

teacher or a district curriculum committee for regular inclusion into the reading program. Although each of the individual strategies and routines we have discussed represents an admirable addition to the comprehension curriculum, none could serve as the sole activity students encountered day after day, selection after selection.

Thus, providing some variety both within and among selections makes sense. We have little research, however, on optimal combinations and distributions of various strategies over time. The closest we come to any definitive research on this question is with Transitional Strategies Instruction, which is portrayed by its developers more as a menu of activities from which a teacher could select than as a subset of strategies most appropriate for a particular story, book, or selection. In terms of research, it would be useful to complement our knowledge of the effectiveness of strategies when they are taught in special units with knowledge of their value added to a comprehension curriculum. Without finding better ways of bringing effective comprehension instruction to classrooms, continued research refining particular comprehension instruction techniques will provide little or no real value.

These difficult questions must be addressed by teachers, teacher educators, and reading researchers. The stakes are too high to leave them unanswered and unaddressed. In the meantime, however, we can take some comfort in the knowledge that for the teacher who wants to work directly with students to help them develop a rich repertoire of effective comprehension strategies, the tools are available. We know a great deal about how to help students become more effective, more strategic, more self-reliant readers. It is time that we put that knowledge to work.

Summary

In this chapter, we have described effective individual and collective strategies for teaching comprehension of text and discussed characteristics of a balanced comprehension program into which such strategies could be embedded. In Figure 10.6, we offer a tool for assessing the comprehension instruction environment in your own classroom. We hope that this will aid readers in identifying both strengths and weaknesses in comprehension instruction as well as serving as a summary of the material presented in this chapter. We hope it will not prove overwhelming, even to those who are novices at comprehension instruction. Realize that the use of even one of the techniques described in this chapter has

Figure 10.6. A checklist for assessing the comprehension environment and instruction in the classroom

About the overall reading program

- How much time do students spend actually reading?
- How much reading do students routinely do in texts other than those written solely for reading or content area instruction?
- Do students have clear and compelling purposes in mind when reading?
- How many different genres are available to students within your classroom? How many students read across genres?
- Do students have multiple opportunities to develop vocabulary and concept knowledge through texts?
 - Through discussion of new ideas?
 - Through direct instruction in vocabulary and concepts?
- Are students given substantial instruction in the accurate and automatic decoding of words?
- How much time do students spend writing texts for others to comprehend?
 - With reading-writing connections emphasized?
- Are students afforded an environment rich in high-quality talk about text?

About comprehension strategy instruction

- Are students taught to...
 - _ identify their purpose for reading?
 - _ preview texts before reading?
 - _ make predictions before and during reading?
 - _ activate relevant background knowledge for reading?
 - _ think aloud while reading?
 - _ use text structure to support comprehension?
 - _ create visual representations to aid comprehension and recall?
 - _ determine the important ideas in what they read?
 - _ summarize what they read?
 - _ generate questions for text?
 - _ handle unfamiliar words during reading?
 - _ monitor their comprehension during reading?
- Does instruction about these strategies include
 - _ an explicit description of the strategy and when it should be used?
 - _ modeling of the strategy in action?
 - _ collaborative use of the strategy in action?
 - _ guided practice using the strategy, with gradual release of responsibility?
 - _ independent practice using the strategy?

About other teaching considerations

- Are students helped to orchestrate multiple strategies, rather than using only one at a time?
 - Are the texts used for instruction carefully chosen to match the strategy and students being taught?
 - Is there concern with student motivation to engage in literacy activities and apply strategies learned?
 - Are students' comprehension skills assessed on an ongoing basis?
-

been shown to improve students' comprehension of text. In fact, in the previous edition of this book, Pearson suggested that comprehension instruction is best when it focuses on a few well-taught, well-learned strategies. Although we can now point to a litany of effective techniques, that does not mean that using a litany of techniques will be effective.

Questions for Discussion

1. In this chapter we have argued that there is considerable research on effective comprehension instruction, but that much of this research is not reflected in classroom practice. Based on your experience in schools and classrooms, do you agree? If so, why do you think that this is the case?
2. Comprehension is addressed in a number of commercial reading programs. With respect to comprehension instruction, what would you be looking for in evaluating these programs?
3. Arrange to observe comprehension instruction in a local school and classroom. What do you see as relative strengths and weaknesses of comprehension curriculum and instruction in this classroom?
4. We suggest several challenges for future research on comprehension. Which of these do you believe is most salient and why?

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