

Teaching Comprehension

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America's Reading Problem is a Comprehension Problem

Carnegie Report

Biancarosa, C., & Snow, C. E. (2006).
Reading next—A vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy: A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York (2nd ed.).
Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Carnegie Report

“American youth need strong literacy skills to succeed in school and in life. Students who do not acquire these skills find themselves at a serious disadvantage in social settings, as civil participants, and in the working world. Yet approximately eight million young people between fourth and twelfth grade struggle to read at grade level. Some 70 percent of older readers [in grades 4-12] require some form of remediation. Very few of these older struggling readers need help to read the words on a page; their most common problem is that they are not able to comprehend what they read.” (p. 11)

2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in Reading

- ❁ 36% of 4th graders were below Basic*
- ❁ 69% of 4th graders were below Proficient

*Not significantly different from 1992

Why is there such a serious problem with reading comprehension?

- ❁ Poverty
- ❁ Lack of reading comprehension instruction

Lack of Comprehension Instruction

Durkin, D. (1978-1979). What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 14, 481-533.

Lack of Comprehension Instruction

Pressley, M., Wharton-McDonald, R., Mistretta-Hampston, J., & Echevarria, M. (1998). Literacy instruction in 10 fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in upstate New York. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 2, 159-194.

Lack of Comprehension Instruction

“Practice of comprehension strategies but virtually no instruction in strategy use” (p. 170).

“we were struck by the almost complete absence of direct instruction about comprehension strategies.” (p. 172)

“we observed only rare instances of explicit comprehension instruction. Indeed, the situation still seems to be much as Durkin described, with a great deal of testing of comprehension but very little teaching of it.” (p. 187)

Lack of Comprehension Instruction

RAND Reading Study Group. (2002).
*Reading for understanding: Toward an
R&D program in reading
comprehension.* Santa Monica, CA:
RAND.

Why isn't there more reading comprehension instruction?

- ❁ Too many teachers and administrators believe that having students practice comprehension is teaching comprehension

Practicing comprehension

Taylor, B. M., Pearson, P. D., Peterson, D. S., & Rodriguez, M. C. (2003). Reading growth in high-poverty classrooms: The influence of teacher practices that encourage cognitive engagement in literacy learning. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104, 3-28.

Practicing comprehension

- ❁ “The more that routine, practice-oriented approaches to teaching important comprehension processes were observed, the lower the growth in reading comprehension.” (p. 23)

Why isn't there more reading comprehension instruction?

- ❁ Too many teachers and administrators believe that having students practice comprehension is teaching comprehension
- ❁ Too many teachers and administrators believe that assessing comprehension is teaching comprehension

Assessing comprehension

Kober, N. (2001, April). *It takes more than testing: Closing the achievement gap*. A report of the Center on Education Policy. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

Why isn't there more reading comprehension instruction?

- ❁ Too many teachers and administrators believe that having students practice comprehension is teaching comprehension
- ❁ Too many teachers and administrators believe that assessing comprehension is teaching comprehension
- ❁ Schools frequently wait to teach comprehension until it is too late

Why K-2 teachers delay teaching comprehension

- ❁ Overemphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, oral reading accuracy, and oral reading fluency
- ❁ Overuse of decodable text
- ❁ Overuse of leveled books
- ❁ Overuse of retelling to assess comprehension
- ❁ Overuse of literal comprehension questions to assess comprehension

In classrooms that use leveled groups

Chorzempa, B. F., & Graham, S. (2006). Primary-grade teachers' use of within-class ability grouping in reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*, 529-541.

In classrooms that use leveled groups

- ❁ “A random sample of primary-grade teachers from across the United States was surveyed”
- ❁ “Sixty-three percent of participants reported using within-class ability groups.”
- ❁ “students in lower ability groups spend more time involved in noninstructional activities, are less likely to be asked critical comprehension questions, and are given fewer opportunities to select their own reading material.” (p. 529)

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Summary, So Far

- ❁ America's reading problem is a comprehension problem
- ❁ The problem is partially caused by poverty and partially by the lack of comprehension instruction
- ❁ There is a lack of comprehension instruction because comprehension practice and assessment are mistakenly assumed to teach it, and because schools put off teaching it until it's too late

How to Teach Reading Comprehension

The Three Phases of a Reading Comprehension Lesson

- ❁ Before Reading
- ❁ During Reading
- ❁ After Reading

A During Reading Format

How the teacher structures the “during reading” phase of the comprehension lesson

The Format

- ❁ Whole class, small group(s), or paired
- ❁ Teacher-, peer-, or self-guided
- ❁ Reading orally or to yourself
- ❁ Single copy or multiple copies
- ❁ Read whole selection or in segments
- ❁ First, second, or third reading

Some During Reading Formats

- ❁ Shared Reading
- ❁ Choral Reading
- ❁ Echo Reading
- ❁ ERT...
- ❁ Partner Reading
- ❁ Playschool Groups
- ❁ Three Ring Circus
- ❁ Coaching Groups
- ❁ Book Club Groups
- ❁ Pick a Page
- ❁ Bookmarks
- ❁ Etc.

How Formats Can Improve Reading Comprehension Instruction

- ❁ By providing extra support for students in reading the selection
- ❁ By multiplying the amount of reading students do in guided reading
- ❁ By making guided reading more multilevel (each format re-levels your students somewhat differently)

A Before and After Reading Activity

What the teacher has students do before and after they read in order to help them learn to comprehend better

Some Before and After Reading Activities

- ❁ Think-Alouds
- ❁ Predicting
- ❁ KWL Charts
- ❁ Graphic Organizers
- ❁ Story Maps
- ❁ Beach Ball
- ❁ Group Discussions
- ❁ Sent/Para Detectives
- ❁ “Doing the Book”
- ❁ Drawing
- ❁ Beyond Retelling
- ❁ Etc.

The After Reading Task

- ❁ A variety of after reading tasks is necessary in order to teach a variety of comprehension strategies and text structures
- ❁ The most effective after reading tasks emphasize higher-order thinking

The After Reading Task

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The After Reading Task

“Participants included 88 teachers and 9 randomly selected students per [grade 1-5] classroom in 9 high-poverty schools across the United States Looking across all the data, the most consistent finding was that teachers who emphasized higher-order thinking, either through the questions they asked or the tasks they assigned, promoted greater reading growth” (p. 3)

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The After Reading Task is a Group Task

- ❁ In a group task, the teacher completes the task in writing as the students in the class or group tell the teacher what to write
- ❁ In a group task, the teacher guides the process, but does not do the task for the group

The Before Reading Phase

- ❁ Unless students read with the after reading task in mind, they will not benefit from the lesson because they will not read any differently than they usually do
- ❁ Since the after reading task is done after the students have read, the before reading phase must preview or otherwise explain or show what the after reading task will be or the after reading task is only a test

Comprehension Lessons That Work

Cunningham's Law #67: It's not any big thing, but a lot of little things that make comprehension lessons effective

Comprehension Lessons That Work

- ❁ Use a variety of during reading formats to provide extra support for students, to multiply the amount of reading they do each lesson, and to make guided reading more multilevel
- ❁ Use a variety of after reading tasks, many of which emphasize higher-order thinking, to teach a variety of comprehension strategies and text structures
- ❁ Use a group task after reading to increase motivation and success

Comprehension Lessons That Work

- ❁ Make sure the before and after reading phases are closely linked and aligned
- ❁ Make sure the before reading phase forecasts the specific after reading task the students will do

Planning a Reading Comprehension Lesson

- ❁ A reading comprehension lesson has 3 phases (before, during, after), but only 2 parts (during reading format, before and after reading activity)

Some Before and After Reading Activities

- ❁ Think-Alouds
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Integrating Writing with Reading Comprehension

- ❁ Do not have students write in the after reading task
- ❁ Instead, occasionally plan a writing lesson that follows the reading comprehension lesson and is linked to it