

Developing Comprehension in the Primary Grades

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Based largely on the following chapters:

Pearson, P. D., & Duke, N. K. (in press).

Comprehension instruction in the primary grades.

To appear in a book on comprehension edited by G. M. Pressley & C. C. Block, to be published by Guilford Press.

Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (in press). *Effective practices for developing reading comprehension.*

To appear in What research has to say about reading instruction edited by A. E. Fartstrup & S. J. Samuels, to be published by the International Reading Association.

Plan for the Presentation

- Some background about research and practice in primary grade comprehension
- A review of research on comprehension instruction in the primary grades
- A description of research-based instructional practices for developing primary grade comprehension
- Discussion of audience experiences

The State of Comprehension Instruction in Research

The comprehension revolution 1970 - 1990

- New intellectual tools (psycholinguistics, cognitive science, etc.)
- An increasing recognition that there was something more to reading than decoding
- A growing body of research demonstrating what good readers do when they read, comprehension strategies worth teaching, effective approaches to comprehension strategy instruction

The State of Comprehension Instruction in Practice

- Durkin's embarrassing little study (1978)
 - Some 4,000 minutes of classroom observation
 - 11 minutes devoted to comprehension instruction
 - Lots of testing and lots of questioning during discussion
- Impact of Chall's book on early reading
- Pressley et al. work of today

Disconnect Between Research and Practice

- The usual suspects. . .
- The overall climate. . .
 - Whole language found the tradition of explicit instruction in comprehension strategies a little too “skillsy” in feel.
 - “New phonics” was focused on word recognition and a held a ‘simple view’ of reading { $RC = [LC * Dec]$ }.

What about comprehension instruction in the primary grades?

- Neglected in research
- Neglected in practice

What Research Says. . .

- Comprehension improves when teachers provide explicit instruction in the use of comprehension strategies
- Comprehension improves when teachers design and implement activities that support the understanding of the texts that students read in their classes
- Comprehension and decoding can exist side by side as instructional goals and valued student outcomes in an exemplary and comprehensive literacy program for primary grade children.

Comprehension improves when teachers provide explicit instruction in comprehension strategies

- Bauman and Bergeron (1992) study: explicit instruction in identifying some key elements of stories
- Morrow (1985) study: explicit guidance in story retelling
- Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Schuder (1996) student: SAIL approach

More about SAIL & Transactional Strategies Instruction approaches

Cognitive strategies include:

- Thinking aloud
- Constructing images
- Summarizing
- Predicting & prior knowledge activation
- Questioning
- Clarifying
- Text structure analysis

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More about SAIL & Transactional Strategies Instruction approaches

Interpretive strategies include:

- Character development
- Imagining how a character might feel
- Creating themes
- Reading for multiple meanings
- Creating literal/figurative distinctions
- Looking for a consistent point of view
- Relating text to personal experience
- Relating one text to another (intertextuality)
- Responding to certain text features, such as point of view, tone, or mood

Comprehension improves when teachers design and implement activities that support understanding

- Tharp (1992) study: the KEEP curriculum, with E-T-R
- Dowhower (1987) study: repeated reading
- Eldridge, Reutzel, & Hollingsworth (1996): shared book experiences
- Stahl et al. (1997) study: lesson structures focused on fluency and comprehension

More about the Stahl et al. structure

The routine for each story was modified so that students engaged in the following activities:

1. Listening to the teacher read the story aloud
2. Participating in a whole class discussion of the story
 - Teacher-generated questions
 - Student-generated questions
 - Attention to vocabulary
3. Completing, independently, organizational tools (story maps, plot charts, Venn diagrams, etc.)

More about the Stahl et al. structure

4. Echo reading with the teacher if in need of extra help
5. Reading the story to parents/caretakers at home
6. On the next day, re-reading the story with a partner
7. Writing a journal entry in pairs or as a whole class
8. Free reading for 15-20 minutes per day in class and at home

Comprehension and decoding can exist side-by-side as instructional goals and valued student outcomes

- Recent national syntheses of research on early literacy:
 - *Preventing Reading Difficulties* (1998)
 - *National Reading Panel Report* (2000)
- Morrow, Tracey, Woo, & Pressley (1999) study: exemplary first-grade teachers
- Taylor, Pearson, Clark, & Walpole (1999) study: ‘Schools that Beat the Odds’

More about the Morrow et al. and Taylor et al. studies

The instruction:

- Is part of a comprehensive language arts program, including attn. to word recognition and decoding
- Is systematic
- Is included in both read-aloud and guided reading
- Involves a range of comprehension strategies distributed strategically across selections
- Includes literature-based activities (along with cognitive strategies)
- Emphasizes higher order comprehension
- Includes multiple opportunities for writing in response to reading

So what do we do? . . .

- Provide explicit instruction in the use of comprehension strategies
- Design and implement activities that support the understanding of the texts that students read in their classes
- Attend to both comprehension and decoding; reject notion that you must choose one or the other
- Conduct more research