University of Northern Iowa

UNI ScholarWorks

2009

Strategies to improve the comprehension of struggling readers and the elementary level

Melissa Mueller
University of Northern Iowa

Strategies to improve the comprehension of struggling readers and the elementary level

Abstract

Comprehension occurs when a reader constructs meaning from the text. Each reader must use a strategy to best suit their interaction with the text. By internalizing reading strategies, students will become successful readers. Education is part of a research based instructional practice movement. This paper describes five instructional methods used to teach comprehension strategies to elementary students and the research that supports them. The paper closes with conclusions and recommendations for teaching comprehension strategies.

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE COMPREHENSION OF STRUGGLING READERS

AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Melissa Mueller

July 2009
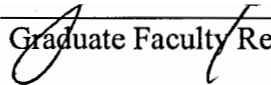
This Review by: Melissa Mueller

Titled: Strategies to Improve the Comprehension of Struggling Readers at the Elementary Level

has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the
Degree of Master of Arts.

July 31, 2009

Date Approved

Lynn E. Nielsen

Graduate Faculty Reader

7/31/09

Date Approved

Timothy G. Weih

Graduate Faculty Reader

8-3-09

Date Approved

Jill M. Uhlenberg
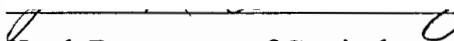
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Table of Contents

Abstract

Comprehension occurs when a reader constructs meaning from the text. Each reader must use a strategy to best suit their interaction with the text. By internalizing reading strategies, students will become successful readers. Education is part of a research based instructional practice movement. This paper describes five instructional methods used to teach comprehension strategies to elementary students and the research that supports them. The paper closes with conclusions and recommendations for teaching comprehension strategies.

Introduction

Reading is a puzzle of factors. It is dependent on the reader's experiential background as well as her conceptual background. For a person to read and understand the text, they must be able to apply word recognition strategies, use reasoning ability, have a purpose for reading, and have a text that is not above their abilities. A reader's environment affects their ability to read, as does their motivation (Heilman, Blair, Hall, 2002).

The approaches to teaching reading have evolved over the last half century. In the 60's and 70's many reading specialists believed reading was the result of decoding. Though decoding is necessary to decode words, it does not guarantee comprehension. Students were able to decode, but did not automatically comprehend. During this time, questioning techniques were analyzed. Educators determined teachers weren't using the right types of questions in instruction. The questions used in reading instruction became known as comprehension questions. Program developers incorporated comprehension questions into the basal readers. Though these questions did check comprehension, they did not teach comprehension (Cooper, 2000). Educators began to look at identifying a set of skills students should be able to demonstrate. By the early 1980's teaching comprehension entailed teaching a skill followed by student practice.

As these approaches were implemented and disproved, researchers in a variety of fields began theorizing how readers comprehend. Researchers in education, psychology, and linguistics began to look at a transactional approach. Louise Rosenblatt was the first researcher to suggest reading is a "transaction between the reader and the text" (as cited in Cooper, 2000). She established the belief that readers who read the same text could take away different meanings, and that was their right as readers. This transactional approach also referred to the transaction between the related elements: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and

thinking. "Personal response and interpretation are at the center of the reading process" (Gunning, 2000, p. 9); therefore, building background knowledge is important. It enriches the transaction between the reader and the text.

Researchers determined children learned best from a holistic avenue opposed to bit and pieces. This evolved into the whole language approach in which students learn through "use, not exercise" (as cited in Gunning, 2000, p. 413). Lev Vgotsky led the idea that children learn by the aid of their peers and parents (Cooper, 2000). His theory was children learn best through "expert guidance" (Gunning, 2000, p.6). Adults scaffold information to move children continuously forward in the learning process. This learning is applied to authentic activities such as writing to family members, reading to learn about a topic of the student's interest, and identify vowel sounds in books they are reading, opposed to skill exercises and writing for an imaginary audience.

The 1970's and 1980's provided the foundation of our literacy instruction today. Educators now define comprehension as "a strategic process by which readers construct or assign meaning to text by using the clues in the text and their own prior knowledge" (Cooper, 2000). As a strategic process, the reader identifies the text structure, a purpose for reading, and monitors thinking. The process of constructing meaning is achieved by the reader interacting with the text. This includes understanding the organization of the written word and connecting the new information with information the reader already knows.

The National Reading Panel was commissioned by the Bush administration to outline the components of a balanced literacy program. The five strands are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The panel then determined broad approaches to instruction in these areas. Phonemic awareness and phonics are to be explicitly and

systematically instructed. Fluency is achieved through guided oral readings. Vocabulary can be taught directly and indirectly with multiple encounters with new words including engaging activities such as computer use. However, the National Reading Panel was unable to determine a specific approach to teaching the comprehension of text. The panel suggests using a combination of techniques, but states its uncertainty of which strategies are most effective.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this review is to examine reading comprehension strategies and identify those strategies that provide evidence of improving the reading comprehension of struggling readers. It is also the purpose of this review to identify the instructional frameworks that these strategies are best taught through.

Research Questions

This literature review will analyze studies of reading comprehension strategies implemented to improve the skills of struggling readers at the elementary level. The following questions will be considered:

1. What does research identify as strategies used by fluent readers?

2. What instructional practices improve the reading strategies of struggling readers?

3. What research supports these frameworks of instruction?

Definitions

Several terms are common in the discussion on literacy instruction. The terms are connected and imbedded in the approaches of reading instruction.

1. *Comprehension-* the understanding, thinking, and conversation between the text and its reader (Miller, 2002)

2. *Fluency*-reading with fluid decoding, word recognition automaticity, expressiveness and phrasing with a good pace and appropriate pauses (Miller, 2002)

3. *No Child Left Behind*-legislation designed to "ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, a proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1,html#section 001) through assessments, teacher and district accountability, adequate resource distribution, and by providing challenging educational programs to close achievement gaps between high and low performing students

4. *National Reading Panel*-panel of 14 individuals that were considered to be "leading scientists in reading research, representatives of colleges of education, reading teachers, educational administrators, and parents" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) commission by Congress to "assess the status of research based knowledge and the effectiveness of teaching children to read" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000) and develop a plan to implement the research in reading instruction

5. *Phonemic awareness*- understanding the smallest speech sounds attached to each individual letter (Miller, 2002)

6. *Phonological Awareness*-"the understanding of spoken words, awareness of words, syllables, rhymes, and individual sounds" (Miller, 2002)

7. *Phonics*-method of teaching reading that emphasizes the learning "of letter-sound relationships and their use in reading and spelling" (Department of Health and Human Services, 2000)

8. *Schema*-the background knowledge and experiences a reader brings to connect with the text (Harvey, 2000)

9. *Vocabulary*-words the reader uses and knows to communicate with others (Miller, 2002)

Significance

The study of instructional practices that improve the reading strategies of struggling readers will help educators make positive decisions regarding reading instruction in the classroom. Educators must be aware of the current research-based practices used in the classroom and apply them. Educators must also be aware of what practices are not beneficial to students in order to phase them out of instructional practices (Routman, 2003). In addition, it is the purpose of education to guide the development of reasoning within students and guide them on the path of being valuable contributors to society. Students will be successful in and out of the classroom when provided with the tools necessary to evaluate situations based on their background knowledge and the circumstances presented to them. These tools are provided through the ability to read and comprehend.

Methodology

Methodology includes what sources the author used to gather information. It also lists key words used in searches, criteria for including literature, and how the author organized the information.

Method to Locate Sources

The author used review articles and professional texts to acquire information on the topic. Review articles were located through several online databases. ERIC (Ebsco), JSTOR, ERIC, InformaWorld, and HW Wilson were utilized. Professional texts were acquired from the

Dubuque Community School District's, Dubuque, Iowa professional library, Keystone Area

Education Agency, Dubuque Iowa, the author's personal collection, and Clarke College's,

Dubuque, Iowa library. The United States Department of Education's website was also used to

locate information and sources.

Several strategies were used to determine what articles to search. Articles located within

online databases were initially chosen if published between 1997 and 2008. The abstract was

read to determine whether or not the article suited the research's purpose. Action research was

the primary focus, and literature reviews were a secondary focus. Only action research with

subjects in grade one through five was considered. There had to be at least 20 subjects in the

study with detailed methods. The author used *reading comprehension, teaching methods,*

reading research, reading instruction, guided reading, small group reading, basal, basal reader

approach, whole language, reading interventions, literacy instruction, direct instruction, and

collaborative strategic reading as keywords. These keywords were searched individually and in

combination with each other. Review articles were chosen using the same criteria.

Criteria to Include Literature

Professional texts were chosen by a copyright date of 1997 or later. The reputability of

the authors also played a role in the choice of text. Authors known for their work in reading

instruction were sought out. These authors include, but were not limited to Debbie Miller,

Stephanie Harvey, Anne Goudvis, Gerald Duffy, and Pat Culhum. Texts referenced in quality

articles were also used.

Procedures to Analyze Sources

The author organized information as annotated bibliographies. Each bibliography was

titled based on the framework researched. These bibliographies included a brief summary of the

article, research questions, hypothesis, methods, results, discussion, and applications to the job.

Notes taken from review articles were sorted by topic in a three ring binder.

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature defines strategies and explains its relationship to comprehension. Several strategies are identified. Instructional approaches are identified and explained, followed by the research that supports their use in reading instruction.

Comprehension Strategies

The definition of strategies in the terms of literacy has evolved from simple recall of text to thinking about the text's content in the last century. In the 1950's, reading skills were considered to be the ability to understand directions and answer questions about text. Twenty years later psychologists coined the term strategy to "signify cognitive aspects of interpreting information" (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008, p. 365). Strategy refers to the reader's awareness of meaning and skill and has evolved into a reader's "automatic use actions that result in decoding and comprehension without control or awareness" (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008, p. 365). Collins-Block and Pressley (2002) define comprehension strategies as "specific learned procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated and intentional reading" (p. 177).

Successful readers use a tool box of strategies as they read, and each strategy plays a specific role in a reader's ability to gain meaning from the text. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) identified making connections, questioning, visualizing, inferring, determining importance, and synthesizing as the building blocks of constructing meaning. Previewing text, utilizing text features, use of graphic organizers, rereading, and reading aloud are also strategies that have shown to improve comprehension (Trinkle, 2009). Building on what students already know-

called scaffolding- and activating prior knowledge are also effective in engaging students in text (Bishop, Ryes, & Pflaum, 2006).

Making Connections

Making connections is a reader relating their own knowledge to the text. They may make text-to-self connections by relating the character's experience with one of their own. With a text-to-world connection, the reader sees a bridge between what is happening in the book with past or present events in the world; this easily occurs when historical fiction. A reader may experience a text-to-text connection when reading books by the same author or centered on a common theme (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).   In *Mosaic of Thought*, Oliver-Keene and Zimmerman (1997) share Debbie Miller's connection lesson. She read a story to the class about a girl and her grandfather. The story follows the relationship of the two through the death of the grandfather. When Debbie read the pages about the stories the grandfather told about his childhood, she told the students how it reminded her of her grandpa telling stories from long ago. "That makes me think of my own life. I'm making text-to-self connections from the text or book to myself" (as cited in Oliver-Keene & Zimmerman, 1997, p. 57).   Students then read their own books and practiced making connections with Debbie's guidance.

Questioning

Questioning is used to propel students into thinking about the whys and hows of what they are reading. It increases memory of the text, helps students identify literal answers from it, and can be used to set the purpose for reading (Collins-Block & Pressley, 2002). Questioning within fiction text looks different from questioning within nonfiction text. Post-it notes are commonly used when reading fiction to pin point the place in the reading a student is wondering about (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Questions can include "What will the character do now?",

"Why is the character having such a difficult time...?" (Oliver-Keene & Zimmermann, 1997, p. 99), and "I don't get it..." (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 365). When reading nonfiction, the reader might start with a KWL chart to recognize what they know and generate questions they would like answered by the text (Collins-Block & Pressley, 1997). Following the reading, the student completes the third column with what they have learned. Another approach is a simple two column table with one side labeled questions and another labeled facts. This can be completed before (what they want to know), during (questions spurred by reading and facts found), and after the reading (what they want to know more about and facts they have learned).

Visualizing

Visualizing is another way of interacting with the text. Mental images engage the reader and are ways to see their interpretation of the text (Collins-Block & Pressley, 2002). Wordless books can be used to promote graphic and colorful word use by students or text with descriptive passages that will paint pictures in the reader's mind (Harvey & Goudvis, 1997). A teacher thinking aloud about their own mental images as a passage is read sets the stage for the students to create their own mental images (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Students then use this strategy in their own books. A common beginning activity is drawing illustrations for the story. Visualizing can be easily introduced in a whole group setting, and students are excited to share their pictures. Once a student has become comfortable with the strategy, teachers can take it to the next level. Students can role play dialogue using expression and actions as they have played it out in their minds.

Inferring

Inferring is the reader thinking beyond the written word. Students make predictions based on pictures and the story's back cover summary. They use the words and phrases to figure out

the character's emotions and might rely on those emotions to predict the upcoming actions in the story (Oliver-Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Often times the theme of the story isn't explicitly stated (Temple, Martinez, Yokota, & Naylor, 2002), and the reader must draw their own conclusions. A teacher must model inferring and give students plenty of time to internalize the strategy. It is one of the most difficult strategies, and it is easier to monitor student progress in a small group setting than a whole group setting (Saunders-Smith, 2003).

Synthesizing

Synthesizing allows the reader to "identify central and important ideas, generalize from less relevant details, and improve memory in terms of free recall and answering questions" (Collins-Block & Pressley, 2002, p. 182). It can act as an informal assessment of a student's ability to make sense of what she has read and her knowledge of story structure. Summaries can be oral or written (Oliver-Keene & Zimmermann, 1997). Graphic organizers are a common tool used to outline a student's summary (Trinkle, 2009).

Determining Importance

Determining importance engages the reader with more than just the author's words. This strategy is best exemplified in nonfiction, easily partnered with questioning, and compliments the research process. Text features are an important resource for students when determining importance (Trinkle, 2009). Headings and subheadings help readers narrow down the main ideas of text and outline the related details. When answering reader generated questions, the index and table of contents are used to locate relevant information and the skill of skimming for key words might be introduced. Again modeling is an effective approach to introducing students on how to determine importance (Carbo, 2008) and graphic organizers can help students organize the information (Trinkle, 2009).

Modeling, guiding, and explicit instruction are all recommended and effective methods of strategy instruction. In Vygotsky's constructivist view, learning starts with a collaborative adult and moves from assisted tasks to independent tasks within the zone of proximal development (Clark & Graves, 2005). By starting with modeling a strategy, then guiding the student through the use of it, followed by practice with other text, the teacher is gradually handing the responsibility to the student. The student will gradually internalize the strategy the more they use it in their own reading. It is important that the teacher give enough support to ensure student success, but not too much as to take away from the learning experience (Clark & Graves, 2005).

Instructional Frameworks

Several instructional frameworks are used in schools to teach reading strategies to students. These include guided reading, basal approach, direct instruction, reciprocal teaching, and the scaffolded reading experience.

Guided reading. Guided reading is a framework utilizing small groups. Its purposes are to meet the different needs of students, reduce the number of students learning outside the general education classroom, and ultimately have students "read for meaning through discussion and making connections" (Opitz & Ford, 2008, p. 310). Students are generally grouped by similar reading development (Gunning, 2000), but can also be grouped by topic and themes with students using different books at their instructional level (Opitz & Ford, 2008). The 20-30 minute lesson is broken into three parts: before reading, during reading, and after reading. Before reading students activate prior knowledge and the teacher helps build background knowledge when needed. Students set a purpose for reading. During reading is when the teacher listens to students to check for word recognition issues, fluency, and take anecdotal records. Graphic organizers can be used during reading or after. After reading is a time to respond. Responses can

be written or in the form of discussion (Saunders-Smith, 2003). Students refer back to the purpose for reading, and then they might retell the story, share connections, tell their favorite part, and answer teacher and student generated questions.

Basal reader approach. The basal reader approach has been used for many years. There was a time when students' abilities determined what basal reader group they were in. In the 1990's, the basal became a whole group method of instruction as an opportunity for all students to experience the same text. (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008). This approach is a "comprehensive program of teaching reading that includes readers or anthologies" (Gunning, 2000, p. 387) and includes teacher manuals that outline the delivery of instruction around the story, student workbooks to reinforce skills, and assessments. Stories in basal readers are often group by a common theme. They are a convenient package of materials that move from kindergarten through eighth grade with a consistent approach to each lesson. The first day is a building background activity and introduction of vocabulary. The story is read to the class the next day and comprehension questions and workbook pages related to vocabulary and the week's skill are assigned. Day three's lesson is a discussion of the story and may include another skill sheet. An end of selection assessment is given on the fourth day. Day five is for reteaching the skill to students who were not proficient on the selection assessment.

Direct instruction. Direct Instruction is a teacher-led model. Within the direct instruction lesson, skills are broken into small parts, taught by the teacher, then practiced by students until the skill is mastered (Gunther, Estes, & Schwab, 2003). The teacher is the giver of information and the students are the takers. The idea is that each small skill will build on the next to create a repertoire of skills students will know and use. The lesson begins with reviewing previous material, introducing the new, then students participating in guided practice. Following guided

practice, students complete independent practice. Many elementary English textbooks are designed in this fashion.

Scaffolded reading experience. The concept of the scaffolded reading experience is building on what students already know. This model can be used to fill learning gaps or enrich student. The goal is success for all students by adjusting to each student's needs; taking them from where they are to the next level. A scaffolded reading lesson begins by tapping or building background knowledge on the subject, predicting, or setting a purpose. The teacher shares the strategy for the activity in the introduction. The students then read the text silently or aloud. Following the reading, a teacher may choose to have students discuss, question, participate in creative activities related to text, reteach the strategy, or have students apply the strategy in another context.

Reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching is a strategy that a framework has been built around. Its theoretical basis is from Zimmerman's self regulation model (Spoer, Brunstein & Kieschke, 2009). Goal setting and strategic planning, the accuracy of implementing the strategies, and the self assessment of implementation are the components of the self regulation model. Reciprocal teaching is built around the four strategies of predicting, summarizing, clarifying, and questioning. Predicting is used to set the purpose for reading and to connect to prior knowledge and is done before reading. Questioning helps students discover the main idea by identifying important information, and clarification establishes self monitoring; this occurs during reading. Summarizing follows reading and is used to asses the student understanding of text (King & Parent-Johnson, 1999).

The purpose of reciprocal teaching is to make students aware of their reading in terms of self regulating and self monitoring. The teacher is the facilitator of the group by modeling the

strategies in the first several experiences. Students practice these strategies and as they become more comfortable using them, become the facilitators of the group discussion. The teacher then becomes the observer (King & Parent-Johnson, 1999). *Soar to Success* is a commercial program that uses reciprocal teaching as its framework (Education Commission of the States, 1999).

Impact on Student Comprehension

Each framework has demonstrated positive impacts on student reading comprehension in given situations. Guided reading consistently improved the reading comprehension of elementary students. Gabl, Kaiser, Long, and Roemer (2007) looked at student data of second and fourth graders over the course of 15 weeks of guided reading instruction. Groups met every day for approximately 20 minutes. Graphic organizers were used to assess the students' abilities to identify problem and solution, sequencing, and character traits. To assess comprehension, students were given 3 minutes to read a passage and answer multiple choice questions about it. Upon the conclusion of the intervention, second grade students improved their comprehension score by 34.1% and fourth graders improved by 21.4%.

Guided reading was implemented in an urban school district in grade three through five in hopes of improving comprehension scores. Researchers used the narrative portion of Ekwall/Shanker Qualitative Reading Inventory to assess student comprehension (Chevalier, Del Santo, Schneiner, Skok, & Lucci, 2002). The pretest showed 57 percent of third graders were below grade level, 65 percent of fourth graders were below grade level, and 54 percent of fifth graders were below grade level. Guided reading groups met an average of three times a week for 20 to 30 minutes. Teachers modeled activating prior knowledge and making connections as well as graphic organizers. The posttest was administered ten weeks later. Third graders demonstrated a 10 percent increase of students performing at or above grade level, fourth grade demonstrated a

13 percent increase, and fifth grade demonstrated a 9 percent increase (Chevalier, Del Santo, Schneiner, et al., 2002). In addition, Teachers observed strategy transference into other content areas.

Anderson, O'Leary, Schuler, and Wright (2002) found guided reading improved reading comprehension in a primary grade in a suburban school. Students scored an average of 72 percent on the multiple choice end of selection test in September (Anderson, et al, 2002). Guided reading was implemented for 20 to 30 minutes per group. Teachers followed the before, during, and after reading lesson format. Graphic organizers were used as an informal assessment. In December, students scored an average of 93 percent on the end of selection test.

The basal approach did not fair as well in studies comparing it to guided reading and direct instruction. In a study of United States' Midwestern fourth grade reading comprehension, Conklin and Wilkins replaced the basal reading approach with guided reading. Student comprehension was monitored for a three week periods. Fifty five percent of students were reading at or above grade level. At the end of the three week intervention, 61 percent of students were reading at or above grade level (Conklin & Wilkins, 2002). This gain was attributed to small group instruction.

Popplewell and Doty (2001) compared two schools in the United States' Midwest. One school implemented guided reading as part of the Four Blocks framework (Popplwell & Doty, 2001) and one school implemented a basal reader. Students in the guided reading school scored an average of 80% on the Steiglitz Informal Reading Inventory (Popplewell & Doty, 2001) whereas students in the basal instruction classroom scored an average of 70 percent.

Direct instruction also showed greater gains in achievement over the basal. In Thames, Reeves, Kazelkis, York, Boling, Neweell and Wang (2008) study, students taught strategies

through direct instruction showed significant improvement on grade level and above narrative and expository passages. Students who continued to use the traditional basal series showed no significant gains in comprehension. Ashworth (1999) also conducted a comparative study of basal approach versus direct instruction. The Georgia Kindergarten Assessment Program (Ashworth, 1999) was used as a pretest and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Ashworth, 1999) was used as the posttest. Students taught comprehension strategies through direct instruction scored 8 percent higher than those taught strategies through the basal on the ITBS (Ashworth, 1999).

Reciprocal teaching also trumped the basal approach. Forty-two fourth through sixth grade students in a middle class German town participated in Sporer, Brunstein, and Kieschke's (2008). Teachers followed the reciprocal teaching format outlined by King (1999). Students in the reciprocal teaching group made three times the gains as those in the traditional basal group on the comprehension test. The reciprocal group also made twice the gains over the basal group on the transfer of skills assessment.

The scaffolded reading experience (SRE) framework is new to the frontier of education, though the art of scaffolding learning is not. Out of five research studies completed regarding SRE, only one study has been conducted at the elementary level according to www.onlinereadingresources.com. The scaffolded reading experience was compared with a response orientated approach that is a teacher led small group. Two classrooms of 27 students participated in the study. Each teacher taught a unit on folktales. Teacher A taught the first folktale using SRE while Teacher B taught it using the response orientated approach. For the second folktale, Teacher A use the response orientated approach and Teach B used SRE.

Each story was taught as three day lessons. The scaffolded reading experience's first lesson began with a prereading activity of building background knowledge, preteaching the

vocabulary and then a text preview. From there the teacher read aloud followed by discussion about the text and both teacher and student generated questions. On day two students reread the story with a partner and completed a story map. They then met in group and related the character's experiences with their own. Day three wrapped up with a discussion summary and assessment. The first lesson of the response orientated approach began with the teacher reading the story and stopping to ask questions. The teacher then led a discussion about what a folktale is and has the students write their own. The second lesson had students rereading with partners then choosing one of three activities: write a poem or story about the main characters feeling, draw a picture of a scene they felt strongly about and explain in writing, or create a short play in a small group (Liang, Peterson, & Graves, 2005). The final lesson was a short discussion of why the character worked hard to meet his goals and make connections with the students. Students also shared why they would want to be friends with the character. The discussion was followed by assessment.

The assessment consisted of open-ended and multiple choice questions. Students in the SRE group scored 79 percent on the multiple choice whereas the response orientated approach group scored and average of 66 percent. Short answer responses were not significantly different; the scaffolded reading group scored 2.04 out of 4 and the response orientated group scored 2.02 out of 4. Teachers expressed that students were more engaged in the scaffolded reading experience.

Several frameworks were successful in improving comprehension. Guided reading consistently improved students' comprehension over direct instruction and the basal reader approach. Students receiving direct instruction and reciprocal teaching also scored higher on comprehension posttests than those instructed using the basal reader approach. The scaffolded

reading experience also increased student comprehension scores. The basal approach did not demonstrate its effectiveness on student comprehension achievement. The gains made by students in guided reading, reciprocal teaching, and the scaffolded reading experience support the theory that small group instruction is an important component to teaching reading comprehension.

<div align="center">Conclusions and Recommendations</div>

This section includes the purpose of the review and answers the research questions. It also includes a summary of best practices in reading instruction and teacher practices in the classroom as well as suggestions for future research.

The purpose of this review was to identify comprehension strategies. It was also the purpose of this review to identify the instructional practices used to teach them. Educators must analyze student needs and choose a framework that will best move students towards having independent interactions with text. One approach does not fit all learners. The comprehension strategies identified in this review fit into each outlined framework. Guided reading, reciprocal teaching, and the scaffolded reading experience provide the best opportunity for student discussion and engagement. Reading instruction must include explicit lessons, opportunities to think beyond text, discussion and reading aloud (Pinnell, 2006). Though the use of instructional texts is important in reading instruction, it is also important that students not be locked into ability groups and are given the opportunity to work within topic and theme groups of multilevel abilities (Opitz & Ford, 2008). Small group instruction results in greater achievement gains based on guided reading results.

What Does Research Identify as Strategies Used by Fluent Readers?

Fluent readers use several strategies when creating meaning from text. Readers connect text with themselves, the world, and other texts they have read. Making connections creates relevance between the text and the reader. They also ask questions about what they are unsure of and what they want to know. Questions set the purpose for reading and increase the memory of what is read. Visualizing uses words to create an image in their mind and engage with what they are reading. Inferring allows them to look beyond the words on the page. Students make predictions about events, determine the character's emotions, and determine the theme of the text. Readers use synthesizing to put the information together and make sense of it. It also acts as an assessment of understanding. Determining importance helps readers identify the main ideas of the text. They use text features such as table of contents, the index, and headings. These strategies are used together, not in isolation.

What Instructional Practices Improve the Reading Strategies of Struggling Readers?

Effective methods of strategy instruction are modeling, guiding, and explicit instruction. Teachers explain the strategy and demonstrate how they use is as they read. The teacher then guides the students through an application before having them practice on their own. Responsibility is gradually given to the student. The student must receive enough support to be successful, but not so much as to limit the learning experience. Modeling guiding, and explicit instruction can be used in a variety of reading instruction frameworks.

Several instructional frameworks are used to teach comprehension. Guided reading uses small groups to meet the different needs of a classroom. It also allows for student discussions and consistent progress monitoring. Teachers begin the lesson with modeling the strategy, then giving the students an opportunity to use it in their book. Students then discuss what they read

and how they used the strategy. An important component to guided reading is the use of books at the students' instructional level.

The basal reader approach is a teacher led model of instruction. The text is often an anthology built around thematic units and is used in whole group instruction. The instruction sequence is outlined in the teacher's manual and student workbooks are used to reinforce skills The teacher introduces the story, with a building background activity and presenting vocabulary. The next day the purpose for reading is shared with students and they listen to the story. A discussion of the story takes place on day three. On the fourth day, students complete an end of selection assessment and the fifth is used for reteaching.

Direct instruction is also a teacher led model often used in a whole group setting. The teacher presents the skills in small parts, and then the students practice the skills until they have mastered them. Each skill is meant to build on the next to give the students a tool box of skills they can use. Each lesson is formatted the same. The teacher reviews the previous material, introduces the new, and then provides guided practice. Once students have demonstrated they can use the skill in guided practice, they complete independent practice. Students are passive participants in this model.

The scaffolded reading experience is most often used in a small group setting.. It builds on what students already know in attempts to fill learning gaps or enrich the content. The lesson begins with students sharing their background knowledge. Next the teacher shares the strategy. Then students read the text silently or aloud. The teacher may have students complete creative activities, reteach the strategy, question, discuss, or apply the strategy to another text.

Another small group approach is reciprocal teaching. The teacher models predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarizing. The students practice these strategies for the first few

lesson. Eventually the students are modeling the strategies for one another. The teacher's role moves from facilitator to observer. The purpose of reciprocal teaching is student self regulation and self monitoring.

What Research Supports These Frameworks of Instruction?

Guided reading, direct instruction, reciprocal teaching, and the scaffolded reading experience had positive impacts on the comprehension of struggling readers. Students taught through guided reading consistently improved their comprehension. Second and fourth graders improved their comprehension scores by 34.1 % and 21.4% in Gabl, Kaiser, and Roemer's study (2007). Students in an urban district also demonstrated growth. Third graders' comprehension scores increased by 10 percent, fourth graders' increased by 13%, and fifth graders' increased by 9 percent (Chevalier, Del Santo, Schneiner, Skok, & Lucci, 2002). Anderson, O'Leary, Schuler and Wright also determined guided reading improved comprehension scores. Students averaged a 72 percent on the end of selection test in September and averaged a 93 percent in Decemeber (Anderson, et al, 2002).

Direct instruction and reciprocal teaching were more successful than the basal reader approach. Students who were taught through direct instruction scored 8 percent higher on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills than those taught through the basal approach (Ashworth, 1999). Students taught with the reciprocal teaching approach had three times the gains on the comprehension test than those taught by the basal approach (Sporer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2008). Those students also doubled the gains of their counterparts on the transfer of skills assessment.

The scaffolded reading experience also improved achievement in reading comprehension. Students scored 79 percent on the multiple choice assessment opposed to the response orientated

group's 69 percent (Liang, Peterson, & Graves, 2005). The SRE is a new approach to teaching

reading, and Liang, Peterson, and Grave (2005) conducted only one study of its impact on

elementary reading comprehension.

Reading Best Practices

The best practices in literacy instruction create readers who are able "to gain literal

meaning, use print and graphics to construct meaning, and think beyond the text" (Pinnell, 2006,

p. 78). These skills are developed through multiple experiences with text. The opportunity to

read easy text fosters success within students, and a teacher reading aloud opens the door to text

students would not be able to read independently (Zemeleman, Harvey, & Hyde, 2005).

Effective reading instruction engages students in discussions, promotes inquiry about topics of

interest, and promotes reading for enjoyment as well as gathering information (International

Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2009). Students must also be

given time to read independently to practice strategies (Carbo, 2008).

Teacher Practices

Teachers must build a repertoire of approaches to meet the needs of readers in the

classroom. Graphic organizers allow readers to see the relationships within the text while making

connections and asking questions build a relationship between the reader and text. Activating

prior knowledge makes the content relevant to the reader and generating and answering

questions puts a focus on the content of what is being read. Giving students choices promotes

ownership and engagement. Encourage students to be expressive in their responses by using an

artistic and dramatic delivery, not just orally or written (Daniels & Bizar, 1998). Let students

have a collection of texts to choose from, not one text preselected by the teacher (Ford & Optiz,

2008). This not empowers the student, but also expands the discussion options of the class when sharing how strategies were used (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005).

A teacher's role is moved from a leader to a coach. They should name and describe the strategy being taught (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008), model it within the framework, and then provide guided practice until the student is independent at using the strategy. Teachers support the students as they apply the strategy and let them go as they become independent. Teachers must also be aware that students are selecting the appropriate strategies as they read by having students explain why they used the strategy (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008). The bulk of a teacher's work is behind the scenes: planning lessons, listening, and anecdotal records (Opitz & Ford, 2008). Small groups must change as students' needs change (Carbo, 2008). Teachers must use assessment data to organize groups and plan reading lessons (Opitz & Ford, 2008). A combination of running records, anecdotal records, one-on-one conferences (Zemelman, Harvey, & Hyde, 2005), and reading program assessments should be used to make instructional decisions. Groups should change based on the data. Students should experience text that span across genres during instruction and have access to a variety of text for independent reading (Opitz & Ford, 2008).

Differentiating instruction by implementing a combination of small and whole group ensures meeting the diverse needs of students (Carbo, 2008). Guided reading, reciprocal teaching, and the scaffolded reading experience allow teachers to follow student progress more closely. Small group instruction also provides a safer environment for student sharing. Students are more likely to share in a group of four to six than that of 25. It is also easier to provide appropriate text in small groups. Text can be chosen by instructional level or strategy. The basal approach is whole group instruction. It is a time for the teacher to read aloud and students to

share a common text. Modeling should be the before reading activity in guided reading, reciprocal teaching, scaffolded reading experience, and the basal approach. Strategies are best learned through student centered, authentic reading experiences. The use of student chosen text and trade books plays a vital role in applying the strategies effectively. Direct instruction' skill and drill technique does not foster the internalization or transference of strategies. They become locked in the context they were used in a lesson. Use of a basal reader can be adapted by following the techniques used in guided reading, scaffolded reading experience, and reciprocal teaching. This will require deviation from the programs weekly lesson plan with less use of workbooks and more focus on reading strategies.

Participation in professional development is another important component. Teachers should participate in peer observations and book studies (Pinnell, 2006). Professional learning communities can be established around school or classroom learning goals. During meetings teachers develop and discuss lessons, look at assessment data, and benefit from the knowledge of their colleagues. Reading conferences are an opportunity to learn from experts and colleagues and to bring information back to the school staff. Area education agencies offer summer workshops on topics such as integrating technology in reading and reading across the content areas. Summer is also an excellent time for teachers to read current research and explore literacy topics related to their student population's needs. The key to implementing best practices for students is the continued education of teachers.

Future Research

Beyond the frameworks of instruction, it would be beneficial to take a closer look at student engagement and motivation. Several teachers observed an increase in student engagement within the successful frameworks. Though it is difficult to measure the feelings of

students, it should not be disregarded. Pinnell (2006) identifies excitement for reading to be an important piece of student learning. Motivation fosters engagement with text and voluntary reading. In addition, more research regarding reciprocal teaching and the scaffolded reading experience would better solidify their place as a successful mode of reading instruction.

Teachers and researchers are on the perpetual quest to identify and implement learning techniques to better provide instruction for students. Educators must continue to seek out new information regarding student learning and do the best job bringing that information into the classroom.

References

Afflerbach, P., Pearson, P.D., & Paris, S.G. (2008). Clarifying differences between reading skills and reading strategies. *Reading Teacher*, 61(5), 364-373.

Anderson, T., O'Leary, D., Schuler, K., & Wright, L. (2002) Increasing reading comprehension through the use of guided reading. Unpublished masters thesis, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL.

Ashworth, D.R. (1999). Effects of direct instruction and basal reading instruction programs on the reading achievement of second graders. *Reading Improvement*, 36(4), 150-156.

Bishop, P.A., Ryes, C., Pflaum, S.W. (2006) Teaching tips: read smarter, not harder-global reading comprehension strategies. *Reading Teacher*, 60(1), 66-69.

Bottomleyl, D.M, Truscott, D.M., Marinak, B.A., Henk, W.A., & Melnick, S.a.. (1999). An affective comparison of whole language, literature-based, and basal reader literacy instruction. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 38,115-129.

Carbo, Marie. (2008). Best practices for achieving high, rapid reading gains. *Education Digest: Essential Readings for Quick Review*, 73(7), 57-60.

Chevalier, K., Del Santo, J., Schneiner, D., Skok, E., & Lucci, L.R. (2002) Comprehension: the key to reading success. Unpublished masters thesis, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL.

Clark, K.F. & Graves, M.F. (2005). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *Reading Teacher*, 58(6), 570-580.

Collins-Block, C., Pressley, M. (2002) *Comprehension instruction: research based best practices*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Conklin, S., & Wilkins, K. (2002). Improving student reading skills through the use of guided reading. Unpublished masters thesis, Saint Xavier University, Chicago, IL.

Cooper, J.D. (2000) *Literacy: helping children construct meaning*. Boston, MA: Houghton

    Mifflin Company.

Daniels, H. & Bizar, M. (1998) *Methods that matter: six structures for best practice classrooms*.

    York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers

Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2000) *Strategies that work*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Heilman, A., Blair, T., & Rupley, W. (2002) *Principles and practices of teaching reading*.

    Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall.

International Reading Association & National Councils of English Teachers. *Standards for the*

    English language arts.. Retrieved from the world wide web July 12, 2009, from

    www.readwritethink.org/standards/.

Ford, Michael & Opitz, Michael. (2008). Survey of guided reading practices: what we can learn

    from primary teachers. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 47(4), 309-331.

Gabl, K.A., Kaiser, K.L., Long, J.K., & Roemer, J.L. (2007). Improving reading comprehension

    and fluency through the use of guided reading. Unpublished masters thesis, Saint Xavier

    University, Chicago, IL.

Graves, M.F. & Braaten, S. (1996) Scaffolded reading experiences: bridges to success

    Preventing School Failure, 40(4), 169-173.

Gunning, T.G. (2000) *Creating literacy instruction for all children*. Boston, MA: Allyn &

    Bacon.

Gunther, M.A., Estes, T.H., & Schwab, J. (2003) *Instruction: a models approach*. Boston, MA:

    Allyn and Bacon.

Oliver-Keene, E. & Zimmerman, S. (1997) *Mosaic of thought: teaching comprehension in a*

    reader's workshop. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

King, C.M. & Parent-Johnson, L.M. (1999). Constructing meaning via reciprocal teaching. *Reading Research and Instruction*, 38(3), 169-186.

Klingner, J.K., Vaughn, S., & Schumm, J.S. (1998). Collaborative strategic reading during social studies heterogeneous fourth-grade classrooms. *The Elementary School Journal*, 99, 1-21.

Liang, L.A. & Dole, J.A. (2006). Help with teaching reading comprehension: comprehension instructional frameworks. *Reading Teacher*, 59(8), 742-753.

Liang, L.A., Peterson, C.A., & Graves, M.F. (2005). Investigating two approaches to fostering children's comprehension of literature. *Reading Psychology*, 26(4-5), 387-400.

Miller, Debbie. (2002) *Reading with meaning*. Portland, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers.

Pinnell, Gay Su. (2006). Every child a reader. *Reading Teacher*, 60(1), 78-83.

Popplewell, S.R. & Doty, D.E. (2001). Classroom instruction and reading comprehension: a comparison of one basal reader approach and the four blocks framework. *Reading Psychology*, 22, 83-94.

Report of the National Reading Panel. (2000) National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Routman, R. (2003) *Reading essentials*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Saunders-Smith, G. (2003) *The ultimate guided reading how-to book*. Tuscon, AZ: Zephyr Press.

Soar to Success. (1999) Education Commission of the States.

Sporer, N., Brunstein, J.C., & Kieschke, U. (2009). Improving students' reading comprehension skills: strategy instruction and reciprocal teaching. *Learning and Instruction*, 19(3), 272-286.

Temple, C., Martinez, M., Yokota, J., & Naylor, A. (2002) *Children's books in children's hands: an introduction to their literature*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Thames, D.G., Reeves, C., Kazelskis, R., York, K., Boling, C., Newell, K., & Wang, Y. (2008). Reading comprehension: effects of individualized, integrated language arts as a reading approach with struggling readers. *Reading Psychology*, 29, 86-115.

Trinkle, Catherine. (2009). Reading for meaning: questioning. *School Library Media Activities Monthly*, v25, n5, p 48-50.

United States Department of Education (2001). *Title 1: improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged.* Retrieved from the world wide web July 10, 2009, from www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html#section 001.

Walsh, Kate. (2003) Basal readers: the lost opportunity to build knowledge that propels comprehension. *American Educator*, 27(1), 24-27.

Wilson, G.P., Martens, P., Arya, P., & Altwerger, B. (2004). Readers, instruction, and the nrp. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 86, 242.

Zemelman, S., Daniels, H., & Hyde, A. (2005) *Best practice: today's standards for teaching and learning in America's schools*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.