EFFECTIVE TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION IN K-3 STUDENTS

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The goal of Open Court Reading is to set young students on the path to becoming lifelong readers—readers who approach reading with enthusiasm and who view it as a pleasure as well as a powerful tool for learning and for taking charge of their lives. Open Court Reading wants to ensure that young students become solid readers who can read and want to read. Good readers read with fluency. They move smoothly through text, effortlessly and accurately translating sound/spell-23ET ((o)7(mifd5(dent) Tm la)106.9(a)8(k)-)7(m effd5(dent)-8(

with the strategies and skills they must have to read with comprehension. This guide is about comprehension. Drawing from time-honored and classroom-proven research, it focuses on what is known about the makeup of skillful comprehension and about effective comprehension instruction.

Comprehension Instruction and the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2010) takes a broad-based approach to literacy, by which students must "learn to read, write, speak, listen and use language effectively in a variety of content areas." (Page 3) More specifically, the CCSS are a set of standards for reading literature an informational text that students are expected to achieve by the end of a specific grade level. The standards DO NOT define the instruction necessary for students to achieve the end-of-grade standards. Nowhere in the CCSS are "strategies" mentioned. Nowhere in the standards are suggestions for how to teach comprehension. Thus, for many educators this is interpreted as there i no need to teach strategies.

The standards do

require students to ort in

- emphasize the importance of reading complex or challenging texts, texts that include demanding vocabulary and academic language.
- require students to

Good readers are often selective, focusing their attention on the parts of the text that are most appropriate to their goals. Effective readers go beyond the literal meaning of text, interpreting what th read by filtering ideas in the text through their prior knowledge. Such interpretations often include an evaluation of the quality of the ideas in the text. Often, such associations are carried out intentionally

certain students have a chance to practice it (p. 339). Research states that the ability to identify and use text structure can make a difference in students' text comprehension: Good readers are able to u structure, whereas poor readers are not (Meyer, Brandt, & Bluth, 1980). Therefore, teaching students the skills necessary to use text structure is another way to improve their reading comprehension.

A very practical way to understand both the distinction between strategies and skills and their interac is to think about the sport of basketball. Players practice different types of shots - three-point plays, hook shots and dunks; they work on different types of dribbling from pull back to crossover to behind the back. All of these skills become automatic with practice, just as reading skills become automatic. But skills are not sufficient to win the game. Players also learn to play strategically by looking at wher players are positioned, where a shot can be made, and which shot makes the most sense. Reading t court and players is key to knowing which play to make. The same is true with reading. The foundati

Browsing and skimming should be turned into questions to help students take ownership of the strate

Predicting , confirming predictions and making predictions motivates and engages readers, provides

- Asking questions that can only be answered by making inferences from the text. For example: I wonder how her brother felt after she said that.
- Asking questions about genre, style, and author's purpose.
- Asking open-ended questions that lead to discussion and clarification of ideas. For example: Wha you think the character meant when she said . . .?
- Asking questions that go beyond the text and lead to more reading or research. For example: I st wonder what could be done to make seeds grow faster.
- Asking questions that monitor and check understanding. For example: What isn't making sense h What is causing my confusion? How do these ideas fit together?
- Returning to questions during and after reading to discuss possible answers and revisiting the te to check for clues.
- Readers may raise questions about the author's technique, its theme, and its relationship to othe books by the same or other authors, such as: How is this book like other books by this author? Or Why did the author start telling the story in the third person and then switch to the first person?

When the process of predicting and confirming predictions is first being introduced and practiced by students, it is helpful to record predictions to be sure they are revisited. For example,

As we make predictions today, I am going to write them down so we can revisit them to see which predictions were confirmed and which were not confirmed in the story. Older students can take responsibility for writing down their own predictions on sticky notes as they read and post them on th appropriate page. This provides an opportunity for students to self-regulate strategy use and when shared with other students, provide a model for others. Confirming also requires students to reread a to check author clues which supports close reading.

Asking Questions and Finding Answers Harvey and Goudvis (2007) explain that "Questions open th doors to understanding." (p. 18). Generating questions about the text propels the reader forward (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000). Asking questions gives students reasons for reading and engages ther with the text, two essential behaviors of skilled readers. Generating questions and determining answ give readers a means of checking their understanding of the information stated in or implied by the author and are also a vehicle for finding evidence in the text to support answers, a key behavior in th Common Core State Standards. They help readers clarify confusion, spur them on to investigate furt and are proof that they are thinking about what they are reading as they interact with the text (Harvey Goudvis, 1997, Miller, 2002). In addition, unanswered questions encourage students to read beyond text and motivate them to do research in search of answers.

When reading fiction, sometimes there really is no answer to a question or the question itself is unimportant for understanding the story. For example, while reading a story about a dog, (which was pictured with floppy ears and long hair that covered his eyes), a student asked, I want to know what k of dog it is. After reading, the teacher asked if there were any questions that were not answered by th author. The st4 >>BDC BT 273.0215(o)8(r)47text, d q(e)3(r t)-15(e th)-8(em.40 14t w)-81d4-16(c)-a

to look at the writer's craft or author's purpose is appropriate, but it changes the reader's stance to on of analysis. The strategy of question-asking from an aesthetic stance should reflect the natural musin of a reader immersed in the world co-created by reader and author.

One way to encourage students to do this when reading fiction is to frame questions as wondering. Wondering is a natural response to reading and helps the reader to enjoy and understand the text be or prepare them for what will happen next in a narrative. Often the wondering leads the reader to mak inferences. For example, returning to Where the Wild Things Are, the teacher might model with a thin aloud: I wonder what made Max act so wild. Maybe he was tired of being inside the house or maybe h was just bored and wanted to use his imagination and pretend he was a real monster.

Informational text demands close attention by the reader. Students who have poor comprehension of informational text often are unable to recall information or to answer questions about the text (Raphael, 1986) and need support to develop good questioning skills. According to Chen et al, (2010 students should learn to use the basic five W questions (who, what where, when and why) and the on question (how). Early in the process, students often focus on asking factual questions that usually ca be answered in the text: Who invented the automobile? What is the largest planet? Where do armad live? When was Lincoln born? Ultimately, students should be generating questions that focus on problems (How can cars run on electricity?), causal (Why are African elephants in danger of becomin extinct?), conditional (If, we don't drive as many cars, then will smog disappear)? and temporal (How can people live on the space station without adverse effects?).

Breaking the strategy down in to manageable pieces can help students build understanding of why to ask questions, when to ask questions, and what to ask. While readers generate questions abo the characters, setting, plot, and other elements of story grammar, they should also be asking questions

- that can be answered by finding explicit information in the text, questions that begin with what, where, or who
- about important points in the text that go beyond merely facts with questions that begin with how or why,
- about something one wants to know and it with the teacher's support,
- that can only be answered by making inferences from the text,
- about genre, style, and author's purpose,
- that are open-ended and lead to discussion and clarification of ideas, such as what did the author,
- that go beyond the text and lead to more reading and research
- that monitor and check understandin. For example: What isn't making sense here? What is causing my confusion?

Visualizing creates mental images or visualizing personalizes reading and engages the reader direct with the text (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000). Visualization is not just a retelling of the specific words in the text. When students read Arnold Lobel's words, "toad sits by his garden and waits" and are asked visualize, they close their eyes and typically create a "literal picture": I see the toad sitting in his gard Teachers should help students to use visualization to interpret and make inferences while they are reading. The images of a characters, situations, or settings may change over time as the author adds information. In addition, readers use their senses to create these visualizations how the character mi feel or look like or how the setting conjures up certain smells, feelings, and sounds. Keeping this in m an effective think aloud might be: I can just see Toad sitting there. He's getting impatient because his seeds aren't growing like Frog said they would. He probably isn't very happy since nothing is happen When I visualize Toad, I can tell how he feels.

Reading

Students may start with literal pictures but should be encouraged to move beyond that by interpreting feelings and sensory elements and visualizing

- A "literal picture" of the character, setting or situation
- With the senses (smell, hear, touch in addition to what the reader sees) to expand the mental ima and to infer beyond the text
- Using background knowledge to infer beyond the text

Although visualization is more often thought of when reading narrative texts, visualization or constructing mental images is an effective strategy for students to use for comprehending complex informational text. Visualizing passages can help students organize and remember information (Trabasso and Bouchard, 2002) as well as to recognize when information is incomplete or inconsisten (Irwin, 1991). For example, in a process-explanation structure, which explains how something works is built, a student can visualize the process, which helps with information retention as well as the identification of confusing or inadequate information in the text. Visualization also involves both makin connections and inferring (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000). In another situation, a group of students were reading about different sources of energy, wind being one of the sources. The text referred to "wind farms." At first the thought of a wind farm, it made no sense when they visualized a traditional farm w crops growing in rows. When one student suggested that they think about the turbines as crops, they were able to visualize long rows of wind turbines, neatly laid out like crops on a farm. The students th inferred that a "wind farm was an enormous area of land with wind turbines planted or erected in long straight rows."

Unlike fiction, there is less room for interpretation when visualizing nonfiction. It may be helpful to:

- Visualize a segment of text using author
- Create a time line
- Visualize beyond the words in the text
- Make diagram of a complex process.
- Illustrate a concept or draw a map.
- Aggregate information and chart it
- Visualize the main idea of the text details

Summarizing The National Reading Panel (2000) analyses found that summarizing increases engagement by focusing on the main ideas rather than the details. Summarizing requires students to process the text by omitting irrelevant information and generalizing ideas various several examples. I order to summarize, students must pay more attention to the text while they read or reread it. This als results in increased engagement. Summarizing helps students understand the structure of the text. Summarizing narrative text involves focusing on the story elements. Effective readers do not wait unt the end of a text to summarize but rather create a series of summary statements as they are reading to check understanding and build meaning. Students need to learn what these logical points are, for example, the end of an episode. Summarizing informational text, like fiction, involves identifying the g the main thesis, the key idea(s) or main point(s) of what was read. Creating a summary for informatio text is often very challenging for students, since there is a tendency to include details, not just the main ideas.

For younger students, summarizing begins by talking about or retelling what they remember about the story. Sequence cards, story maps, and other graphic organizers offer the scaffolding needed for students to summarize text. For example, in kindergarten, students might use sequence cards to ret the events in terms of what happened first, next and last. By first grade they identify and use basic st elements to retell the story. Second graders can learn to summarize the plot in chronological order by using a graphic organizer.

The literature on teaching summarizing contains a range of activities, many of which do not result in t development of good summaries. For example, having students continuously add to a summary that student started, only teaches students that "more is better" when conciseness should be the focus. The goal of instruction should be moving students toward identifying the central idea as stated in the text or in their own words. The following is a continuum of skills leading to summarizing. Summarizing a complex skill and takes years to develop. Young children have difficulty with the skills necessary to summarizing. They delete information but don't combine or condense details. Learning to paraphrase precedes their ability to begin combining and condensing. This continuum can be helpful for the scaffolding students need to become more proficient in summarizing.

- Retelling anything remembered.
- Retelling (paraphrasing) in one's own words.
- Retelling ideas in sequence.
- Summarizing the main idea and details.
- Recognizing convenient or necessary spots for summing up, not just at the end of every paragrap but at the end of chapters and key story events.
- Summing up the most important information concisely by creating a gist statement.
- Using inferences to summarize (Gear, 2006).

All these strategies should be employed throughout the reading process. As students become profici using strategies and engage with each other to discuss problems, they need to appreciate that what a problem for one student may not be a problem for another. An unknown word for one student may b a familiar one to another. Students may come up with different visualizations or connections based on their own personal experiences. Strategy instruction helps students understand that interpretations of text can and should vary across readers. While there may not be one "right" answer to a question different strategies might be used to solve a problem, students should always be encouraged to discu the problems, share solutions and respect different interpretations of stories.

Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Strategy instruction is most effective when strategies are explicitly taught (National Reading Panel, 2000; Duffy, (2002) in the context of actual reading. This involves the instructional strategies of explanation plus modeling or demonstrating the strategy as to how and when to use it (Dewitz et al. 2009). In addition, instructional strategies should include scaffolding by teachers and opportunities fo students to practice and apply strategies (Palinscar and Brown, 1984; Rosenshine et al., 1996). Whil the teacher serves as the instructional leader initially, students are actively engaged in the process a should be gradually given the opportunity to take over responsibility for recognizing when and how to use strategies. Direct or explicit instruction involves the following process:

Strategy Explanation involves describing the strategy and explaining why it is important to use. Explanations contribute to the ability of students to become independent in strategy use and should be clear and succinct. Once the students are sufficiently exposed to the strategy, teachers should as them to explain the strategy and how it benefits them as readers. Explanation helps students to think about when they have used the strategy previously and motivates them to try the strategy on their ow or when prompted. This explanation stage takes very little time but should not be omitted. For examp Today, we are going to focus on the strategy of predicting. Making predictions helps us to think about what will happen as we read. Some people call it making a guess about what is going to happen. Bu don't just make a guess without thinking. When we make a prediction, we think about clues the autho gives us in the story and we also think about what we have learned from our own experience or other stories.

Modeling Thinking aloud is a common and effective form of modeling and helps students focus on building meaning (Bauman, Seifert-Kessel and Jones, 1992) and understanding how successful read construct meaning while reading. Thinking aloud is based on the work of Bereiter and Bird (1985) and is a critical component of strategy instruction. Think-alouds go beyond direct explanation by opening window into the minds of proficient readers. They incorporate the how, why, and when of specific stra use through the actual verbalization of the thinking while reading.

- Classify and categorize information.
- Identify and distinguish main ideas and details.
- Draw conclusions and make inferences from what is read.
- Distinguish fact from opinion.
- Distinguish fantasy from reality.

Some of these skills—such as identifying cause-and-effect relationships, identifying main ideas, understanding a sequence, comparing and contrasting, and classifying and categorizing—help stude organize text information. Others—such as understanding the author's point of view and purpose and distinguishing fact from opinion—lead them to a deeper understanding of a text, Although most of the skills mentioned can be employed in analyzing narrative text and informational writing, it is especially helpful for students to have a repertoire of skills to use as they read expository texts. Expository text the type of writing students most often encounter in their textbooks, as well as in newspapers, magaz manuals, reference books, and guides. The following section takes a closer look at each of these skil at how they work to help students better understand the texts they read.

Identifying Cause and Effect Relationships It has been argued that helping students identify and understand cause-and-effect relationships is one of the most important aspects of comprehension instruction (Pearson & Johnson, 1978). After all, seeking causes and analyzing effects are primary concerns of a wide spectrum of society; everybody seeks to identify and understand the why and the

Classifying and Categorizing Classifying and categorizing, which means putting like things or ideas together, is a natural human activity. When something new is encountered, an attempt to understand is made by relating it to a class or category of similar things; for example, a kumquat is a citrus fruit, li an orange, a tangerine, or a lemon (Pearson & Johnson, 1978).

Because classifying and categorizing is such a common, natural activity, students benefit from knowi that authors often use this structure as a way of making new ideas and information easily accessible their readers.

Identifying and Distinguishing Main Ideas and Details Authors of expository texts and narratives build arguments, develop ideas and plots, and generally write entire texts by stating directly or implying important, or main, ideas and then offering details to support those ideas. The ability of students to identify relevant information in a text, including main ideas and the relations among ideas, is crucial t full comprehension. It has been found, however, that students at all grade levels are not able to find a analyze the main ideas in textbooks, especially if the main ideas are implied rather than stated clearl (Seidenberg, 1989).

To be most effective, instruction in distinguishing main ideas should show students how to use their p knowledge of the topic of a selection to help them determine what is more and less important. Helpin them activate their knowledge of other text structures and of signal words—first, next, consequently, subsequently, therefore, and so on—aids them in organizing the text and subsequently figuring out w the important idea is in a paragraph, section, or chapter.

Distinguishing Fact from Opinion Biographies; accounts of historical events; reviews of books, plays, cultural events; and other forms of expository text in which authors may take a particular perspective can pose special problems for students if they are unable to distinguish a statement of fact from a statement of the author's opinion. Often, students simply accept what is written as factual. Further, th often accept as factual something with which they agree strongly or that they see or hear repeated of (Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 1998).

To evaluate the information in what they read, students need to know what makes a fact a fact and w makes an opinion an opinion. Typically, this means helping them understand that a fact can be verifie or tested. It can be checked in a reference book or through reputable Internet sites; it is reported in th same way by any number of observers or writers. There is no disagreement among sources, for exar that American astronaut Neil Armstrong was the first human to set foot on the moon. That is a fact. A opinion, however, is not so easy to identify or characterize. Its validity cannot be demonstrated. Sour may disagree, for example, that Neil Armstrong was the greatest of all the American astronauts.

Instruction should include discussion of statements in a selection to help students identify factors such as dates and figures that can be used to determine whether or not the statements are verifiable discussion does not help students distinguish fact from opinion, lessons should be extended, perhaps include trips to the library to find additional sources of information for cross-checking.

Teaching Comprehension Skills to Understand Writer's Craft

Comprehension skills can also be used to understand why an author writes in a certain way or uses various literary elements to communicate. Recognizing these elements will not only enable students to comprehend a text better, but it also may help them use these same skills in their own writing.

Identifying and Considering the Author's Point of View In narrative writing, or fiction, point of view is th perspective from which an author presents the actions and events in the story. In general, an author u either a first-person or third-person point of view. The characteristics of first-person point of view are as follows.