



Improving the Reading Comprehension of America's Children

10 Research-Based Principles

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The purpose of reading is comprehension. How do we teach children to comprehend more difficult and varied texts? Until recently, we had few answers. But research from recent decades has provided a general outline of how to effectively teach reading comprehension.

1. Effective comprehension instruction requires purposeful and explicit teaching. Effective teachers of reading are clear about their purposes. They know what they are trying to help a child achieve and how to accomplish their goal. They provide scaffolded instruction in research-tested strategies (predicting, thinking aloud, attending to text structure, constructing visual representations, generating questions and summarizing). Scaffolded instruction includes explicit explanation and modeling of a strategy, discussion of why and when it is useful, and coaching in how to apply it to novel texts.

2. Effective reading instruction requires classroom interactions that support the understanding of specific texts. Effective teachers have a repertoire of techniques for enhancing children's comprehension of specific texts, including discussion, writing in response to reading, and multiple encounters with complex texts. They are clear about the purposes of teacher- and student-led discussions of texts, and include a balance of lower and higher-level questions focusing on efferent and aesthetic response. Well-designed writing assignments deepen children's learning from text.

3. Effective reading comprehension instruction starts before children read conventionally. Children in preschool and kindergarten develop their comprehension skills through experiences that promote oral and written language skills, such as discussions, play activities, retellings, and emergent readings. Early childhood environments can be made literacy-rich through thoughtful inclusion of appropriate materials and practices. Reading and rereading a wide variety of texts contributes to both phonemic awareness and comprehension.

4. Effective reading comprehension teaches children the skills and strategies used by expert readers. Expert readers are active readers who use text and their own knowledge to build a model of meaning, and then constantly revise that model as new information becomes available. They consider the author's intentions and style when judging a text's validity, and determine the purposes that the text can serve in their lives—how it can further their knowledge, deepen their enjoyment, and expand their ways of examining and communicating with the world. They also vary their reading strategy according to their purpose and the characteristics of the genre, deciding whether to read carefully or impressionistically.

5. Effective reading comprehension instruction requires careful analysis of text to determine its appropriateness for particular students and strategies. Teachers analyze each text to determine its potential challenges and match it with their goals. They consider conceptual and decoding

demands and apply strategies to meet those challenges. Interactions with texts requiring minimal teacher support help hold children accountable as independent readers. Scaffolded experiences ensure that all children are exposed to high-level text and interactions.

6. Effective reading comprehension instruction builds on and results in knowledge, vocabulary, and advanced language development. Children are better able to comprehend texts when they are taught to make connections between what they know and what they are reading. Good comprehension instruction helps them make these connections more effectively. Vocabulary knowledge is an important part of reading comprehension, and good vocabulary instruction involves children actively in learning word meanings, as well as relating words to contexts and other known words. Teaching about words (including morphology) improves children's comprehension.

7. Effective reading comprehension instruction pervades all genres and school subjects. Children need to read in a wide variety of genres—not only narrative, but informational, procedural, biographical, persuasive, and poetic. They will only learn to do so through experience and instruction. Each school subject requires the ability to read in specific genres; therefore, comprehension should be taught in all subjects.

8. Effective reading comprehension instruction actively engages children in text and motivates them to use strategies and skills. Effective teachers create an environment in which children are actively involved in the reading process. In such an environment children read more, which in turn improves their comprehension and knowledge. Children need to be motivated to learn and apply skills and strategies during reading.

9. Good comprehension instruction requires assessments that inform instruction and monitor student progress. The use of multiple assessments provides specific and timely feedback to inform instruction and monitor student progress toward research-based benchmarks. Good assessment identifies students' comprehension levels as they develop from preschool to advanced grade levels, and helps the teacher to evaluate each child's need for support in areas such as language development, strategy, and the application of knowledge. Effective assessment also enables teachers to reliably interpret data and communicate results to students, parents, and colleagues.

10. Effective reading comprehension instruction requires continuous teacher learning about the processes and techniques detailed in the previous nine principles, and ways to use such knowledge to develop the comprehension skills and strategies of all students. Working closely with their peers in school-based or interest-based learning communities, effective teachers learn to use assessment data, reflections on their own practice, and moment-by-moment feedback from children to vary the support they provide to students with different levels of expertise and confidence.

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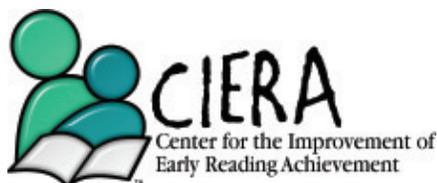
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