



# **Comprehension Difficulties**

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# Chapters on which this Presentation is Based

- Pressley, G. M., Duke, N. K., & Hilden, K. (invited, submitted). Reading comprehension difficulties. To appear in B. Shulman, K. Apel, B. Ehren, E. R. Silliman, & C. A. Stone (Eds.), *Handbook of language and literacy development and disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed) (pp. 205-242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Pearson, P. D., & Duke, N. K. (2002). Comprehension instruction in the primary grades. In C. C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds.), *Comprehension Instruction: Research-Based Best Practices* (pp. 247-258). New York: Guilford Press.

# **Comprehension Difficulties:**

- **Exist.**
- **Are not always caused by word recognition and decoding difficulties.**
- **Can be caused by many different things.**

# **Comprehension Difficulties Exist**

**For evidence consider:**

- **Clinical casework on children with comprehension difficulties**
- **Range of performance on norm-referenced tests**
- **Results of state and national assessments**

# **They are Not Always Caused By Difficulties with Word Recognition**

- **Far from perfect correlations between word recognition and/or fluency and comprehension** (e.g., Nation and Snowling 1998; Paris, Carpenter, Paris, & Hamilton, 2002; Yuill & Oakhill, 1991)
- **Documented cases of hyperlexia** (e.g., Wahlberg, 2001; Barnes, Faulkner, & Dennis, 2001)
- **Other cases in the clinical literature** (e.g., Dewitz & Dewitz, 2003)

# **They are Not Always Caused By Difficulties with Word Recognition**

- **Profile Analyses, good w.r., poor r.c.:**
  - **Shankweiler et al, 1999: 13.6% of children 7.5 - 9.5 years old, 27.8% of impaired readers at this age**
  - **Catts and Hogan, 2002: 3% of fourth graders, 19.5% of fourth graders with reading difficulties**
  - **Buly and Valencia, 2002: 18% of fourth graders who did poorly on Washington state test**

# **Comprehension Difficulties Have Many Causes**

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- **Difficulties with word recognition and decoding**
- **Difficulties with fluency**
- **Poor short-term and/or working memory**

# **Comprehension Difficulties Have Many Causes**

- **Difficulties with oral language / language**
  - **Speech and language impairments**
  - **Limited language proficiency (e.g. LEP)**
  - **Dialect differences**
- **Difficulties with written language**
  - **Written language register**
  - **Specific genres**

## **Example of oral register language:**

*Telling about a birthday party:* Well. . . I had ten guests, . . . I don't remember all who they were, . . . but I remember one was Ola, . . . one was Sara and Kathy, . . . 'cause they are sisters. Older brother, . . . and . . . he also came, . . . he was tall, . . . and of course I had to invite my brother, . . . 'cause of course he was. . . right there in the house. A-n-d . . . let's see, . . . Ola,. . . and. . .

(Purcell-Gates, 1988, pages157-158)

## **Example of written register language:**

*Pretending to read a wordless picture book.* there once. . . . was a brave knight,. . . and a beautiful lady. They went. . . on a trip. . . A dangerous trip. . . they saw a castle. In the distance. They went to it. A mean. . . me:an. . . me:an hunter, . . . was following them, . . . through the bushes. At the entrance. . . of the little castle. As he cree:ped out of the bushes, . . . he thought what to do. As the drawbridge was opened, . . . they could easily get in, . . . and the question was. . . . how to trick them, . . .

(Purcell-Gates, 1988, pages 157-158)

# **Comprehension Difficulties Have Many Causes**

- **Lack or poor use of strategies**
- **Difficulties related to prior knowledge**
  - **Lack of relevant prior knowledge**
  - **Failure to apply relevant prior knowledge**
  - **Application of irrelevant prior knowledge**

# **Comprehension Difficulties Have Many Causes**

- **Lack of reading engagement**
- **Other factors**
  - **Eye movement problems**
  - **Other self-regulatory or metacognitive issues**
  - **Others**

# **Comprehension Difficulties Have Many Causes**

- ↳ In some cases, only one of the previously-listed causes may be at work.**
- ↳ In other, and probably most, cases, more than one of these causes is at work.**

# **Preventing and Addressing Rdg. Comp. Difficulties**

- **Assess and intervene in the areas that can cause reading comprehension difficulties**

**Note: There is not necessarily a one-to-one mapping between causes of reading comprehension difficulties and most effective approaches to addressing them. For example, the best way to improve reading comprehension for a child with weak short-term memory may be to improve reading comprehension strategy use.**

# **Preventing and Addressing Rdg. Comp. Difficulties**

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- **Make language development, both oral and written, central to education at all levels.**
  - **Develop children's oral language competencies.**
  - **Develop children's knowledge of written language -- vocabulary, registers, genres, et al.**

# **Preventing and Addressing Rdg. Comp. Difficulties**

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- **Develop solid word recognition, decoding, and fluency.**
- **Build rich content knowledge.**
- **Develop strategic readers.**
- **Inspire reading engagement.**

# Developing Strategic Readers

**Some strategies shown to improve comprehension if taught, even individually:**

- **Monitoring and adjusting as needed**
- **Generating questions or thinking aloud**
- **Attending to and uncovering text structure**
- **Connecting background knowledge & predicting**
- **Drawing inferences**
- **Constructing visual representations**
- **Summarizing**

(See Duke & Pearson, 2002, for a review)

# **Five components of teaching comprehension strategies**

- (1) An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.**
- (2) Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action**
- (3) Collaborative use of the strategy in action.**
- (4) Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility.**
- (5) Independent use of the strategy.**



# Developing Strategic Readers

**Teaching multiple strategies simultaneously may be particularly powerful (Duke & Pearson, 2002; NRP, 2000; Pressley, 2000):**

- **Explicit Explanation: Duffy et al, 1987**
- **SAIL: Pressley et al., 1994**
- **Metacognitive curriculum: Paris et al, 1986**
- **Reciprocal teaching: Palincsar & Brown, 1984**
- **And many others!**
- **In the next three slides I provide a little detail about two approaches that have been shown to be effective at improving comprehension of informational text.**

# **Collaborative Strategic Reading**

**(Klinger and Vaughn, 1999)**

- **Students work in small, cooperative groups**
- **Students apply four comprehension strategies:**
  - **Preview (think about what they already know, predict what the passage might be about)**
  - **“Click and clunk” (monitor comprehension, use fix-up strategies as needed)**
  - **Get the gist (glean and restate the most important idea)**
  - **Wrap up (summarize, ask questions)**

- **Students have specific roles: leader, clunk expert, gist expert, announcer, encourager**
- **Cue cards may be used to support students in small, cooperative groups**
  - **E.g., a clunk card that says: “Reread the sentences before and after the clunk looking for cues.”**
  - **E.g., a student leader cue card that says: “Did everyone understand what we read? If you did not, write your clunks in your learning log.”**
- **Students complete learning logs before and after reading**

# **Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction**

**(Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997)**

- **Centers on a conceptual theme**
- **Engages students in real-world interactions and uses interesting, often student-selected texts**
- **Focuses on goals**
- **Involves collaboration and student autonomy**
- **Includes strategy instruction in the service of conceptual goals**
- **Evaluation focuses on conceptual goals, learning goals, and engagement**

# **In Sum, We've Got To:**

- **Assess and intervene in the areas that can cause reading comprehension difficulties.**
- **Make language development, both oral and written, central to education at all levels.**
- **Develop solid word recognition and decoding, and fluency.**
- **Build rich content knowledge.**
- **Develop strategic readers.**
- **Inspire reading engagement.**