What Is comprehension?

The process of readers interacting and constructing meaning from text, synthesizing the use of prior knowledge, and the information found in the text.

Skillful readers use:

- prior knowledge
- making meaningful connections
- inferring
- asking questions to determine importance

Prior Classroom Knowledge

From our survey we could see that the top strategies that our class seemed familiar with were:

- Checking for understanding, schema, using text features, sequencing and inferring.

The strategies that the class responded as not being familiar with or not feeling comfortable teaching were:
• synthesize these strategies with text

**Research shows that as the amount of background concerning text increases, the ability to comprehend correlates.**

**Build background knowledge**

- use informational texts
- maintain rich literate environment
- create visual/graphic organizers to connect concepts
- teach how to make connections and activate schema

**Risk factors for comprehension difficulty:**

- Poor attendance
- behavioral problems
- low academic achievement
- low socioeconomic status
- mobility issues
- retention
- ADD or ADHD

**Other reasons for difficulty:**

- underprivileged literacy environment - few language skills
- nobody reads to them
- negative motivation
- lack of access to literature

**Struggling readers lack the knowledge of strategies needed to fix breakdown in during reading. They need to be explicitly taught strategies to fix their reading when it is not making sense.**

**KEY COMPONENTS AND IDEAS:**

Activating prior knowledge is an important part of the reading process.

Motivation increases engagement.

Promote reading at home to practice strategies

Help students observe themselves read so they can develop their own "fix it" toolbox.

Picture books spark higher level thinking skills

**Assessment Measures**

- **Formal**
  - AIMS Web
  - Dibels
  - Reading A-Z
  - DRA - Developmental Reading Assessments

- **Informal**
  - CAFE Conferencing
  - Ask questions that require student to make inferences.
  - Draw pictures or mental images
  - Write summaries

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**What Every Teacher Should Know about Comprehension: The Inside Track**

*Maureen McLaughlin*

**Reflection of Theory and Practice**
To teach students to be successful readers, we need to know what comprehension is, how it works, and how we can help our students to comprehend what they read.

**Principle 1. Base your understanding of Comprehension on the Social Constructivist Nature of Reading**

- Involves intentional problem solving, thinking process, content is influenced by the person’s prior knowledge and experience.
- Meaning constructed when readers make connections between prior knowledge and what they are reading
- Schema based learning development - connect to what is already known
- Social constructivist nature of comprehension suggests that readers refine understandings by negotiating meaning with others.
- Focus on social interactions reflect Vygotsky’s 1978 principle of social mediation.

**Principle 2. Understand Students’ Roles in the Reading Comprehension Process.**

- Good readers have clear goals and self-monitor
- Metacognitive readers-monitor their own thinking while reading
- Readers also generate questions at different points to become problem solvers
- When understanding breaks down good readers know “fit it up” strategies
- Include: changing the pace of reading, using context clues, cross checking cueing systems

**Principle 3: Be an Influential Teacher:**

International Reading Association (2000) stated that Teacher’s knowledge that makes the difference

Teacher’s role: Create experiences and environments that introduce, nurture, or extend students’ abilities to engage with text.

Explicit instruction, which includes:

- Modeling
- Scaffolding
- Facilitating
- Participating

Influential reading teacher is to do the following:

-Believe all children can learn
- Differentiate instruction
- Understand that reading and comprehension are social processes
- Teach in print rich and concept rich environments
- Have knowledge about various aspects of literacy
- Provide opportunities to read, write and discuss
- Teach for variety of purposes using diverse methods, materials and patterns
- Understand skills and strategies
- Use formative assessments to build on strengths
- Monitor students learning.

**Principle 4: Motivate and Engage Students:**

Motivation is key in the classroom you need to be a model teacher, have a book rich classroom environment, give your students opportunities for choice, and have literacy related incentives that reflect the value of reading.

**Principle 5: Teach Reading Comprehension Strategies**

- Previewing—Activating prior knowledge, predicting, and setting purposes for reading
- Self-questioning—Generating questions to guide reading
- Making connections—Relating reading to self, text, and others
- Visualizing—Creating mental pictures of text while reading
- Knowing how words work—Understanding words through strategic vocabulary development, including the use of graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic cueing systems

For our presentation we used many different texts to support our instruction.

1) **Small-Group Instruction, Chapter 6**

- Allows us to meet the needs of our classmates by working in small groups.
- More one-on-one time with our classmates.
- Time is used more efficiently.

2) **Elementary Literacy Coaches: The Reality of Dual Roles by Sharon Walpole and Katrin Blamey**

- We informed our class about comprehension, we demonstrated three strategies in depth and practiced them in small groups and gave feedback about each strategy.
- We modeled the strategies, we discussed them, and we watched them do the strategy so we could coach where needed so they were using the strategy correctly and effectively.
- Coach as an assessor: We assessed each classmate during the small instructional time to make sure they understood the strategy as they were practicing it.
- Coach as an observer: We observed our classmates practicing each strategy.
- Coach as a modeler: We modeled each of the three strategies we chose before letting our classmates practice them.

3) **Words Their Ways**

- Our classmates facilitated in their own learning by being encouraged to think on their own and volunteer their thoughts rather than simply answering questions.

4) **Choice Words**

- We used choice words to facilitate an encouraging learning environment.
- We were careful to monitor the way we encouraged our classmates in their learning in order to show them that they are in charge and responsible for what they had learned.

5) **Reading Is Thinking: Within, Beyond, and About the Text**

- We encouraged our classmates to connect their thinking of a text to an author’s thinking. When one comprehends something one makes connections to self, to text, and to the world. When reading you are thinking within, beyond and about the text. All three of these occur simultaneously before, during, and after reading.

6) **The CAFE Book**

- We used the CAFE book to link the audiences prior knowledge to all of our additional strategies that we brought into our presentations.
- The CAFE book was also used as a reference to what good modeling looks like in teaching.

7) **Comprehension Under Construction (CUC)**

- We used CUC because it is a fun and interactive way for students to learn the comprehension strategies within.
- CUC involves a kinesthetic and tactile instruction method.

8) **REAP Strategy**

- We found that the REAP strategy was an easy way for students to remember different ways to help them comprehend what they are reading. Many strategies from the CAFE menu connected with the strategies in REAP.

9) **High Five Strategies**

- We found the strategies taught in the high five format were research proven top five strategies repeated through the literature, therefore we chose these to model and teach.
• Monitoring—Asking “Does this make sense?” and adapting strategic processes to accommodate the response
• Summarizing—Synthesizing important ideas
• Evaluating—Making judgments about text content and the author’s craft

Explicit instruction increases comprehension; Teachers gradually release responsibilities to students

Five Steps:
1. Explain
2. Demonstrate
3. Guide
4. Practice
5. Reflect

Explicitly teaching comprehension strategies affords teachers opportunities to monitor students in various stages of learning.

Principle 6: Foster the Development and Use of Vocabulary

“Learning new concepts and words that encode them is essential to comprehension development

vocabulary development is influenced by the amount and variety of text students read

Teacher read-alouds offer students access to a variety of levels of text

Effective vocabulary instruction is characterized by the following:

• Environment that fosters word consciousness or the awareness and interest in using new words
• Students who actively participate in the process
• Instruction that integrates vocab with the curriculum and word learning across subject areas
• Instruction that provides both definitional and contextual information
• Teachers who provide multiple exposures to words
• Teachers who provide ongoing opportunities to use the words
• Explicit learning and learning from context should be balanced.

To infuse vocabulary across curricula do the following:

• Classroom must be full of accountable talk and writing
• Intentionally teach individual words
• Build and strengthen students’ word learning strategies and understandings of roots and affixes
• Develop word consciousness by introducing categories of word relations
• Use technology to make word investigations more rewarding

Principle 7: Provide Students with a Variety of Types and Levels of Texts

Providing multiple reading genres enhances motivation and increases comprehension. Student interest plays a role in text selection. To find out interests you could use, Interest inventories, Literacy histories, or interviews with cross age partners.

Principle 8: Encourage Students to Use Multiple Modes of Representing Thinking

Beyond written and oral include: sketching, dramatizing, singing and hands on activities like creating projects; We all do not learn in the same way therefore the students can build on their strengths.

Principle 9: Embed Formative Assessments in Your Everyday Teaching

Captures their performance and gives insights into understandings at a given point in the learning experience. Assessments not viewed as an add-on but a natural component of the teaching and learning.

• Examples of formative assessments include teacher observation of student reading, discussion, informal written responses, and strategy applications.

Comprehension Under Construction (CUC)

“we want students to not only use the toolbox but also arrive at the job site eager to work.”

Comprehension Under Construction (CUC) is a strategy which veers away from the typical Basal reader style strategies and sticky note extravaganza that classrooms have been using.

The bottom line is that we want to our students to do more than recite a list of strategies, we want them to actually use the strategies, unprompted and to do so without having to record the event on a sticky note.
**Principle 10: Teach Students to Comprehend at a Deeper Level**

Deeper level: require students to understand beyond the information on the printed page or screen and critically analyze the author’s message. Examine and dispute the power relations that exist between readers and author’s focus on the problem and its complexity reflection. Involves thinking beyond the text to understand: why the author wrote about a particular topic, why he or she wrote from a particular perspective, and why some ideas were included and others were not.

**REAP**

READ, ENCODE, ANNOTATE, and PONDER

REAP is based on the premise that readers have the highest levels of comprehension when asked to communicate ideas they have learned from a passage they have read.

- Aim of REAP: to help readers synthesize the author’s thoughts in their own words, thus improving their comprehension and writing skills.

REAP was developed to help students improve their reading, writing, and thinking and was also designed as a method to teach students ways of responding differently to a text. Students respond with simple summaries (brief or may require complex critical creativeness) or making notes from a text.

- Language learning is usually based on comprehension activities such as thinking over information acquired through listening and reading, then forming and evaluating cause and effect relationships.

- Before reading, while reading, and after reading are the three stages of the reading process.

Throughout the reading process, students are:

- Establishing a relationship between initial learning and text meaning
- Thinking about the meaning of text
- Making conclusions about the text
- Using prior knowledge for comprehension
- Controlling reading speed
- Making predictions about the meanings of unfamiliar words
- Making predictions about the meanings of unknown groups of words or sentences in the text.

“Deconstructing comprehension into many skills leaves the reassembling of those skills in some coherent whole up to the teacher and readers, and the core programs rarely reference and old skill when introducing a new skill”

- The asking of inference or main-idea questions by the teacher may undermine the very metacognitive process that students need to acquire, the decision to invoke a strategy when the reader needs it”

Adopts a less is more approach to comprehension construction, we want to appoint students as “independent contractors.

Rediscovering RT: less teacher talk, more student walk

CUC lessons always begin with the teacher adopting the role of the “Foreman”. Specifically the foreman surveys the job site (solicits background knowledge) and introduces the 4 workers who will build the group’s collective comprehension.

1. Archie the Architect, who draws up the blueprint to predict what the building will look like.
2. Joe the Job Inspector, who clarifies the meaning of words and ideas.
3. Eric the Electrician, who keeps the group “wired” with questions that provoke sparks.
4. Bernie the Bricklayer, who cements understanding by connecting main ideas, brick by brick, into a cohesive summary.

Four Comprehensive Stages

1. Teacher led stage (teachers models each role at the construction site)
   a. continues over several lessons as the teacher models the strategies using authentic literature.
2. Collaborative stage
   a. the individual hats are given to students along with personal blueprints
   b. after proficiency is attained, the foreman announces a “strategy switcheroo” and the hats are passed onto someone new in the group.
3. Reciprocal stage
   a. the group functions more independently, hats are initially rotated on a lesson-to-lesson basis, as in literature circles.
4. Metacognitive stage
   a. each lesson ends with the query, “who helped you most today? was it Archie? why was this strategy helpful?”
   b. the more often the teacher shares personal examples of strategy usage and models to the students, the more the students understand the relevance of the toolbox.

- Comprehension Under Construction Lesson Plan
- Comprehension Under Construction Toolbox
The REAP strategy was developed for composing annotations of texts. This strategy helps to improve writing skills, metacognitive awareness, and comprehension of main ideas.

- **Read** - The first step of the strategy is to read the text!
- **Encode** - After reading the text, the information is paraphrased by the reader into his/her own words.
- **Annotate** - Annotations are brief summaries of a text that explain and/or critique the text. Students take notes.
- **Ponder** - The reader evaluates their annotations for accuracy and completeness. Student considers how the text relates to other readings or related issues.

**High 5!**

**Strategies:**

1. **Activating Prior Knowledge** - helps readers make connections between what they know and what they’re reading. Teacher can ask questions or present facts to help students make connections. Teach the meaning of words and provide additional information if necessary.

2. **Questioning** - Prior to, during, and after reading.
   - Right there question: what are the facts here?

**VIDEOS, RESOURCES AND LINKS**

- Nancie Atwell - THE READING ZONE
- Jeffrey Wilhelm - ACTION STRATEGIES FOR DEEPENING COMPREHENSION
- Comprehension Brochure
- Top10 Comprehension Principles
- Comprehension Family Feud
- Teaching visualization through read aloud
- Teaching information text using text features and annotations
- Teaching comprehension strategies through song
- Strategies for comprehension from McGregor’s Comprehension Connections
- Comprehension PowerPoint
- Comprehension Annotated Bibliography
Think and search -> what does the writer want me to figure out based on the facts?
Beyond the text -> what is not being said here that I should check by doing some background research?
A sequential book/text -> ask themselves what will happen next?
Descriptive text -> ask themselves what the subtopics are

3. Analyzing Text Structure: Narrative or Expository - looking at keywords, subheadings and other text features can reveal the structure the writer is using. Teachers need to teach each type of expository text structure (eg. cause-effect, description, problem-solution) so students can internalize all the structures, each one needs to be taught separately. Expository texts:

1. Texts that describe list, web and matrix (most frequent)
   - **List** - most simple (eg. grocery list)
   - **Web** - more complex, looks like a spider web, describes one thing or idea, but a web has categories
   - **Matrix** - most complex, describes more than one thing, it compares or contrasts 2 or more topics

2. Texts that are affected by time (Sequential Structures) present a series of steps that progress over time
   - **String** - step-by-step description of events given, could refer to an order to follow
   - **Cause-effect** - ideas/events interact with one another
   - **Problem-solution** - writer states a problem or poses a question followed by a solution/answer in the text

To develop narrative text structure awareness teachers should teach:

1. **Characters**
   - Major or Minor
   - Compare/Contrast

2. **Setting**
   - When and where

3. **Plot**
   - Problem
   - Response
   - Action
   - Outcome

4. **Theme**
   - Message underlying story
   - Story Web

4. Creating Mental Images - helpful for students to image the structure; that is to visualize it while reading so they can later make a diagram of it. Diagrams help students make the structure complete. Structures help students to see relationships between ideas and concepts.

Readers can also visualize objects, people, places, and events.

5. Summarizing - the ability to delete irrelevant details, combine similar ideas, condense main ideas and connect major themes into concise statements that capture the purpose of reading for the reader. Summarizing is embedded within text structure awareness.

Steps the reader will take:

- Read the text
- Identify the text structure used
- Make a diagram of the structure
- Discard redundant info (key ideas remain)
- Circle only the critical ideas that you need for the summary

High5 Lesson

**Master References List:**

**Professional Text**

Research Articles


Children’s Literature Connections