



Lecture Transcript

Session 4: Comprehension and Response

Dr. Jeanne R. Paratore: As we think about comprehension and response today, I'd like you to first think about the essential comprehension strategies. And for me this is an important starting place, because one of the things, I think, that happens to us as teachers is that we end up with this very large collection of comprehension strategies. There are so many things that we want children to do if we look at a scope and sequence. There are often, you know, 20, 25 different skills listed in a typical scope and sequence or curriculum guide, or something of that sort. And in fact, when you compare it to the behaviors of poor readers, researchers have found essentially five behaviors that differentiate good readers from poor readers. And they are these: Good readers focus attention and set purpose in some way. You can think of this in terms of the predicting strategies that are so common in our classrooms.

The second strategy that differentiates good readers from poor readers is the ability to organize information during and after reading. I think about that as the practice of sorting and categorizing, knowing what to keep and what to throw away. Good readers don't try to remember everything they read. Good readers don't read a 20 or 25 page chapter and try to remember it all. They have some way to prioritize information. They have some way to decide, This is important, I'll keep it. This is trivial information, I'll throw it away. They organize and sort in some way.

Good readers also are able to elaborate on ideas and clarify information. They may do this in response to questions from someone else. So the teacher may ask a question and the child can elaborate. Or there may be a question in their book, or a question from another child. Or there may be a self-initiated question: I wonder why this happened? And the child can go back and sort it out and elaborate.

Good readers can also summarize. Upon completion of a chapter, they can tell you what it's mostly about.

And good readers, throughout each of these processes, throughout the reading of the text, can self-monitor and self-correct. And if they find that they're not building comprehension, they can go back and fix up. Gee, I don't understand this because I never set a purpose for reading. I'm not getting this because I don't know why I'm reading. I need to start again; I don't understand this.

mostly about. I need to go back through, reread and organize my thoughts in some way.

OK, so these are the essential comprehension strategies we need to think about; we need to develop in our readers. The ways to develop them relate to the type of instruction we provide children. So, we can begin by characterizing instruction as needing to be explicit. In defining explicit instruction, we can most easily define it as having 3 important parts. An explicit lesson includes teacher demonstration and modeling of some sort. It includes guided practice, with the teacher and children working together through the lesson. And then finally it includes independent practice when the child, or the group of children, have an opportunity to practice what the teacher has taught. This is critical when the skill or strategy is introductory.

An effective lesson also is marked by strategic instruction. So, in addition to including demonstration, guided practice, and independent practice in an effective lesson, the teacher explains what to do: Today we're going to learn to prepare a summary. The teacher shows children how to do it: These are the steps to summarization. This is how you summarize. And the teacher explains when to use the strategy and why the strategy might be useful: So, for example, you might choose to summarize when you need to remember something over a long period of time. Summarization helps you remember things over a longer period of time. Summarization will help you to go back and access the information later on. So, we're telling children what to do, how to do it, when, and why to do it.

If you think back and reflect on your own practice, what we know about teachers in general is that we're pretty consistent about telling children what to do: Boys and girls, after you read this, I want you to compose a summary. We do that pretty routinely. We're somewhat inconsistent about the how of it. Though research tells us that the more explicit we are about procedures, the more likely children will acquire and use the strategy on their own, and acquire and use it successfully. And we're also not very consistent about the when and why of it. And the when and why is really important. It's part of the engagement; it's part of the motivation; it's part of the understanding that leads children to say, This isn't just something that I do inside school doors. This isn't just a classroom thing. This is something that has a purpose as I make my way through my daily routines. So, these are the key ideas to think about as we plan instruction.

And finally, let's think about the purposes of our comprehension and response tasks. We should use comprehension to engage children in esthetic response. An esthetic response to text is a response that engages children in essentially an emotional and affective response to the text: Wow, I really liked this. Wow, this reminded me of.... Wow this made me think about.... An esthetic response asks children to respond personally in some way to that text.

An efferent response is essentially an information-based

response, and has ties in some way, very often, to curricular goals: I want you to read this to compose a summary. I want you to read this and compare and contrast it with.... It's an information-based response, very often teacher directed. The context for response is, Do I want children to respond to this collaboratively, or individually? Both of those responses are important in building a community of learners, and in building children who are successful comprehenders. And types of response are, Do I want children to respond to this today in writing, or do I want them to have an oral discussion about it? And both of those are important.

In the chapter you read for today, by Nell Duke and David Pearson, they began the chapter by saying, In some ways comprehension is very much like decoding. In particular, when we talk about an effective decoding program, we talk about balance. When we talk about an effective comprehension program, we must also talk about balance. So it's balance in the purposes, the contexts, and the types of response that's important in the comprehension program. And it's the inclusion of these characteristics that's important in the method of instruction.