



Part V: Reading Comprehension

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The final installment in this series brings us to the reason why written text was ever created in the first place...to convey ideas that can consistently be understood over time. To comprehend is to grasp the importance and meaning of information, and we now have over 30 years of research to help us effectively teach students how to understand what they read. The six strategies below have been identified by the 2000 National Reading Panel as the most effective approaches to teaching reading comprehension (Armbruster, Lehr and Osborn, 2001).

Self-Monitoring – Even in the early grades, students need to be aware of what they do and do not understand. Students need to be able to identify where in the text they are having difficulty and what that difficulty is. This strategy also involves students restating difficult text in their own words. By teaching students to look back through the previous text and to look forward through upcoming text, student can learn to help themselves resolve what they are having trouble understanding.

Graphic & Semantic Organizers – Graphic organizers use diagrams and pictures to illustrate how ideas presented within the text relate to each other. Semantic organizers are visual organizers that resemble a spider web, with lines connecting a central concept to related ideas and events. These visual organizers help students focus on the text structure, provide tools to see how pieces of the text fit together and help students organize accurate summaries.

Answering Questions – When teachers ask students questions about what they have read, they give a purpose for reading, focus attention on what is being taught, encourage students to think actively as they read, encourage students to self-monitor their level of understanding and help to review content while connecting what they have just read to what they already know.

Generating Questions – In order for students to come up with their own questions about the text they are reading, they must integrate information from different sections of the text. This helps students to better assess what they are reading and stimulates them to process the text more actively.

Recognizing Story Structure – Students understand and remember the sequence of events best when they grasp how the story plot is organized. Story structure instruction involves teaching students how to identify the setting, initiating events, internal reactions, goals, attempts and outcomes. Using story maps as a graphic organizer is an effective and powerful way to help students better understand the events of a story. It should be noted that this strategy works best when reading stories. This is not a good strategy for reading informational text or poetry.

Summarizing – Summarizing requires students to determine what is most important and explain it in their own words. This strategy helps students to cut through the bulk of the text and connect the main ideas in way that they can easily understand.

Reading comprehension strategies are most successful when they are explicitly taught in combination with each other through direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, application, and cooperative learning.

Direct Explanation occurs when the teacher explains to students why the strategy helps comprehension and when they should apply the strategy.

Modeling happens when the teacher demonstrates how to apply the strategy by commenting out loud while reading the text.

Guided Practice involves the teacher assisting students as they learn how to appropriately apply the strategy.

Application takes place when the students have practiced the strategy to the point where they can apply it independently.

Cooperative Learning utilizes small groups to work on clearly defined assignments. Within this setting, students help each other learn and apply comprehension strategies while working on content-area subjects.

Reading comprehension can be focused on everywhere text is present. Even students in the primary grades benefit from reading comprehension instruction. All readers benefit from understanding how reading is a process of making sense from written text. The better our students learn to digest what they are reading, the more prepared they will be for learning and the stronger their overall achievement will be.

Resources/References

www.nationalreadingpanel.org - National Reading Panel

www.nifl.gov - National Institute for Literacy

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