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The whole language approach to reading instruction: Strategies that enhance comprehension

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The whole language approach to reading instruction: Strategies that enhance comprehension

Abstract

The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, ~ Nation at Risk (1983) focused the nation's attention on problems in our educational system. One of the reactions from the publication was a concern to improve literacy in the United States by improving current practices in reading instruction. Becoming ~ Nation of Readers, a widely publicized report issued in 1985 by the Commission on Reading, was an outcome of this concern about current reading practices. An important finding of this two year study was that much is already known about how children learn to read, but this knowledge is not being put into practice (Commission on Reading, 1985). Like other educational movements, a reading revolution began to sweep America's elementary classrooms. This approach to literacy and reading instruction is labeled whole language.

THE WHOLE LANGUAGE APPROACH
TO READING INSTRUCTION:
STRATEGIES THAT ENHANCE COMPREHENSION

A Graduate Project

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by

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The Whole Language Approach to Reading

Instruction: Strategies that Enhance Comprehension

The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk (1983) focused the nation's attention on problems in our educational system. One of the reactions from the publication was a concern to improve literacy in the United States by improving current practices in reading instruction. Becoming a Nation of Readers, a widely publicized report issued in 1985 by the Commission on Reading, was an outcome of this concern about current reading practices. An important finding of this two year study was that much is already known about how children learn to read, but this knowledge is not being put into practice (Commission on Reading, 1985). Like other educational movements, a reading revolution began to sweep America's elementary classrooms. This approach to literacy and reading instruction is labeled whole language.

The purpose of this paper is to examine specific strategies that are consistent with the whole language approach to reading instruction and the understandings of how readers comprehend. Does the whole language approach improve reading comprehension? In the process of examining this question, four areas will be

addressed: (a) What is whole language? (b) What are the processes the learner works through to comprehend? (c) What strategies/classroom activities congruent with the whole language philosophy are used to develop and enhance comprehension? (d) What assessment strategies congruent with the whole language philosophy are effective for evaluating growth in comprehension ability?

What is Whole Language?

Whole language is a philosophy of learning, of teaching, and of language (Goodman, 1989). All language processes--reading, writing, speaking, and listening--are integrated by instruction and activities which focus on the construction of meaning. Shanklin's and Rhodes' (1989) definition of whole language is "...a model of instruction based on theory and research in reading process, writing process, and the development of literacy" (p. 59). Newman (1985) defines whole language as a philosophical theory.

...a description of how some teachers and researchers have been exploring the practical applications of recent theoretical arguments which have arisen from research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociology,

anthropology, philosophy, child development, curriculum, composition, literacy theory, semiotics, and other fields of study. (p.1)

Watson (1989) says whole language describes instructional programs "that are built on the body of knowledge coming out of the work of educators, cognitive psychologists and systemic linguists; it has to do with real kids using real language" (p.8). Zintz and Maggart (1984) describe whole language as a top-down theory where "the whole is thought to be greater than the sum of its parts" (p.7).

Central to whole language theory is the belief that children should learn to read and write in the same natural way they learned to talk. Whole language theorists believe that children come to school with a natural tendency to make sense of the world, bringing their knowledge of the spoken component of language. Whole language instruction "promotes natural language development by emphasizing the natural purpose of language: communicating meaning" (Gentry, 1987, p. 42).

According to Kenneth Goodman, a pioneer in the whole language movement, reading and writing are active language processes. Students take an active part in their own learning; they learn to read while they read and learn to write while they write, for real purposes.

In a whole language classroom, students move from reading to writing and from writing to reading. Children interact with each other as they share information, read, write, talk, observe, and ask questions. Children assume the ownership of learning by taking responsibility for their own reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. The Iowa Curriculum Guide for the Language Arts (1989) advocates a "whole" experience, an active process for language and thinking development; a curriculum that is not fragmented, but one that is integrated. The language systems are best taught or experienced in real context and whole experiences. The systems of language support each other in the process.

Whole language is a holistic process rather than a "bits and pieces" approach. First, children respond to whole selections, through meaningful experiences. Then they are involved in activities that focus on smaller pieces: paragraphs, sentences, words, and letters. In a whole language approach, all the systems of language are inseparable with comprehension being the goal in reading and listening and with expression being the goal in writing and speaking.

Whole language minimizes the skill-driven approach to reading. Reading skills are not imposed on

students. "...skill work should be done with meaningful texts when children demonstrate a need for and interest in such skills" (Harp, 1989, p. 326). Skill instruction is part of the ongoing reading activity rather than an isolated activity. A context of meaningful materials is provided for skills practice activities instead of workbook/worksheet exercises.

The whole language approach to reading is literature based. Its central mode is the use of relevant literature, real books. Quality trade books provide a variety of literature (Newman, 1985). They also provide for three kinds of reading that are components to holistic reading: whole class reading, small group reading of a particular interest or theme, and independent reading (Des Moines, 1988). During whole class reading, all the children in the class read and react to the same book. Some students will gain confidence and self-esteem in this experience because the ability grouping barrier has been removed. Students who may not know every word in the book will feel satisfaction as a member of the community of learners as they learn from listening and participating in discussions and other related activities.

During small group reading, each student becomes a member of a small group as the entire class explores a

central theme. Each small group reads and discusses a trade book with a different title but having the same theme. The thematic web allows students to make choices about what they read as they are allowed to sign up for the book of their choice. The themes may be of particular interest to the students as they sometimes fit with topics being studied in other areas of the curriculum, such as social studies or science.

The third component essential to literature based reading is independent reading. This provides a mode for putting research into practice. "...the amount of independent reading children do is significantly and consistently related to gains in reading achievement" (Des Moines, p. 6). Children can actively use the skills introduced and practiced in mini-lessons. Independent reading allows time to browse; it provides time for children to read books they select, time for conferencing between teacher and child about the selection, and time for sharing--"book talk".

The whole language approach to reading is an integrated process, child and meaning-centered, and literature based (Goodman, 1986). It promotes natural language development by emphasizing the purpose of language, communicating meaning. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are integrated within a context

that is meaningful to the learner. The whole language process allows children to use language functionally and purposefully for their own needs.

What are the Processes the Learner Works Through to Comprehend?

The process of comprehension is complex and interactive (Pearson, 1985). Comprehension occurs when the reader/listener interacts with the text/context. Comprehension occurs when the reader/listener makes sense of what is being read; comprehension is the realization of meaning in text (Vaughan & Estes, 1986). "The whole language view of reading is not one of getting the words but of constructing meaning" (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987, p. 146). The whole language philosophy suggests that children learn to comprehend reading material by reading and being read to.

Reading is comprehension, the active construction of meaning. The process of comprehension involves the integration of the new information from the text with the reader's background knowledge in ways that make sense (Armbruster, 1986). This role of background knowledge in comprehension is referred to as schema theory. Schemata are described by Gillet and Temple

(1982) as mental frameworks that contain one's understanding and information about the world. The reader's use of schemata, organized background knowledge, allows the learner to construct or reconstruct meaning from the material being read. In the reading process, the learner is constantly restructuring and refining the new information from the text. Schema is the basis of this interaction of the reader and the text.

Zintz and Maggart (1984) define schema more simply: "...schema refers to all the little pictures or associations you create in your mind when you hear or read a word or a sentence" (p. 289). Schemata are the determinants of how new information will be interpreted. Armbruster (1986) and Gillet and Temple (1983) identify two types of schemata which are thought to be necessary for comprehension--storage, and retrieval of information from text. They are: (a) content, world knowledge about objects, events, and situations and (b) textual, knowledge about certain kinds of text structure. Schemata is described as the building blocks of cognition.

Comprehension depends on prior knowledge; what is comprehended is always partly what was known before the reader interacted with the author's ideas in print.

"All reading and virtually all learning depend on what the learner brings to the task of learning" (Vaughan & Estes, 1986, p. 105). Linking prior knowledge with new information is an essential process for learning.

"Comprehension means relating new experiences to the already known" (Smith, 1975, p. 10). Prior knowledge is an important factor in reading comprehension.

As the reader attempts to construct meaning from the text, predictions are made based on the reader's experiential background. Children build meaning from the interaction of their experiences and the text.

"Prediction means asking questions--and comprehension means getting these questions answered" (Smith, 1982, p. 62). Prediction is at the heart of the comprehension process.

The use of semantic cues, syntax, and grapho-phonetic information by the reader is also part of the process of comprehension (Altwerger, Edelsky, & Flores, 1987). These cuing systems are utilized interactively by the good reader to make sense of print. The reader samples, predicts, confirms, and self-corrects. The reader anticipates meaning through a process of sampling the print guided by their syntactic, semantic, and grapho-phonetic prediction. The reader obtains visual information from semantic and

syntactic cues (samples), then structures vocabulary and ideas (predicts), followed by checking for grapho-phonetic match and semantic and syntactic sense. The reader continues this cycle of sampling, predicting, and confirming, if confirmed; if not, the reader goes back to reprocess.

The cognitive processes which underlie comprehension as categorized by Moore and Kirby (1988) are internal, "inside the head", and external, "outside the head". The internal processes are identified as language competence, interest, motivation, inferences, and imagery. Text structure is recognized as the external cognitive process. Harris and Sipay (1980) suggest these interacting factors are related to reading comprehension: (a) linguistic competence, (b) ability to apply known oral language, (c) ability to obtain information from visual cues, (d) conceptual development, (e) ability to relate what is known to information presented in the written text, and (f) cognitive skills.

Wittrock (1989) describes the processes involved in comprehension as generative cognitive processes. He suggests these processes generate signals, strategies, and plans that create meaning by building relations among the parts of the text and between the text and

the learner's knowledge, beliefs, and experiences. Wittrock's model of the generative processes of reading comprehension is characterized by four parts: generation, motivation, attention, and memory.

Davey (1983) presents five cognitive processes of reading comprehension that a skilled reader uses during reading. The processes are predicting, imagery (organizing information into mental images), linking prior knowledge to new information, metacognitive awareness (monitoring ongoing comprehension), and applying appropriate fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down.

The whole language philosophy suggests that children learn to read and make sense of text by following the natural learning behavior that governs the way they learn to talk. The first step is trying to imitate their elders. Then children try experimenting with approximations to see if they can communicate in a meaningful way. "The significant adult in the child's environment expands the child's language competence just by talking and thereby providing a model" (Zintz & Maggart, 1984, p. 72). Children hypothesize correct language usage in their own speech, try their assumptions, and exclude incorrect patterns when not reinforced with a positive

response. And so it is with the reading process. Skilled readers predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they make meaning out of content. In their early attempts at reading, children are encouraged to be risk-takers.

What Strategies and Classroom Activities, Congruent with Whole Language Philosophy, are Used to Develop and Enhance Comprehension?

A study by Durkin (1978-79) found the lack of comprehension instruction in elementary classrooms. Many of the teachers assumed they were teaching comprehension, but Durkin found they were focused on assessing students' comprehension by questioning them about what they had read. They were being "managers" of commercial materials.

The Report of the Commission on Reading, Becoming a Nation of Readers, recommended that more classroom time be spent on comprehension instruction and less on skills, workbooks, and skill sheet activities. "Evidence suggests that instruction on the processes underlying comprehension can improve a reader's comprehension skills" (Hall, 1989, p. 157).

In a whole language classroom the emphasis is on strategies rather than skills. Routman (1989) defines

strategies as "...the thoughtful plans or operations readers use while involved in the reading process; these plans are activated, adjusted, and modified for each new reading situation.... Strategies imply high level thinking, integration, and self-direction" (p.40). The proponents of the whole language approach suggest that effective strategies ensure good comprehension. In a whole language classroom, strategy instruction is integrated into the total reading process and taught when the need arises. The focus of instruction is on how to make sense of the whole rather than the parts, words or letters.

The literature suggests that strategies which enhance comprehension can be taught through the use of relevant literature, all kinds of reading material that provide information or tell a story in natural language patterns. Reutzel and Fawson (1989) designed the literature webbing strategy lesson with predictable books to expose young children to a variety of patterns or order used by authors and to enhance comprehension. In their investigation, Reutzel and Fawson (1989) found that research data suggests "students who have been introduced to reading with predictable books make greater gains on standardized reading achievement tests than do students who were introduced to reading with

basals" (p. 208). The results of their study using a literature webbing strategy lesson (LWSL) (see Appendix) with predictable books showed significant improvement in young readers' (first-grade students) comprehension.

Children comprehend when they make connections between what they know and new information. Finding out what children already know about central ideas, helps the teacher to know what concepts need to be developed during the prereading activity. Maria (1989) maintains that instructors in the reading process must determine the text's ideas, and find out first what the children know about them through selected prereading strategies. These "strategies must involve interactive group discussion which connects the children's knowledge to the text's central idea" (p. 300). Interactive group activities, such as discussions, brainstorming, and semantic mapping activate background knowledge for making connections.

Langer has developed a prereading plan (PReP) that has both a diagnostic feature and an instructional component (Vaughan & Estes, 1986). PReP "...prepares the reader to anticipate what prior knowledge will be useful for understanding new ideas" (p. 114). When engaging students in this activity, the teacher can

assess how much the students know about a topic, the language used to express their prior knowledge about the topic, and what additional concepts and vocabulary are needed for understanding the text.

First, the teacher gives the students cues about a topic to stimulate responses about their associations with the topic. During this stage of PReP, the responses are recorded as students listen to others' explanations, interact, and integrate the old and new ideas. Then students are asked to categorize the recorded responses. Organizing the information into categories gives the students a frame of reference to guide their reading. After the categories have been determined, students are encouraged to think beyond their initial responses as they elaborate on the associations and relationships.

Semantic mapping (also known as semantic webbing) can be used as a prereading activity to activate and build on students' prior knowledge. A semantic map is a diagram which helps students see how words are related to each other. The procedure involves brainstorming ideas around a topic/theme and discussing how the new information is linked to prior knowledge. The discussion is believed to be the most important part of the activity. The map can be used to help

students see relationships, to categorize, for vocabulary and comprehension development before or after reading.

A reading strategy essential to comprehension is predicting. Prediction before, during, and after reading activates prior knowledge and its link to new information. Routman (1988) states that "...good predicting means being able to use all available information--from print, from the story, and from experience--to make a carefully reasoned judgement..."(p.43). Readers are instructed to use a prediction strategy during reading when they encounter a word that they do not know. The reader skips the word and reads to the end of the sentence. Then using context clues, a meaningful guess is made based on what would fit and make sense.

An instructional strategy which involves making predictions is the cloze procedure. It is the procedure of using a short passage from the reading material from which words (or all the word except for the first letter or letters) have been deleted. The student uses context clues to predict the missing words as the student completes the passage. The whole language belief of "taking risks" is applied here as

the teacher emphasizes there are many correct answers. Cloze can be either oral or written.

Dewitz, Carr, and Patberg (1987) found in their investigation that students who received a cloze strategy to help integrate prior knowledge with text information made superior gains in comprehension and had greater metacognitive awareness. Metacognition is monitoring one's comprehension. It is the readers' "...awareness of their level or degree of understanding and their ability to regulate the process of comprehension as they proceed through texts" (Dewitz, Carr, & Patberg, 1987, p. 111). It is asking oneself whether you understand what you are reading and knowing what to do if you do not understand. This particular study revealed that a cloze procedure, a structured overview, and self-monitoring checklist do increase student comprehension and self-monitoring.

Activities to help children picture what they read can have an impact on reading comprehension (Matter, 1989). Imaging is a prereading activity that allows learners to gather their senses and thoughts about a topic, thus helping the students to facilitate understanding. A lesson Matter (1989) suggests using with students would proceed as follows. Students are asked to close their eyes and picture what is being

said. They may be asked where they are, who is talking, or what is being described. The students give supporting reasons with their responses. This is followed by using the language as they discuss and interchange ideas. They may, for variety, respond with drawings or written responses. "Imaging stimulates the affect and the volition as well as cognition...." (Vaughan & Estes, 1986, p. 127).

An instructional activity used to help students with their use of thinking strategies to construct meaning is the think aloud (Davey, 1983). Think aloud models the cognitive processes of reading comprehension. The teacher selects a passage to read aloud that contains points of difficulty. The teacher verbalizes these strategies to model how each difficult point is solved: (a) making predictions (developing hypotheses), (b) describing the picture you're forming in your head from the information (developing images), (c) making analogies (linking prior knowledge to new information), (d) verbalizing confusing points (monitoring ongoing comprehension), (e) demonstrating 'fix up' strategies (correcting lagging comprehension), (f) stopping and using cloze method on difficult vocabulary, and (g) demonstrating how to use the tools of the reader (dictionary, phonetic key). Think aloud

is congruent with the whole language philosophy in that the emphasis is on reading strategies rather than skills.

Pearson and colleagues in the Handbook of Reading Research (1984) concluded that vocabulary and concepts are developed concurrently so that learners see a relationship between their understandings and the vocabulary required to express those understandings. Vocabulary instruction accompanies the reading of text so that the need to understand what they are reading provides children the necessary drive to learn new words.

Meaning is the essential element of a word; until the concept is understood, the learner has no need for a label. Preteaching key concept vocabulary is an effective strategy for vocabulary/concept development. The teacher first selects the key concepts to emphasize in the reading. Then the vocabulary terms necessary for understanding the important concepts are identified. Terms/ideas that are familiar to students are used to initiate discussion. Ways to convey the idea behind the key concept include simple explanation, demonstration, comparison/contrast, analogy, and visual aids. The concept is presented in known terms and students are led to a point where they are ready for

the label or word. The new concept and label are incorporated into class discussion, using the new word in its various forms. Students are then given opportunities to practice the new term to develop a sense of "ownership". The vocabulary taught are key words to the understanding of text which children are reading. "A reader's knowledge about a topic, particularly key vocabulary, is a better predictor of comprehension of a text than is any measure of reading ability or achievement" (Pearson, 1985, p. 729).

A principle of the whole language approach is that vocabulary is learned best in context (Goodman, 1986). Advocates of a holistic strategy believe that it is not necessary to be able to read every word to get the meaning. Hammond (1983) endorses this belief. He states that "...it is not necessary to know the meaning of every single word to understand the passage; there are enough other words to carry the meaning" (p. 64). Therefore, in some instances it is best to discuss the meaning of new vocabulary after reading the selection. Vocabulary becomes meaningful through discussions around a book or topic. The dramatization of words aids in the retention of their meaning. In the use of literature, vocabulary is effectively taught during and after reading (Routman, 1988).

A comprehension strategy used during the reading process is an interactive notating system for effective reading and thinking (INSERT) (Vaughan & Estes, 1986). The student "inserts" his or her ideas into those presented by the text using a notating system. The student marks the margins of the text with a ✓ if an idea confirms what one thought, a - if an idea contradicts what one thought, a + if an idea is new and interesting to the reader, a ? if an idea is puzzling, a ! if an idea in the text is intriguing, and a * if an idea strikes the reader as very important. This activity forces students to think critically as they make specific decisions about the ideas in text. INSERT helps to maintain the ongoing reading and thinking process.

Asking the right questions can be an effective strategy for enhancing comprehension. Proponents of the whole language approach advocate asking questions which have no right answers, questions which elicit good reasoning. Routman (1988) reinforces this belief when she states that the goal in questioning is "...meaningful responses - not correct answers..." (p. 39). Questioning strategies that focus on prediction are powerful tools for aiding comprehension (Nessel, 1987). Questions that encourage children to make

inferences are the "right" questions. Examples of higher level questioning are "What do you think....?", "Why do you think....?", and "Why or why not?". Questions which cause the reader to predict, analyze, apply, and evaluate are used to guide the reading-thinking process.

Davis and McPherson (1989) believe that the most effective strategies for developing reading comprehension are those that can be used in the instructional process before, during, and after reading. They consider story mapping to be such a strategy. A story map is "a graphic representation of all or part of the elements of a story and the relationships between them" (p. 232). It assists children in organizing the story content into a reasonable whole.

The use of story frames is another instructional strategy for helping students construct the meaning of a story (Fowler, 1982). A story frame is a paragraph in which students fill in the blanks. The paragraph usually begins with "The story takes place _____ . _____ is the main character in the story who _____ ." Here the student must identify the problem and solution. The paragraph usually concludes with "The story ends _____ ." The story frame

helps students organize the information in a story into a logical whole.

The structure of the semantic map after reading is similar to the story map mentioned earlier. The story can be recapped by reviewing the map. Students can use the map as a guide to retelling the story or as a structure for writing a summary of the story.

A procedure by which teachers guide students through stages of anticipation, realization, and contemplation (ARC) is presented by Vaughan and Estes (1986). "During reading, anticipations, realizations, and contemplations synergistically interact to enable the emergence of comprehension" (p. 104). The ARC process provides a framework for teaching in content reading; it also can be an effective teaching format in relevant literature. Perceived as an integrated, highly connected strategy, the ARC process provides the necessary interactions for making the connections for comprehension.

The first stage of this instructional format is anticipation, the pre-reading stage. During anticipation, the teacher orchestrates activities which cause the readers to become aware of what they know, believe, and feel about the topic and to set purposes for reading. Strategies suggested to be used in this

pre-reading stage are PReP, ReQuest (see Appendix), brainstorming, LINK (see Appendix), cubing, imaging, categorical overview, and clustering.

The realization of meaning, during reading, is the second stage in the ARC process. Activities selected for the realization stage promote the readers' active engagement with the text. During realization, readers are associating prior understandings and experiences, their schema, with the ideas in the text, blending the new with the old. For uses in this stage, the following strategies are recommended to assist learners with remembering: INSERT, SMART (see Appendix), look-backs, talk alouds, paired readings, paired questioning, and imaging.

The third stage of ARC is contemplation; this step is done after reading. Contemplation activities are selected to insure the readers' reflection on ideas encountered during the reading process. The contemplation activities and strategies reinforce the integration of new understandings with the prior understandings. Strategies recommended for use during post-reading are REAP (see Appendix), Save the Last Word for Me, writing cinquains, paired summarizing, and graphic post-organizers. Within the ARC framework, a

variety of strategies/activities can be used to enhance successful reading and comprehension.

W. Dorsey Hammond (1983) offers five basic strategies teachers can use to develop comprehension.

1. Provide children with sensible and meaningful reading material.
2. Raise students' interest by drawing on their existing knowledge.
3. Establish a purpose for reading.
4. Ask questions that provoke students' thinking rather than merely test their memory.
5. Rely less on teaching manuals and more on your own teaching ability. (p. 63-64)

What Assessment Strategies, Congruent With the Whole Language Philosophy, are Effective for Evaluating Growth in Comprehension Ability?

The review of current literature suggests the need for alternative approaches to reading comprehension assessment that are consistent with current research and theory about how meaning is constructed.

"Research...in fields such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, education, and sociology has led to significant advances in theory and practice in the area of reading....However, reading tests are virtually the

same today as they were in the 1920's" (Wixson, & Peters, 1987, p. 333). Valencia, Pearson, Wixson, and Peters (1987) are advocates of changing the way we traditionally assess reading, standardized tests and unit tests, to alternative approaches that are based on the interactive view of reading.

Educators are finding alternatives to the traditional evaluation techniques. The states of Illinois and Michigan have developed valid tests of reading comprehension for a statewide testing program that reflects current reading research and theory (Valencia & Pearson, 1987; Wixson & Peters, 1987). Both models of large-scale reading assessment place the emphasis on the process of comprehension. The assessment includes a primary test component (constructing meaning) and supporting components (topic familiarity and metacognition knowledge and strategies). These changes in measuring comprehension are congruent with the focus of recent research.

The characteristics of all forms of evaluation in a whole language classroom are in agreement with the philosophy of whole language. Shepard (1989) recommends using a variety of assessment measures which evaluate real learning tasks. Methods of assessment which check comprehension are (a) oral responses in

discussion, (b) retelling a story, (c) shared book experiences, (d) whole class and individual cloze activities, (e) oral reading to determine which reading strategies the student is using, (f) response logs, (g) conferencing, (h) thoughtful questioning, and (i) open-ended questions. Strategies mentioned earlier that can be used as a means of comprehension evaluation are story mapping as a post reading activity, semantic mapping after the reading, and summarizing through cinquain writing.

An informal assessment of comprehension strategies described by Wade (1990) is the use of think alouds. He believes this process-oriented measure can provide useful information about the reader's cognitive and metacognitive strategies. Think aloud is one kind of verbal reporting "...in which the examiner provides a task and asks subjects to say aloud everything that comes to mind as they are performing it" (p. 444). This method assesses whether and how students use their schemata in making sense of text and "...whether they monitor their comprehension" (p. 449).

Authorities on whole language evaluation processes agree that student self-evaluation is the most effective tool in assessment. "A child who consistently self-corrects and self-monitors is reading

for meaning" (Routman, 1988, p. 209). Self-evaluation encourages a student to become responsible for his/her own learning. Hansen (1987) believes the student's self-evaluation of "What do I do when I read?" is very important in the evaluation process.

Paris (1991) suggests that effective measures of comprehension can be created through use of portfolios. Portfolio-based assessment "...is a collection of selected student work that serves as the basis for ongoing evaluation" (Vavrus, 1990, p. 48). Teachers can repeatedly use a variety of real-life texts and tasks to assess students' comprehension strategies. Tasks suggested were (a) the use of Heath's Reading Strategy Assessments as a model for measuring students' understanding of strategies before, during and after reading; (b) asking comprehension questions to assess these strategies; (c) identifying the topic, predicting, inferencing, monitoring, and summarizing; (d) follow-up questioning to assess metacognition; (e) cloze tasks; and (f) retellings.

Valencia (1990) also encourages the portfolio approach to reading assessment. She believes one of the guiding principles of the portfolio approach is that assessment must reflect the understanding of reading as an interactive process for the construction

of meaning. Valencia suggests that the following items be included in the portfolio because they are useful in the assessment of comprehension: (a) responses to reading, (b) reading logs, (c) checklists, (d) teacher's observational notes, and (e) students' self-evaluations. Through the use of portfolios, growth in the processes of comprehension can be more easily monitored by the student and the teacher.

Goodman, Goodman and Hood (1989) see the evaluation procedures as being incidental, informal, and formal as teachers interact, observe, analyze, and reflect. The evaluation of the reading process takes place while students are involved in the actual process of reading. Evaluation is ongoing; it is a part of the everyday curriculum. Evaluation relies on teacher judgment (Routman, 1988). Teachers are "kid watchers" as they observe and record data while measuring positive student growth.

Summary

Whole language is a philosophy that views reading, writing, speaking, and listening as whole, interactive processes integrated by instruction and activities. The instructional approach to the reading process is focused on constructing meaning through real use of

meaningful text. In a whole language classroom, students are encouraged to become independent, life-long thinkers, readers, and writers as they assume ownership of their learning.

In the interactive, complex process of comprehension, readers construct meaning by linking prior knowledge with new information. Schemata allow the reader to relate ideas, things, and events while constructing and reconstructing meaning from print. Predicting is an important part of the process of constructing meaning; it activates background knowledge before, during, and after reading. The cuing systems (semantic, syntax, and grapho-phonetic) are always present and interacting as readers build meaning. Students make sense of text as they predict, select, confirm, and self-correct. The whole language approach is consistent with the understandings of how children comprehend.

The teacher orchestrates a variety of strategies before, during, and after reading to develop and enhance comprehension. The literature revealed an overlap in use of strategies. Some prereading activities can be used as assessment tools during the post-reading stage (e.g., story map). The strategies can be taught using real books for real purposes.

The literature suggests a need for changes in the assessment of reading comprehension; these changes should be consistent with current research and theory. Assessment should not drive instruction, but be interwoven with instruction.

Some alternative approaches of evaluation based on the interactive process of comprehension are occurring. These capitalize on the expertise of classroom teachers as they collect data, judge, and evaluate while students are involved in the process. These procedures are both formal and informal.

Portfolio assessment is receiving much attention in recent literature. Advocates believe the portfolio approach best reflects student growth because it is monitored by both student and teacher. Self-evaluation is believed to be an important part of assessment.

In summary, the review of the literature does not resolve the question "Does the whole language approach improve reading comprehension?". There is a need for additional studies that address the effects of the whole language approach to reading instruction on the development and enhancement of comprehension.

The review of literature does support the use of specific strategies before, during, and after reading that are congruent with the whole language beliefs of

how readers make sense of reading material. The literature also supports the use of evaluation strategies that are consistent with the whole language philosophy of assessment. The implication for teaching and learning is that teachers should provide students with appropriate strategies for developing, enhancing, and assessing comprehension in a whole language classroom.

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Appendix

Acronyms for Strategies Consistent with the Whole Language Approach to Reading Instruction

LINK: list, inquire, note, and know. These are the four basic steps and processes involved in this pre-reading strategy. The activity helps students establish a link between their prior knowledge and information they will be studying.

LWSL: literature webbing strategy lesson. LWSL provides for young readers a guided reading lesson using predictable books. The webbing strategy is used as a visual representation for predictions, discussions, and extensions of language activities with predictable books. The purpose is to help young readers experience success and enjoyment in reading predictable books.

REAP: read, encode, annotate, and ponder. The student reads a selection, writes a retelling of the selection, writes a summary of the retelling, and then ponders the importance of the ideas. The post-reading strategy encourages thinking, reasoning, and reflection.

ReQuest: Reciprocal questioning. This prereading strategy name comes from the questioning that the students and teacher engage in together during the

initial stages of a reading assignment. Manzo's ReQuest technique encourages students to base their purpose for reading on anticipatory questions (Vaughan and Estes, 1986).

SMART: self-monitoring approach to reading and thinking. The steps involved in this strategy help the reader identify what is understood and what is not understood during the content reading/thinking process. The process guides students to think and understand rather than memorize what they read.