A Reading Comprehension Guide Book for Upper Elementary School Students

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A Reading Comprehension Guide Book
For Upper Elementary School Students

A Project Report
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education
Reading Specialist

By
Kaley Repp
July 2010
ABSTRACT

A Reading Comprehension Guide Book
For Upper Elementary School Students

by
Kaley Repp
June 2010

This is an examination into the reading skills students need to help him/her comprehend reading. This project identifies 18 strategies students use when comprehending texts and then places those 18 strategies into a guide book. The 18 strategies are presented with lessons, teacher prompts, and literature for teachers to use with students who need additional reading support. This guide book has not been tested for effectiveness among elementary school students, however, the strategies are research-based and have been identified as effective for student success in comprehension.
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This project will present effective reading comprehension strategies for struggling readers. The guide book could be used during in-class reading interventions or to support a supplemental reading program, for struggling readers. This reading comprehension strategy guide could be used by, but not limited to, intermediate classroom teachers during whole group classroom instruction. It could also be used, in small groups or one on one with struggling readers, in a supplemental reading program or by pre-service teachers coming into schools to work with struggling readers. This project presents a review of research and compiles a set of reading comprehension strategies for teachers. Additionally, the project will present a set of skills, strategies, and lessons for teachers. It is intended to be a guide for teachers to use to help them implement proven reading strategies that will aide students in improving their reading ability.

The first chapter presents the background of the study, specifies the problem of the project, describes its significance, and presents an overview of the methodology used. The chapter will conclude by presenting the delimitations of the study and defining special terms that will be used throughout the project. Chapter II presents a review of the literature relating to strategies and skills shown to improve student reading comprehension. Chapter III explains the steps involved in the development of this project and an outline in which the project will be created. Chapter IV provides the strategy guide for struggling readers. Chapter V presents a summary of the conclusions as a result of this project and the creation of this guide.
Background of the Project

In this project, literature will be reviewed on researched reading strategies, supplemental reading programs, and interventions. In 2009, Shamey researched the effect of early reading intervention on the success of middle school students in their content area classes. The study found that students who participated in the intervention program during their elementary school years were able to sustain the gains they made. The students who were in the intervention programs were well below grade level and were still below their peers in middle school, however they did maintain their growth. This shows that this intervention program was beneficial for low-level readers because their performance and achievement in all content areas depended on their ability to read and comprehend what is read.

In 2006, Strickland, Ganske, and Monroe stated that early intervention programs have proven to be successful amongst K-1 students, and that some of the adapted approaches have been shown to work with upper elementary students as well. These authors stated that because their prior experiences with certain skills were not enough for them to gain independent use, students who struggle with reading need additional time working with those skills. They also noted that students are leaving elementary school are unprepared for middle school reading. Therefore, elementary school teachers need to be doing all they can to help their students make appropriate gains to meet their grade level expectations (GLE).
The Problem Statement

About one fourth of the fifth grade students at Lincoln Elementary in Ellensburg, Washington, read below grade level. Of that fourth, several are severely below grade level (three years or more). From an educational perspective, it is a concern that these students will be going on to middle school and junior high without being capable of reading and comprehending grade level material. These students will need to have the ability to read and comprehend the materials they are given in order to be successful in their content area classes. This is important because, “by middle school, student performance and achievement in all content areas hinges on demonstrated reading and writing skills. In light of this, early intervention to promote the development of literacy skills is critical” (Shamey, 2009, p. 4619).

The Professional Significance of the Study

Teachers are preparing students who need to be able to read and write, in the real world where they will need to be contributing citizens in our society. This is significant because, “reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child’s success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, the opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success will be lost” (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). A foundation for these students needs to be created in order to aid them in building their reading knowledge and skills and to help support their ability to be lifelong readers and learners. Without remediation and interventions, these students will continue to fall behind in their academics therefore, this project could be used on a daily basis to
help those students who have fallen behind and need extra support to bring them up to grade level with the assurance that the reading strategies are effective and proven.

A problem when looking for successful, effective, and valuable strategies and lessons is questioning their usefulness for intermediate teachers who are working with struggling readers. Will they be teacher friendly? Easy to use? Most importantly, will they meet the needs of the target population of struggling readers?

Additionally, some students are not reading up to their grade level and up to state and national standards. When looking at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the data indicates that since 1992 there has been minimal improvement in reading, and that the low performing students are actually declining (Progress, 2009). In Washington State, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores have shown improvement from 2002-03 school year to the 2008-09 school year. Specifically,

- 4th grade, students improved 6.9%, however, 26.1% did not make standard.
- 7th grade, students improved 11.4%, however, 40.7% did not make standard.
- 10th grade, students improved 21.2%, which left 18.2% not meeting standard (OSPI, 2009).

This information shows improvement across the state, but it also shows that there is still room for growth. Some students need additional support to help them meet grade level expectations.
Overview of Methodology

For this project a literature review of effective reading strategies, supplemental reading programs, interventions, reading to learn, and middle school success was conducted. Strategies were gathered, and lessons and skills that have been shown to be effective with struggling intermediate readers were collected. Using the effective strategies and lessons, a guide to be used by teachers who are looking to improve reading comprehension among students, was produced.

Delimitations of the Study

There are innumerable reading comprehension strategies available for use with reading comprehension. This guide book does not include every effective strategy and lesson. The strategies that were selected, are the strategies that match the scope and sequence of the Houghton Mifflin reading anthology, which is the reading anthology used by the Ellensburg School District. Although, the strategies and lessons collected are research-based, they have not been assessed as an entire collection. A researcher could examine those strategies in order to determine whether the methods presented here improve reading ability, comprehension, fluency, and test scores when used together.

Definition of Key Terms

In this study there are a number of educational terms used. Below is a list of these terms and definitions.

Anthology—book or other collection of selected writings by various authors, usually in the same literary form, of the same period, or on the same subject (Dictionary.com, 2010).
Assessment—Collecting data and gathering evidence regarding the appropriation of knowledge; not useful unless evaluation is included (Routman, 2003).

Benchmark—any standard or reference by which others can be measured or judged (Dictionary.com, 2010).

Cause-effect- a stated or implied association between an outcome and the conditions which brought it about, often an organizing principle in text (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Comprehension —The construction of the meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communicative context (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Differentiated Instruction—Challenging and relevant instruction that meets the needs and interests of each learner. In a heterogeneous group (often whole class), students receive scaffold, multi-level instruction across content, processes, and product that enables each student to be successful (Routman, 2003).

EALR—Essential Academic Learning Requirement, learning goals which have provided the foundation for the development of all academic learning standards in Washington State (OSPI, 2009).

Fluency—The clear, easy, spoken expression of words; freedom from word-identification problems that might hinder comprehension in silent reading or the expression of ideas in oral reading; automaticity (Harris & Hodges, 1995).
GLE—Grade Level Expectation, learning goals set forth by the state of Washington for each grade level, K-12 (OSPI, 2009).

Independent Reading—Readers choose and read books they enjoy and understand; usually involves daily sustained silent reading in school along with careful teacher monitoring (Routman, 2003).

Inference—The act or process of deriving logical conclusions from premises known or assumed to be true (Dictionary.com, 2010).

Main idea—The gist of a passage; central thought (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

MSP—Measure of Student Performance, is a yearly assessment in Washington State taken in grades 3-8 (OSPI, 2009).

Paraphrase—The act of restating something spoken or written in another form (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Prediction—A person’s use of knowledge about language and the context in which it occurs to anticipate what is coming in writing or speech (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Prior knowledge—Knowing that stems from previous experience (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Prosody—The pitch, loudness, tempo, and rhythm patterns of spoken language (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Retell—When the reader orally describes what happened in the story (The teacher may gain insight into the reader’s ability to interact with, interpret, and draw conclusions from the text (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Sequencing—The arrangement or order of subject matter (Harris & Hodges, 1995).
Struggling Readers—Students who are reading a year or more below grade level.

Summary—A brief statement that contains the essential ideas of a longer passage or selection (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Text Structure—The various patterns of ideas that are embedded in the organization of text (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

Vocabulary—Words known or used by a person; words of a language (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

WASL—Washington Assessment of Student Learning, is the previous Washington State test taken in grades 3-8 and 10th (OSPI, 2009).

Summary

Many teachers are using interventions to support their struggling readers. They look for online sources, use worksheets from work books, or continue to use the same strategies they have been using with students for years. However, the same concerns arises, “How do I know that what I am doing will benefit students?” Which project presents a compilation of research-based strategies that support reading comprehension.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This chapter will examine at the 18 reading strategies identified for this project. This chapter is organized into three main categories comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. These three areas are three main areas of reading. The chapter then delves deeper into the category of reading comprehension, since the guide book is a compilation of reading comprehension strategies.

In order for comprehension or learning to occur a reader’s skills, knowledge base, and strategies must mesh with the difficulty of the text he/she is reading (Zakaluk & Samuels, 1988). In addition students must possess the mental know-how to use the comprehension strategies effectively and successfully. When students know comprehension strategies and can effectively use those skills, the process of reading and comprehending is easier and more useful for students.

There is a variety of strategies, interventions, and skills used to teach reading comprehension. When researching reading comprehension strategies for use with struggling upper elementary school students, some stood out more than others; such as, story structure/story elements, cause and effect, compare and contrast, main idea and supporting details, sequencing, schema/background knowledge, connections, inferring, visualization, peer coaching and peer lead literature groups, retelling/paraphrasing, summarizing, teacher read aloud, questioning and predictions. Additionally, fluency and vocabulary were also researched, as they relate to comprehension. The following review
of literature will explain each of these strategies and identify their importance for use with a struggling reader.

The research for the guide book was collected by searching for articles, texts and documents that contained the terms comprehension, vocabulary, fluency, and combinations thereof. After a preliminary search was concluded a group of 16 comprehension, vocabulary and fluency strategies were selected.

The Big 3

There are many processes involved. Reading can be separated into several categories; including comprehension, fluency and vocabulary, however this review will focus on comprehension. Without fluency and knowledge of vocabulary, there would be no comprehension. Therefore, this comprehension guide includes a section on fluency, vocabulary.

The first of the Big Three being addressed is comprehension. Because the guide book is based on comprehension, this area of reading is broken up into an additional 16. This section is more in-depth than the vocabulary and fluency sections.

Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the essence of reading, (Durkin, 1993); it is making meaning of what the author has written, and understanding what is written in text (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Reading comprehension is broken up into many different parts, and those parts work together in a reader’s mind to create meaning. These strategies include making prediction, using background information and schema, making inferences, connections, story structure and story elements, main idea and supporting details,
sequencing, cause and effect, compare and contrast, retell and paraphrase, summary, questioning, read aloud, visualization, peer lit groups, and peer coaching. The literature review of comprehension strategies begins with what readers bring with them when they read, their prior knowledge.

Prior Knowledge

Students all have prior knowledge they bring with them to their reading however, each reader’s prior knowledge is different based on their “previous experiences” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 195). It is important that teachers activate that prior knowledge to help students make sense of their reading. One way to help students draw upon what they know is by having them make predictions about what they are about to read.

Predictions. In order to make a prediction, a person must “use of knowledge about language and context in which it occurs to anticipate what is coming in writing” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 191). It is to say in advance what one believes will happen; the reader will need to anticipate what will follow while reading continuous text, as “language and meaning together help readers predict what will come next” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Making predictions can create a purpose for reading. Readers may read and then compare what they read to their prediction. Good readers are able to change their predictions as they read, however, poor readers may not change their predictions when they read information that goes against what they had previously thought (Gunning, 2010). This then leads to misconceptions in the student’s reading and comprehension.
Therefore, it is important to teach students to be flexible with their predictions and that as they read, their predictions can continuously change to fit the reading.

When using prediction as a comprehension strategy, teachers need to be careful that students do not think reading is a guessing game. Teachers do not want students to predict and then see if their prediction was “correct” (Carr & Thompson, 1996). Predictions are not right or wrong, they are ideas the readers have going into a story, and they continue to transform while reading.

Predictions are developed using what students already know. This is also known as using background knowledge or schema. Activating students’ background knowledge or schema will aide them in their comprehension of the text. This is another example of how reading strategies work together to help the reader construct meaning.

*B*Background knowledge and schema.  Building upon background knowledge is crucial in students’ reading comprehension. If students have background knowledge about a subject before they begin reading a text, it will help them connect their reading to what they already know about the given topic. This is called activating schema (Carr & Thompson, 1996). Their knowledge of the texts helps them learn more as they read, because they have a place to connect and store their new knowledge. Students are also more likely to be engaged in the reading and read with a higher level of comprehension when they have prior knowledge about the topic. This is because, “teachers who used prior knowledge activation strategies were equally effective in teaching high-, average-, and low-achieving readers. Students in these teachers’ classrooms outperformed their
peers on a variety of comprehension measures” (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010, p. 169).

There are several strategies involved in activating a reader’s prior knowledge. Teachers can introduce part of the text prior to the student reading it, make comparisons with other texts or life events, make predictions, pre-teach unfamiliar vocabulary words, or help them construct meaning of the text before reading it. Additional strategies teachers can use to help activate prior knowledge are anticipatory sets, KWL charts, open-ended questioning, group discussions, and storytelling (Gunning, 2010). Each of these strategies helps students make connections with what they know and what they are about to read (Beers, 2003).

Teachers can activate schema in many ways. They can review previously taught information, engage students in a conversation about previous lessons, and assess students understanding of the previously taught knowledge at the same time (Carr & Thompson, 1996). Reviewing helps students place their new learning with their previous knowledge. Also, overviewing any new material can quickly develop new concepts and pre-teach vocabulary. Teachers can also use storytelling to set up rich, meaningful concepts; they can use dramatics, such as acting out a character or dressing up in costumes, to bring a time period or a character to life. Speakers and field trips are more meaningful and create longer lasting memories than stories for students. Allowing students to hear from experts and see firsthand the material they are learning about is invaluable to their comprehension. Riddles and jokes can also be an engaging way to get students knowledge base activated (Schulhauser, 2005). This can also be an intriguing
way to engage students. When using jokes with students, teachers are also asking them to make inferences.

**Inference.** Readers make inferences constantly (Beers, 2003). Authors do not tell the reader everything they need to know point blank; the reader then must take what they have read with what they know to construct meaning and make an inference. Each time a pronoun occurs in text, readers need to decide to what the author is referring. “Inferential thinking occurs when text clues merge with the reader’s prior knowledge and questions to point toward a conclusion about an underlying theme or idea in the text” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 23). If readers don’t make inferences as they read, they may miss the literal meaning from their reading as well as deeper underlying ideas or themes of the words. Therefore, they may be unable to make a judgment about what is not there, but is implied (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The fourth type of prior knowledge students use is making connections. By activating students’ prior knowledge helps them think about what they already know and then make connections to connect with the text.

**Connections.** Readers make connections with the text they are reading. They relate what they are reading with their own life, a book they have read or something they already know about. It is important to teach students to make these connections as they read because it will help them become more active in their reading process (Schulhauser, 2005). Because, “when students have had an experience similar to that of a character in a story, they are more likely to understand the character’s motives, thoughts, and feelings” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000, p. 69).
There are three types of connections readers make. Text-to-self connections are ones that readers make between the text they are reading and their past experiences. Text-to-text connections are ones that readers make between the text they are reading and a text they have read or have had read to them previously. Text-to-world connections that readers make between the text they are reading and things they have heard on the news, from their parents, or larger world issues or events (Schulhauser, 2005). Some connections may fall into more than one category.

To help students learn how to make connections, teachers should start with texts to which the students can easily relate. They should choose books that have characters with similar backgrounds and experiences. This will enhance the concept of making a connection between a book and their lives easier to grasp. Once students seem to understand the concept of making connections with those texts, it is then easier to move to texts that are not as closely related to the student’s lives. As teachers move further away from characters and events that their students have experienced, it becomes important they make connections that are not as obvious. “The more connections students can make between what they are learning and their own lives, the deeper the understanding of new concepts” (Schulhauser, 2005, p. 59).

In addition to activating students’ prior knowledge, and guiding them to make predictions and connections, teachers need to help students understand the way stories are set up. In school, readers need to understand how to read expository text, texts that are teaching them something, where the reader gather information, and narrative text, texts, that are telling a story.
Text Structure

Authors write texts in specific ways to help organize their ideas. They do this for themselves and for their reader. When readers are able to recognize the text structure the author has created, they will be better able to retain the information they are reading and learn the new material (Willis, 2009). Knowing the text structure or pattern also helps them distinguish between important and unimportant information. Students also need to be aware that often text patterns can be embedded amongst other text patterns.

"Research on story grammar suggests that children as young as five or six have a well-developed sense of the elements in story structure" (Mandler & Johnson, 1979, p. 131). Since students are familiar with text structure at a young age, it is likely that teachers will not need to teach text structure. However, as texts become more difficult and complex, students may need additional help navigating through their reading. When students look for text patterns, there are several steps they should follow. First, it is recommended they find important ideas, and look for signal words that could be tying information together. Next, they should look for other important ideas and supporting details and at the ways those are tied together. They may ask themselves if the ideas are connected in a way that is obvious with a clear pattern? Lastly, students should outline the relationships in order to identify the text pattern (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011).

Authors will give readers clues as to which text structure is being used by providing key signal words or phrases. Examples of signal words are shown in figure 2.1.
Text structure is broken up into five categories. Those categories are story structure/story elements, cause and effect, compare and contrast, main idea and supporting details, and sequencing. The first element of text structure is story structure/story elements. This section will discuss how texts are organized for readers (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010).

*Story structure/story elements.* Narrative text is structured around key elements. They all have characters; a plot with a beginning, middle, and end; a sequence of actions or events; a problem; attempts to solve the problem and a solution. They also have a setting, a theme or message and often dialogue between characters.
Expository or informational texts contain facts, main idea, supporting details, and complex vocabulary. When readers understand what elements are included in narrative and expository texts, they are able to look for and identify key elements. These elements aid them in their comprehension and recollection of the text (Bakken & Whedon, 2002). In narrative and expository writing, readers can find the main ideas and supporting details or the text.

Main Idea and Supporting Details. Being able to extract the main idea and supporting detail from a text and place it onto paper into a graphic organizer shows that students have a firm grasp over the material they are learning. “When students learn how to use and construct graphic organizers (such as main idea and supporting details), they are in control of a study strategy that allows them to identify what parts of a text are important” (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011, p. 324). It is generally easier for students to find the main idea and supporting details in expository texts rather than narrative texts, because they can pull out the main fact or topic in which they are learning. When looking at narrative texts, teachers need to help students look for the message or overall idea of the passage. Once students begin to understand this concept, they can translate it into their writing as well (Strickland, Ganske, & Monroe, 2006).

Initially, some readers may struggle trying to put the main idea and supporting details down in a specific format. Teachers may then need to start with verbal responses and dialogue to help students see the strategy modeled correctly. This should be followed by the opportunity to practice, and receive feedback on their ability to find the information that is most important. Often as the author is organizing the main idea and
supporting details, he/she is placing it into a particular order, that order is known as sequencing.

**Sequencing.** Authors will put information into a logical pattern to help the reader navigate through facts, events, and/or concepts. The authors will go through a step-by-step sequence to develop the events and concepts for the reader. Sometimes sequencing patterns are very explicit and easy for the reader to see. Yet, other times the sequencing patterns can be implicit and more difficult for the reader to find (Ellery, 2010).

Additionally, it is important for a student to read a text and then be able to place the main events back into their correct sequence (Bakken & Whedon, 2002). When students are able to recall the correct sequence of events from a book, it helps them make sense of the book and cuts down on their confusion. Another element of text structure that reduces student misconception is understanding the cause and effect relationship.

**Cause and Effect.** This text pattern shows readers how things came to be, “how facts, events, or concepts (effects) happen or come into being because of other facts, events, or concepts (causes)” (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011, p. 322). This text pattern can be thought of as the “if, then” strategy. An example is, “if you hit your little sister, then you may get in trouble from your mom.” When students are able to see the relationship between events, and how certain events or actions can influence or impact other events and actions, it helps with additional reading comprehension strategies, such as predictions and questioning. Students begin to recognize a “cause” and then are able to formulate a prediction about what will happen, because of that event (effect). Understanding cause and effect also helps students formulate questions about their
reading; they begin to wonder if the events had been different would there have been a
different outcome. This strategy, along with comparing and contrasting helps students
become more actively involved in their reading (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010).

*Compare and contrast.* Comparing and contrasting information allows students
to look at similarities and differences in the texts they are reading. They can compare
between characters, settings, information and events. It also allows them to compare the
text they are reading to other texts, movies, and stories. Comparing and contrasting
allows students to look at the story in another way and generate new ideas about their
reading (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011). Once students have a grasp of how to compare
and contrast, they can begin to making connections between their background knowledge
and the new information they are learning. They can also compare the information and
vocabulary they are learning with new information and new vocabulary (Dreher & Gray,
2009).

In addition to students understanding the way in which texts are structured, it is
also important for them to be able to recount the information they just read. This takes
practice for students to be able to retrieve the information or story they just read.
Students can do this by retelling, paraphrasing, or summarizing.

*Organization and synthesizing information*

Readers are continuously taking the information they are reading and organizing
it in a manner that makes sense to them. They are adapting the information to construct
meaning from the text. Readers generally do this developmentally in three steps,
Retelling, paraphrasing and last summarizing. These are all skills that must be learned and practiced.

**Retell/paraphrase.** In this strategy, students retell a text to their teacher after they have finished reading a passage. The purpose of a retell is so the teacher might “gain insight into the reader’s ability to interact with, interpret, and draw conclusions from the text” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 220). Paraphrasing is when a student retells what they have just read, but in their own language (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Developmentally, paraphrasing generally comes after retelling for students, as it tends to be easier for them to restate the author’s words, they may then move onto paraphrasing later. Paraphrasing encourages students to connect their reading to their prior knowledge and bring that information into their paraphrasing (Kletzien, 2009). A retell goes beyond a summary; however, like a summary it should include the characters, main idea, problem, solution and setting. A retell should also include more details and events. Having students retell a story can also help them get ready for the summary process. When students are working on their retell, it is important they work on the organization and accuracy of what they are telling.

Paraphrasing is a developmental step in getting students ready for summarizing. Summarizing requires students to find the main point or important events, where as paraphrasing does not require students to eliminate information or decide its information is important and which is unimportant. Paraphrasing is not the same as summarizing, however it is a developmental step for students who are not yet ready for summarizing.
Summary. Summarizing involves putting together information while reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). The reader identifies information, extracts it from print, and forms an ongoing summary of what it means. Writing summaries is an important skill for readers. It helps them select the important information from their reading and organize it in a concise manner. Reading students summaries can quickly give teachers an idea of whether they understood the main idea, problem and solution of a story.

Writing summaries can be an overwhelming task for many students. Because students must be able to determine the main idea and supporting details and put them into a logical order (Pressley, 2006). Often students don’t know where to start in this process and what information they need to include. Summarizing can help students locate the important people, events, problem and solution of a story. One strategy to help students with this is the Somebody Wanted But So (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011). Students choose a main character (somebody), what they wanted, the problem (but) and the solution (so). This is an easy way to get students started with summary writing. This strategy works for fictional texts only, and would need to be modified for informational/nonfiction texts. Another way to have students practice summary writing is by using the 5 W’s, who, what, when, where, why. When students fill in each of these categories, it insures that they cover all of the main aspects of the text (Beers, 2003). This can easily be practiced with newspaper articles.

Students must be active when they read and constantly be interacting with their text. They are drawing upon their prior knowledge, using text structure, organizing
information in their mind and questioning what is happening in the text. Students ask questions about what will happen, what is happening, and what has happened.

**Questioning**

Experienced readers ask questions about the text they are reading, before, during, and after their reading. They use self-comprehension monitoring strategies to generate their own questions about the text they are reading (Parker & Hurry, 2007). Questioning may help students to clarify and reinforce knowledge; develop, extend and expand concepts; make connections between what they are learning and what they already know, stimulate higher level and critical thinking; clarify reasoning processes; help with retention of information; and enhance a deeper understanding and appreciation of material (Schulhauser, 2005). Questioning helps students internalize the concepts they are reading about and develop a deeper understanding of the material. “Self-questioning has a high level of success in improving comprehension, probably because it leads to more active reading and thinking” (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010, p. 203).

Teachers also use questioning strategies to build comprehension and clear up misconceptions. However, by asking students questions that are ‘right there’ in the texts or asking them to come up with questions that are right in the text does not require a lot of thinking from students (Gunning, 2010). Questioning is a strategy that propels readers forward in their thinking and understanding of a text. Readers ask questions before, during, and after they read a text. They ask questions about all aspects of the text, the author, the meaning, the setting, the ideas and the issues. Asking questions helps the readers construct meaning, enhance understanding, find answers, solve problems, find
specific information, discover new information and clarify confusion (Harvey &
Goudvis, 2000). When students question their reading, they need to know sometimes
their questions are answered and sometimes they are not. One way to model this strategy
is by thinking aloud the questions readers have. This can be accomplished through
classroom read alouds.

*Read aloud*

The purpose and goals of teacher read aloud is to excite students about books. It
is also to model fluency, build vocabulary, reinforce genre, highlight story elements,
emphasize previewing strategy, nurture higher level thinking, reinforce metacognitive
strategies, enhance listening comprehension and integrate content areas. It can also be
used as a form of informal assessment. Teachers can assess students’ interest and attitude
about reading, their listening comprehension, and allow for student self-assessment
(Schulhauser, 2005).

Reading aloud to students helps them understand the structure of stories, and gets
them familiar with texts, and allows them to have expectations about what a book may be
about. Reading aloud has a positive effect of the student’s comprehension in their own
reading, because it introduces them to more genres of books, adds to their background
knowledge, and allows them to connect their reading to other books. When teachers read
aloud, they should introduce story grammar as it appears in the text (setting, problem,
events, characters, etc.) to help students follow along with the story and heighten their
awareness of the story. (Ouellette, Dagostino, & Carifio, 1999)
Reading aloud introduces students to new literature as well as models for them fluent reading. During read aloud teachers are able to model reading comprehension strategies as well as introduce vocabulary to students (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000).

Reading aloud is just as important for upper elementary school students as it is for younger students. Because it creates shared literary experiences as a foundation for learning and how to comprehend texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

One read aloud strategy is known as Direct Listening Thinking Activity (DLTA) (Gray, 2010). In the DLTA the teacher begins by introducing the texts to the students and then allows them time to make a prediction about what the story will be about. In doing this, the teacher sets a purpose for listening, because now the students must listen to confirm, reject, or modify their prediction. When the story has concluded, students then must give evidence from the story that either supported or made the student modify their prediction.

Choosing an appropriate story for read aloud is also very important. Teachers should choose books that are just slightly above the grade level/reading level of the students they are reading to which they are reading. However, it should still be within their realm of understanding. Students are able to have rich conversations about the text, as well as having students staying engaged. Students also seem to benefit more from read alouds when the teacher introduces the text, reads it through without many extended breaks or interruptions, and with frequent and thorough book talks (Gunning, 2010). Additionally book discussions during and after read alouds is important for students, because the language that the students use is rich, and allows teachers to model using
enriched language with newly introduced vocabulary and comprehension strategies. Read aloud time can also be a good time to have students practice their visualization.

**Visualization**

Visualizing allows readers to turn the words on the page into pictures in their minds. It is often explained to students as creating a movie in your mind. When students visualize the stories they are reading, they become more engaged in their reading; and therefore pay closer attention and are more likely to remember the important details of what was read (Naughton, 2008).

One way to work on visualization is for teachers to read aloud to students and model for them. This is done by closing the eyes, while the teacher shares the picture they see in your mind. The teacher then continues to read and ask students to create a picture and share what they see in their mind. After some practice teachers can then have them draw the picture they see in their mind, or tell another student about what they are picturing. By having students draw and talk about the pictures they see, the teacher can also look for misconceptions students are having about their reading and help to clear them.

Visualizing enables students to explore concepts visually and emotionally while reading. Visualization is used more with narrative texts, but can also be used with expository texts. Visualization may not be relevant to all texts, and not all students visualize with pictures; some use visualization by activating their emotions or other senses. Teachers should encourage students to activate all of their senses during visualization, to help them create a complete picture (Schulhauser, 2005).
Peer Support

Giving students the opportunity to take responsibility over their learning, and giving them the opportunity to help their peers empowers them. Peer support tends to be successful because peers can often engage other students in a way that sometimes teachers cannot. Plus, both students benefit from peer support, for example when students are involved in peer coaching (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Greenwood & R, 1988). The coach is benefiting because she/he are acting as the teacher and cementing their knowledge and the student receiving the coaching is getting additional practice on the skill(s) they need.

Peer coaching. Students with reading difficulties need additional attention and time from teachers, “one way to provide increased one-on-one assistance for reading is through peer-delivered instruction” (Harris, Marchand-Martella, & Martella, 2000, p. 21). Many studies have showed how peer-delivered instruction or coaching is highly beneficial for the student giving the instruction as well as the student receiving the instruction (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997; Greenwood & R, 1988). During peer coaching, two students are paired up, one higher-leveled reader, the coach, and one lower-leveled reader. Using the peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS) (Greenwood & Hall, 1988), the students proceed through several steps always having the coach model first. The coach starts by reading for five minutes, and then the reader rereads what the coach has read for five minutes. Once read, they begin by making reasonable predictions as to what will happen next in their reading. They then accurately read half a page, check their
prediction, and then summarize the most important part of their reading. This program works on comprehension as well as oral fluency (Liang & Dole, 2006).

Another peer coaching program is called, the Corrective Reading Program (CRP). This program is a direct instruction model and is meant for students in the third grade and above who are struggling with decoding and/or comprehension. This is a scripted program so students can be successful teaching each other because they do not need much practice. Another way for students to be successful while working with their peers is through peer led literature groups and discussions.

*Peer-led literature-groups.* Peer-led literature discussions can be beneficial for students by increasing their oral vocabulary and language development; it helps increase the level of pleasure they get from reading literature, as well as their confidence in being able to read, understand, and interpret literature and text. Berne and Clark (2008) found that student-led literature discussions helps students because it gives them an opportunity to listen to their peers who come from different backgrounds and perspectives and who are at different reading levels. It allows students to see the book in a way they may not have on their own. It also helps them understand the book by listening to their peers understanding of the same text.

During student-lead literature discussion, students need to feel empowered and have a sense of ownership over the book and the discussions they are having. The literature group needs to be made up of students who have all selected the same text, so they all have buy into the group. Teachers should offer choices to the students, keeping reading level, content, and vocabulary in mind. Groups can also be made up of students
reading the same author or about the same subject/content area. Once students are in
groups the teacher need to make a schedule. This can be done alone or allow students to
make their schedule with their group. If the teacher allows their students to create their
own schedule, make sure you keep a timeline in mind of when the literature group should
end.

As students read, they should be keeping some sort of a log (Berne & Clark,
2006). This can be a response log, responding to questions you have posed or the group
has posed. It can be a log where students write down their questions and connections, or
any combination or addition to this. The day after their reading, students need to be
given time to discuss the text(s) they have just read. This will require pre-teaching and
modeling. Teachers will demonstrate and promote effective discussion techniques. At
the end of the book, the groups may choose to share their book(s) to the class through a
number of ways, such as talk shows, broadcast interviews, newspaper/magazine reviews,
posters, and any additional projects teachers or their students may create (Berne & Clark,
2008). The additional practice of reading aloud is also beneficial for the reader and the
coach’s reading fluency, which is one of the three main aspects of reading.

Fluency

Fluency is having the ability to read a text quickly, accurately and with prosody
and understanding of the text (Harris & Hodges, 1995). It is important that the reader
reads quickly, accurately and with expression, however it is most important that the
reader understands what is being read, because without making meaning the reader is just
word calling. Fluency is one determent in student comprehension. Some effective to
Improve fluency are through repeated readings of familiar texts, having students reread texts that are in content areas, partner reading, shared reading, reader’s theater, reading series books and listening to tapes. (Routman, 2003)

Reading with automaticity is an important part of reading fluency. Once students can recognize the words they are reading, they can then spend their time concentrating on meaning rather than the task of decoding, and that is when students change “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Additional ways to teach fluency include having students practice their phrasing, sight words, high frequency words, giving them opportunities to listen to many different genres of texts, and teacher prompts as opposed to teacher corrections (Beers, 2003). “Reading rate is important because students who recognize words effortlessly should be able to devote more attention to reading comprehension” (O’Connor, White, & Swanson, 2007, p. 33). Fluent readers also know when to slow down as they reading informational texts and when it is appropriate to read quickly (Pressley, 2006). Another part of being a fluent reader is recognizing the words written in the text. Students with larger vocabularies have better fluency and comprehension.

**Vocabulary**

Vocabulary, is defined as “all of the words in a language” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 274). Teachers are responsible for providing students with opportunities to be immersed in a vocabulary rich environment, so they have the chance to learn additional vocabulary words. “…the achieving students possess the most adequate vocabularies” (Perry, Herold, & Stoll, 1967). Vocabulary development is important for students at a young age. A student’s vocabulary knowledge by kindergarten and first grade is a major
predictor for students' reading comprehension in middle school and high school (Graves, 2009). By the time the average student graduates from high school he/she has learned 15,000 or more root words. Most of those vocabulary words are learned through reading words in their context, and listening to vocabulary rich language (Pressley, 2006).

Teachers need to pre-teach unfamiliar vocabulary words to students so they can create meaning of their reading, as "vocabulary is the most powerful predictor of excellence in reading comprehension; it is also an indicator of overall academic success" (Pressley, 2006, p. 322). One of the greatest indicators of student academic success is vocabulary acquisition (Mills, 2009). When students have a poor or limited vocabulary they are limited in their speaking, reading, and written comprehension.

In 2005, Schulhauser stated there are four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary. Listening vocabulary consists of words heard and understood; speaking vocabulary is words used correctly while talking; reading vocabulary is the largest group of words, these are the words recognized in print; and writing vocabulary is words used correctly in writing. This is the last form of vocabulary to develop.

Then in 2008, Michael Graves explained the four parts of a rich vocabulary program. The first way is to immerse the students in a language rich environment, "providing frequent, varied and extensive language experiences." Second, teachers teach individual words. Teaching the words thoroughly and extensively is the most effective. Third, teachers teach word learning strategies, such as looking at a word in its context to
infer the meaning, looking at word parts and looking it up in a dictionary. Lastly, fostering word consciousness and interest in words is emphasized. When students learn to listen and watch for words and their meanings, they learn the power of words and begin to appreciate words.

In conclusion, there are many different comprehension strategies that readers are constantly using. They are not limited to the 16 identified above. Readers use multiple strategies, at one time, in order to make meaning of what they are reading. Teachers may teach these skills in isolation to introduce a strategy or to build upon the understanding of that strategy; however they cannot expect students to use these strategies in isolation.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Project Development

The research for this project was compiled from many sources. Educational journals and educational texts were referenced. During the research process many sources often included example lessons along with the information, with countless lessons coming from the authors of the books and articles referenced in the literature review. This project presents a reading comprehension guide book for struggling readers. The guide book contains 18 reading strategies for teachers to use with their students. The 18 strategies were based upon 16 commonly used comprehension strategies in addition to fluency and vocabulary development. The guide book is intended to be placed in a three-ring binder with labeled tabs for easy access and availability for teachers.

Project Implementation

The guide book was created with teachers, and their busy schedule in mind. All 18 sections are organized the same so the teacher knows where to find what she/he is looking for. The lessons and teacher prompts are organized so teachers can quickly glance at a page or a section and get an idea of what to do with a student who is in need of help in a particular area or strategy. This guide book is also meant to combine lessons and strategies from multiple sources into one location. This way teachers only need to look in one place, rather than having to look through multiple books and resources. Additionally, this resource can also be added onto. When a teacher finds a new lesson or
intervention that fits in with any of these strategies, she/he can add it into the appropriate section.

Guide Book

The comprehension guide book will be organized into 18 sections. Each section will have several elements. The first page of each section is meant to be a visual representation of the strategy. This can be used to introduce strategies to small groups, or as a class. It can also be copied and placed on a reading wall in a classroom as a visual reminder of the strategies the class has learned during the year. The next page will be titled “teacher prompts”. This page could be used as a guide to help teachers with their questioning while working with individual students or in small groups on a specific strategy. The prompts could also be used to facilitate whole class discussions. Finally, they could be used as questions for reading/response logs for literature groups or other reading groups.

The third part of each section will include written lesson plans, with accompanying reproducible lessons and templates. The written lessons are intended for teachers to read and then use to guide a group of readers. The reproducible materials will be for teachers to copy and use for small groups or whole class. Some sections will also include assessments.

The guide book will be set up in a manner which is easy and friendly for teachers. Currently, many teachers have to look at multiple sources to find strategies, lessons, prompts, and literature sources. Also, this guide is intended to allow teachers to individualize and make their own, by continuing to add new found lessons and strategies.
Summary

This chapter described the process used to collect information for compiling appropriate effective comprehension reading lessons for upper elementary school students. It also described the manner in which the guide book will be organized. The next chapter will highlight the reading comprehension guide book. It will also include the guide book itself, along with a list of resources used while creating the guide book.
CHAPTER 4
PROJECT

Chapter 4 contains the teacher’s guide book, titled *A Reading Comprehension Guide Book*. Based on the research cited in Chapter 2, lessons and strategies have been selected and created to help struggling readers improve their comprehension. The teacher prompts, lessons, graphic organizers, and texts presented in the guide do not have time requirements in mind, so teachers are free to easily choose and implement appropriate lessons. The material can be modified for the length and duration of time that the teacher sees fit for their students. Professional judgment should be used, they need to monitor their students’ learning in order to determine how long and how often to use any of the interventions in each set of strategies.
A Reading Comprehension Guide Book

For Upper Elementary School Students

By

Kaley Repp

Lincoln Elementary School

Ellensburg, Washington
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Chapter 4: All pages for the guide book, except for the introduction on page 36, the title page and table of contents, and the bibliography on pages 104-105, have been redacted.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this project was to research effective reading comprehension strategies for struggling readers and develop a reading comprehension strategy guide for teachers to use with them. The guide book was compiled in order to support teachers in their continuing efforts to help struggling students improve their reading and become independent readers. The materials used in the guide book were research-based strategies that have been shown to be effective in helping improve student comprehension. This project examined comprehension skills, strategies, teacher prompts and lessons for teachers. The guide book is for teachers to use to help them implement proven reading strategies that will aide students in improving their reading ability.

How the Research Supports This Project

Reading is comprehension; the goal of reading is to construct meaning out of the words and ideas in the text (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Without comprehension, students are merely word calling (Beers, 2003). Reading is an active process between the reader, his/her prior knowledge, the author and the text (Carr & Thompson, 1996). Teachers have an important job; to not only teach students how to read the words in their texts, but also to comprehend what those words mean. As elementary school students get older, they switch from learning to read to reading to learn in upper elementary school (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011). Once students move from elementary school to middle school and high school they are expected to be able to read to learn. For this reason it is
important for students to leave elementary school with the skills and tools to be able to read and comprehend the information they are reading.

Constructing meaning from reading is also a Washington State Reading EALR. It states: “The student understands the meaning of what is read” (OSPI, 2009).

To meet this standard, the student will: demonstrate evidence of reading comprehension, understand and apply knowledge of text components to comprehend text, expand comprehension by analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing information and ideas in literary and informational text, and think critically and analyze authors’ use of language, style, purpose, and perspective in literary and informational texts (Young, 2010, pp. 16-35).

This guide book directly meets the Washington State Reading EALR, and therefore would be of use to upper elementary school teachers.

User Recommendations

“No scripted program, instructional package, or workbook can teach students how to be strategic comprehenders. To teach comprehension strategies effectively, a teacher must be knowledgeable, flexible, and methodical” (Alvermann, Phelps, & Gillis, 2010, p. 196). Teachers need to use this guide book as, a source to find reading comprehension strategies and interventions. However, teachers need to still decide what is best for the students in their classroom, they need to be flexible about what they teach and knowledgeable about the strategies so they teach them correctly and effectively.

Each section of the guide book is made up of several components. The first page is meant to be a visual representation of each strategy. These can be used to introduce
strategies to small groups, as a class, they can also be copied and displayed on a wall. The "Teacher Prompts" can be used many ways. They can be a guide to help teachers with their questions while working with small groups on a specific strategy. They can also be used as questions for reading/response logs for literature groups or other reading groups. The "Lesson Plans" section includes lessons, tables, worksheets and reproducible. The final section entitled "Literature", has a list of books teachers can read aloud to their students in order to model that strategy or books the students can read to practice the strategy on their own.

By no means however, is the guide a complete collection of reading comprehension strategies. As lifelong learners, teachers should be continuously looking for new proven strategies to add to their arsenal of tools to help their struggling students achieve and succeed in their classroom.
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