Adolescents, 2007,p.9).

Instruction in reading comprehension strategies is relevant for all students, but particularly for students with reading difficulties (Gatjria, Jitendra, Sood & Sacks, 2007, 2011; Vaughn, Gersten & Chard, 2000).

It is interesting to compare successful readers with struggling readers to understand how their reading behaviours affect their understanding and recall of text.

Successful Readers	Struggling Readers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor reading for understanding. Consider the writing from the author’s view, interacting with the text during and after reading. • Link content with their prior knowledge. • Use a variety of effective reading strategies before, during and after reading. • Set a purpose for reading and adjust their rate and strategy use depending on the text and content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fail to use metacognitive strategies as they read. • May not be aware when understanding breaks down. • Do not question or interact with the text during or after reading. • May lack subject-specific prior knowledge. • Do not readily make connections between what they are learning and what they already know. • Have limited knowledge and use of strategies for gaining information from text. • May fail to read with purpose or goals. • Often do not enjoy reading and lack understanding of the utility of reading

Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M. (2008) p.22

Students with reading difficulties tend to be inactive learners (Torgesen & Licht, 1983) who fail to monitor their reading or use comprehension strategies effectively. They tend to focus on the surface aspects of reading. They do not reflect on how their reading is progressing nor do they know which strategies to use when comprehension breaks down.

How do we teach comprehension strategies?

Comprehension strategies are employed before, during, and after reading. Effective readers automatically employ strategies to understand what they are reading. Students with reading difficulties, however, need explicit instruction on how to use comprehension strategies to assist them to understand what they read. They also require ample practice at both guided and independent levels, in using these strategies with a variety of texts.

Comprehension Strategies Used by Effective Readers

Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading
Establish purpose for reading	Identify main ideas and supporting details	Retelling in your own words Summarize
Activate background knowledge	Create mental images: "Make a movie in your head" - visualising Make inferences Reread or use "fix-up" strategies when they do not understand	Make inferences
Make predictions	Make informed predictions/verify predictions	Verify predictions
Generate questions about the text	Generate questions about the text	Generate questions about the text
Evaluate text structure	Use text structure as a framework for comprehension	
	Monitor understanding of words and use vocabulary strategies when unfamiliar words are encountered	
	Monitor for understanding	

Denton, C., Bryan, D., Wexler, J., Reed, D. Vaughn, S. (2007) p.66

For **strategy instruction** to be effective, students, especially students with reading difficulties, must have a metacognitive knowledge of how, where, when, and why they are using a strategy, and the underlying reasons behind the components of the strategy (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). Students need to be able to manage cognitive and metacognitive processes (self-regulation) to monitor their comprehension and to maintain effort.

Although students with reading difficulties might benefit from an initial emphasis on teaching specific comprehension strategies one at a time, as they gain mastery of individual strategies, instruction and practice can systematically focus on the application of **multiple** or **integrated strategies** (Coyne et al, 2007, p.93).

Downloadable fact sheets and examples are provided for each of comprehension strategies highlighted above.

References

Boardman, A. G., Roberts, G., Vaughn, S., Wexler, J., Murray, C. S., & Kosanovich, M. (2008). *Effective instruction for adolescent struggling readers: A practice brief*. Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation, Center on Instruction.

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