Improving Students' Reading Comprehension
by Using Reading strategy

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Introduction

Reading is a process of communication from the writer to the reader, or a process of recognition, interpretation of written or printed materials. In reading, readers interpret the text in light of their previous knowledge and simultaneously modify their original schemata as new information is learned. Reading is also something crucial and indispensable for students since the success of their study depends on a greater part of his ability to read. This paper will discuss about the nature of reading, reading comprehension, and some reading strategies.

The nature of reading

Reading requires a high effort and concentration; it is supported by Kustaryo (1988) that reading is very complex activity and improves the ability from very poor reading habits to better ones. It is more than just a visual task. A reader must not only see and identify the symbols in front of him but he must be able to interpret what he reads, associate with experience, and in term of ideas, judgments, applications and conclusion. Reading is what happens when people look at the text and assign to written symbols in that text. Reader is both approaches and product of human learning. It is more than just receiving meaning in literature sense. It involves an individual's entire life experience and thinking power to understand what the writer has encoded.

Burns and Griffin (1998) state that reading is about understanding printed materials. So, it is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language and comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and paragraphs in the text.

1

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex skill that involves all of the higher mental process in order to understand what is read. It is not only read but also to understand the content of the text. Irwing (1991) states that reading comprehension is an active process in comprehends printed material. It means that in reading, the reader should be able to think and comprehend the information of meaning of the text.

According to Brown (1994) reading comprehension is primarily a matter of expanding appropriate, efficient and comprehension strategies. Some strategies are related to bottom-up procedure and other enhances the top-down processes. Then Devine (1986) reading comprehension is a process of using syntactic, semantic and rhetorical information found in the written material to be reconstructed in the reader's mind.

Some Reading Strategies

Listening to Voice

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

- Questioning the narrator's or speaker's assumptions, beliefs, intentions, and bias

- Discriminating between apparent message and hidden agenda

- Interpreting multiple levels of meaning

What is it?

This concept is probably one of the most complex pieces to understand when reading a text; this is due to the interrelationships of so many of the elements that create what we call "a writer's voice." This complexity could cause some people to say that this concept is too

difficult for my students to deal with; however, it can be used as a way to pique students' interest, as a way to intrigue them before they even begin reading a text.

Definition: Voice can be defined as the writer's awareness and effective use of such elements as diction, tone, syntax, unity, coherence and audience to create a clear and distinct "personality of the writer," which emerges as a reader interacts with the text.

To study "voice," and by doing so, develop one's own writer's voice, the distinct elements or building blocks need to be clearly defined for our students. This process should be carefully scaffolded; depending on the grade and skill level, it is not necessary to have your students understand *all* of the particulars of each of the elements given below before they can begin to interact with a text and "listen to a writer's voice." For instance, under *Diction*, you may only introduce tone; under *Tone*, you may only use characterization, you may not introduce *Syntax* until later on; you can then build on these basics as your students' understanding grows and develops.

Diction refers to a writer's word choice with the following considerations:

- denotation / connotation of a word
- degree of difficulty or complexity of a word
- level of formality of a word
- tone of a word (the emotional charge a word carries)

  * all of the above will often create a subtext for the text

Tone refers to a writer's ability to create an attitude toward the subject matter of a piece of writing; the tools a writer uses to create tone:

3

- diction

- figurative language

- characterization

- plot

- theme

Syntax refers to the arrangement--the ordering, grouping, and placement--of words within a phrase, clause, or sentence. Some considerations:

- type of sentence

- length of sentence

- subtle shifts or abrupt changes in sentence length or patterns

- punctuation use

- use of repetition

- language patterns / rhythm / cadence

- how all of the above factors contribute to narrative pace

- the use of active and/or passive voice

Unity refers to the idea that all of the ideas in a written piece are relevant and appropriate to the focus. Some considerations include:

- each claim (assertion, topic sentence) supports the thesis

- each piece of evidence is important and relevant to the focus of the paragraph or the piece of writing as a whole

- occasionally, a writer may choose to purposely violate the element of unity for a specific effect (some humorists / satirists will sometimes consciously do this)

- it is important to consider what has been omitted from a piece and examine the writer's intent in doing so

Coherence refers to the organization and logic of a piece of writing; some considerations include:

- precision and clarity in a thesis and supportive arguments

- the arguments ordered in the most effective way for the writer's intent

- the sentences and paragraphs "flow smoothly" for the reader; there should not be any abrupt leaps or gaps in the presentation of the ideas or story (unless the writer makes a conscious choice for a specific and appropriate effect)

Audience refers to the writer's awareness of who will be reading his / her piece of writing; some considerations are:

- Who are the targeted readers?

- How well informed are they on the subject? What does the writer want the reader to learn as a result of this piece?

- What first impression is created for the reader and how does the author's voice shape this first impression?

- How interested and attentive are they likely to be? Will they resist any of the ideas?

- What is the relationship between the writer and the reader? Employee to supervisor? Citizen to citizen? Expert to novice? Scholar to scholar? Student to teacher? Student to student?

- How much time will the reader be willing to spend reading?

- How sophisticated are the readers in regard to vocabulary and syntax?

Writers do not rank or prioritize these elements of voice; but rather it is how a writer weaves these threads together that create the tapestry of "writer's voice."

What does it look like?

No matter what grade level, one of the best ways to begin and develop an exploration of writer's voice during the reading process is to begin with very short piece: poetry, short nonfiction or fiction texts, or an excerpt from a longer text that your students are currently reading. At the beginning, the shorter the text and the more powerful the voice, the better. You may want to have your students use the annotation acronym, "DUCATS: the Six Gold Pieces of Writer's Voice" (Ellis) from the *Annotating a Text* strategy (see the bottom of that page for other acronyms as well).

Below is the opening page of Jerry Spinelli's young adult novel, *Crash*; the page was copied, and students were asked to annotate the text for writer's voice, specifically targeting diction, tone, syntax and audience.

How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?

- A great way to pique students' interest in a text before they even begin reading it is to select several passages that have a strong sense of voice and read them aloud. Ask students identify the elements of voice with which they are familiar and make predictions or pose questions based on the selections.

- Collect examples that illustrate a clear and strong writer's voice and use an inductive process to have students identify the elements that constitute voice.

- After covering the elements of writer's voice, have students find an example of a piece of writing they feel has a strong voice and annotate the piece by highlighting and labeling the words and phrases that contribute to the voice.

Have students choosen two characters from the novel they are reading and have them compose a piece of writing in each character's voice.

Reciprocal Teaching

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

- Formulate questions in response to the text(s)

- Make inferences and draw conclusions based on explicit and implied information

- Make, confirm and/or revise predictions based on information in the text

- Condense and summarize ideas and information

What is it?

According to Alverman and Phelps (1998) in their book, *Content Reading and Literacy: Succeeding in Today's Diverse Classroom*, reciprocal teaching has two major features: (1) instruction and practice of the four comprehension strategies—predicting, question generating,

clarifying, and summarizing and (2) a special kind of cognitive apprenticeship where students gradually learn to assume the role of teacher in helping their peers construct meaning from text.

According to Rosenshine & Meister (1994), there are four important instructional practices embedded in reciprocal teaching:

- Direct teaching of strategies, rather than reliance solely on teacher questioning
- Student practice of reading strategies with real reading, not with worksheets or contrived exercises
- Scaffolding of instruction; students as cognitive apprentices
- Peer support for learning

Reciprocal teaching involves a high degree of social interaction and collaboration, as students gradually learn to assume the role of teacher in helping their peers construct meaning from text. In essence, reciprocal teaching is an authentic activity because learning, both inside and outside of school, advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge (Alverman and Phelps, 1998).

What does it look like?

Teachers begin by teaching and modeling the four comprehension strategies; students then practice them through dialogue among themselves. At first the teacher leads the dialogue, but as students become more proficient with the four strategies, the teacher gradually fades out of the dialogue and allows students to assume leadership.

The process of reciprocal teaching must be carefully scaffolded to ensure success for your students:

8

- Teachers need to explicitly teach and model the four basic strategies above: predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. It is important that students understand that skilled readers employ these strategies every time they read something, and that this is a great habit to develop as a way to improve their comprehension skills. This can be accomplished with short pieces of fiction or nonfiction; the entire class can brainstorm examples of the various types of comprehension strategies. Small groups can then choose 3-4 questions from each category to answer and share with the entire class.

- Once students understand and are able to apply all four strategies, it is time for the students to work independently at first, by annotating examples of all four strategies on a short text for homework. Students can annotate in the margins, or the teacher may want to create a graphic organizer or note sheet where students can record their questions and commentary.

- Then, the next day in class, small groups form to share their annotations and construct their own meaning of the text. One student in the group is chosen/appointed/elected to be "the teacher" of the group. His/her responsibilities are essentially to facilitate the group's task, progress, and time management.

- During the discussion, it is crucial that each student cite reference points in the texts that are the focal point of his/her questions and/or evidence to clarify or support their questions and/or commentary.

- During the discussion, students add commentary to their sheets/annotations to construct a richer and deeper understanding of the text.

- The teacher spends his/her time circulating the room to visit each group's discussion. He/she might ask a follow-up question to enrich the conversation.

- The teacher should structure some sort of closure activity, such as a whole class discussion that is built around questions that groups still have or interesting commentary that each group discovered as a result of their discussion.

9

In the chart below are some sample questions that students might pose for each of the four comprehension strategies based on the text, *Night*, by Elie Weisel.

Reciprocal Teaching

Four Roles

Predicting	Questioning	Clarifying	Summarizing
Why do you suppose Weisel chose the single word title, Night? What is his intent?	*Weisel describes, in great detail, the possessions left on the empty street after the first evacuation, why?*	*Are there any words or phrases that confused you?*	*What is important and/or not important in this section of the text?*
After reading this first chapter, what specifics do you expect to learn from this perspective?	*How does the writer's diction reveal his tone?*	*Are there any cultural or religious references that you don't understand or you would like clarified?*	*What do you suppose was the writer's intent in this chapter?*
What is likely to happen next?	*How does this chapter relate or connect to our essential question?*	*How might you have responded in that particular situation in which the main character found himself?*	*How would you characterize the overall tone of this opening section?*
What happens to the human spirit during tragic times?	*What connections can we make to human rights abuses today?*		*Sixty years later, how has the world changed as a result of the Holocaust?*
How will this character respond, based on what you know about him already?			
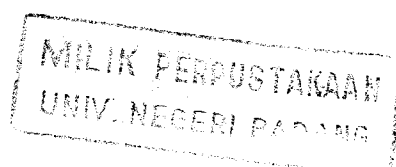
How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?

- At the beginning, teachers may want to hand out a poem or short piece of fiction or nonfiction that he/she has annotated that models all four strategies.

- One suggestion is to start with very short pieces of literature or short sections of a larger work (a chapter or section of a novel, biography, etc.). This allows students to practice and hone their skills before moving on to longer readings.

- It is important that the role of "teacher" be rotated on a regular basis so that all students have a chance to be the leader of the group; this kind of validation is an important part of the process.

RAFT: Role, Audience, Format, Topic

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

- Understand the relationship between literature and its historical, social, and cultural contexts

- Analyze and interpret elements of character development

What is it?

This is a great strategy that integrates reading and writing in a non-traditional way. It asks that students take what they have read and create a new product that illustrates their depth of understanding; it may be used with fiction or nonfiction texts. The format is incredibly flexible and offers limitless opportunities for creativity for both you and your students. When you are first using a "RAFT" with your students, you will develop the specifics for each element in the acronym; they are as follows:

Role: In developing the final product, what role will the students need to "take on"? Writer? Character (in the novel)? Artist? Politician? Scientist?

Audience: Who should the students consider as the audience for the product? Other students? Parents? Local community? School board? Other characters in the text?

Format: What is the best product that will demonstrate the students' in-depth understanding of their interactions with the text? A writing task? Art work? Action plan? Project?

Topic: This is the *when, who,* or *what* that will be the focus/subject of the final product. Will it take place in the same time period as the novel? Who will be the main focus of the product? What event will constitute the centerpiece of the action?

What does it look like?

A teacher assigns (or students select) a role, audience, format, and topic from a range of possibilities. Below is a chart with a few examples in each of the categories; it is meant only as a sampling to spark new ideas and possibilities for building RAFTS:

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
• writer	• self	• journal	• issue relevant to the text or time period
• artist	• peer group	• editorial	
• character	• government	• brochure/booklet	
• scientist	• parents	• interview	• topic of personal interest or concern for the role or
• adventurer	• fictional character(s)	• video	
• inventor		• song lyric	
• juror	• committee	• cartoon	
• judge	• jury	• game	

- historian
- reporter
- rebel
- therapist
- journalist

- judge
- activists
- immortality
- animals or
  objects

- primary document
- critique
- biographical sketch
- newspaper article

audience
- topic related
to an essential
question

How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?

- This strategy is great for differentiation; teachers (and students) can develop any number of possible RAFT's based on the same text that can be adjusted for skill level and rigor.

- Paula Rutherford's book, *Instruction for All Students*, offers a comprehensive list of "Products and Perspectives" from which to chose.

- The RAFT strategy can be used as a prewriting strategy and/or as a strategy for helping students prepare for a small or large group discussion.

Think Aloud

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

• Formulate questions prior to reading and in response to the text

• Make, confirm or revise predictions based on information presented in the text

What is it?

As the title implies, a think aloud is a great strategy to use to slow down the reading process and let students get a good look at how skilled readers construct meaning from a text.

13

Many of us developed our skills as readers implicitly, by simply doing a lot of reading of all sorts of texts; after all, reading is a passion for us. Therefore, when we teach reading at the secondary level, we need to keep in mind that we must take what we know and do *implicitly* and make it *explicit* for our students, especially for our struggling readers. Below is a beginning list of what skilled readers do implicitly; we need to help our students learn and apply these skills/strategies on a regular basis to improve their interactions with text.

What Skilled Readers Do While They Read:

Activate prior knowledge: Whenever skilled readers approach a text for the first time, they consciously (or unconsciously) summon any information or background that they have in relation to the topic, idea, people/characters, setting, historical context, author, similar events, etc. This process provides a footing or foundation for the reading; it helps us to make sense of the new text. This is an important step that inexperienced readers often skip over.

Set a purpose/reason/goal for reading: Another step that becomes automatic for skilled readers is establishing what they expect to get out of the reading. Depending on the purpose, we adjust our reading in order to meet the chosen goal. Helping our students to define the reason, purpose or goal for the reading is a crucial initial step in helping them to successfully interact with the text. Are they reading for pleasure/entertainment? To gather information? To support a thesis? To answer an essential question? etc.

Decode text into words and meanings: These are the basic reading skills that our children *begin* to learn at the elementary level; but as secondary teachers, we must continue to work on them as the texts become more varied and sophisticated. Decoding text into words and meaning can also involve using strategies to define unfamiliar words using context clues or word parts (e.g., prefixes, suffixes, roots).

Make personal connections: As skilled readers move through a text, they constantly compare and contrast their knowledge and experience with what is presented and revealed in the text. This process of "personal engagement" in the text improves the reader's comprehension and understanding. Skillful readers often ask themselves (consciously or unconsciously) the following questions as they read: How is this like or unlike something I know or have experienced? How can I connect the ideas here to other texts I have read? How is this text (and the ideas presented in it) useful or relevant to me?

Make predictions: From the moment a skilled reader picks up a text, they start making predictions about it. They look at such things as the title, table of contents, dedication, number of pages, font size, photographs, commentary on the back or book jacket, etc.; and they begin to make predictions about the contents, quality and their initial reactions to the text. As their reading progresses, they continue to check and revise their initial reactions and predictions.

Visualize: One of the most powerful tools that skilled readers develop is their ability to visualize what they are reading. While reading a fictional text they may create a mental picture of the setting, imagine what the characters look like, in short, immerse themselves in the visual world of the story. In a nonfiction text that is abstract in nature, the reader may create visual symbols, concept webs, or mind maps that help him/her to keep track of the information and organize it.

Ask questions: Good readers make a habit of asking questions while they read. They ask questions about the text, the writer, their own responses, opinions, and reactions to the reading. They may be questions that probe deeper for understanding, but they may simply be questions that voice their internal confusion and need for clarity. When explicitly taught, this is a skill that often will shock some of your less skilled readers; they often think that it is time to stop

reading when they become confused, assuming that good readers never get confused. It is powerful for them to see/hear someone work through their confusion.

Monitor understanding and summarize: Skillful readers carry an "invisible suitcase" of information with them as they read a text. Along the way, they drop important items into the case that help them to make sense of the text; if something doesn't make sense they unpack it and take a closer look. They review those collected items at various points in the reading in order to move toward understanding, synthesis and evaluation of the text.

Apply what has been learned: Both during and after the reading, skillful readers are constantly asking themselves, "How can I use this information?" "What does this story mean to me?" "How can I apply this in my own life?" "Is this relevant to other situations or circumstances?" When students are reading a text to fulfill the demands of a task or prompt, they may keep the demands of the prompt in mind, consider how they will apply information from the text to complete an assigned task. More generally, discovering how a reading applies to our lives and the world around us is essential for engaging a reader in a text. We need to help our students discover the ways to reflect on how the reading "applies."

What does it look like?

Using the list of *What Skilled Readers Do While They Read,* use the basic process below to model think-aloud reading with your students. There are many variations on this process, some of which will be listed in the next section, *How can I use, adapt or differentiate it?* **Note:** You can either introduce the list of *What Skilled Readers Do* to your students, or use an inductive process whereby they annotate what you are doing during the think-aloud and then the group or class can create the list together.

Step 1: Begin with a short section of a text (1-2 pages); the text should be challenging for most of your students and give you several opportunities to illustrate the various strategies.

Step 2: Depending on your students' skills and grade level, choose 3-5 strategies on which you want to focus from the list. (Activate Prior Knowledge, Make Predictions, Ask Questions, etc.) Tell your students the *what, why* and *when* of these strategies: *what* the strategies are that you will be using, *why* each of these strategies help on this particular text, and have them keep track of *when* you use them as you read the text.

Step 3: Make sure you give your students the purpose or goal for this reading or have them come up with it if that's appropriate for the particular reading.

Step 4: Read the text to your students and model the chosen strategies as you read by stopping (sometimes even in the middle of sentences!) to articulate aloud what is going on inside your head as you read.

Step 5: Have your students annotate the text by underlining/ circling the cues that triggered the use of a particular strategy and discuss them after the read-aloud is complete.

Step 6: Have students brainstorm a list of other texts and circumstances where they might be able to use each of the strategies. Have the students connect these strategies to real life applications. (e.g. How do we judge the tone of a school when we walk into it, and what clues might a writer use to create a chosen tone in his/her description of that school?)

Step 7: Consistently reinforce the use of these strategies as you continue reading this text and as you introduce new texts to your students.

How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?
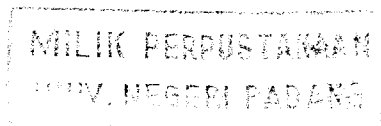
In his book, *Improving Comprehension with Think-Aloud Strategies*, Jeffrey Willhelm provides a list of "basic ways to conduct think alouds;" the book is an excellent reference tool that gives specific details on each of the following:

- Teacher does think-aloud; students listen.

- Teacher does think-aloud; students help out.

- Students do think-alouds as large group; teacher and other students monitor and help.

- Students do think-alouds in small group; teacher and other students monitor and help.

- Individual student does think-aloud in forum; other students help.

- Students do think-alouds individually; compare with others. (they write their commentary)

- Teacher or students do think-alouds orally, in writing, on an overhead, with Post-it notes, or in a journal.

Willhelm notes that "written think-alouds have the advantage of providing a record of reading activity that can be shared, manipulated, saved, assessed, compared to earlier and later efforts to gauge and demonstrate improvement, etc." (Willhelm, 2001).

Inferential Reading

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

- Draw upon prior knowledge

- Draw conclusions and make inferences

- Recognize the effects of one's own point of view in formulating interpretations of texts

What is it?

In her book, *When Kids Can't Read*, Kylene Beers laments, "I once thought that if my students could make an inference, any inference, then my teaching woes (and their comprehension worries) would end. . . The problem with comprehension, it appeared, was that

kids couldn't make an inference." She then remarks, "It took years for me to get a handle on that one."

What we need to keep in mind is that our students certainly *do know how* to make inferences; they continually make inferences throughout the school day. They make inferences based on their peers' physical appearance, actions, speech, or based on their teachers' facial expressions, body language and room arrangement. What we need to help them do is transfer those skills and strategies to their interactions with text. Ah, there's the rub.

What does it look like?

And so, how do we teach this seemingly elusive skill? In her book, Beers provides two excellent resources that will help both students and teachers. She provides a list of thirteen types of inferences that skilled readers make, an excellent list to provide for your students to keep in their notebooks. Her second list is a series of comments teachers can make to help students make certain types of inferences.

Types of Inferences Skilled Readers Use

Skilled readers . . .

1. Recognize the antecedents for pronouns

2. Figure out the meaning of unknown words from context clues

3. Figure out the grammatical function of an unknown words

4. Understand intonation of characters' words

5. Identify characters' beliefs, personalities, and motivations

6. Understand characters' relationships to one another

7. Provide details about the setting

8. Provide explanations for events or ideas that are presented in the text

9. Offer details for events or their own explanations of the events

10. Understand the author's view of the world

11. Recognize the author's biases

12. Relate what is happening in the text to their own knowledge of the world

13. Offer conclusions from facts presented in the text

Comments Teachers Can Make to Help Students Make Certain Types of Inferences

1. "Look for pronouns and figure out what to connect them to."

2. "Figure out explanations for these events."

3. "Think about the setting and see what details you can add."

4. "Think about something that you know about this (insert topic) and see how that fits with what's in the text."

5. "After you read this section, see if you can explain why the character acted this way."

6. "Look at how the character said (insert a specific quote). How would you have interpreted what that character said if he had said (change how it was said or stress different words)?"

7. "Look for words that you don't know and see if any of the other words in the sentence or surrounding sentences can give you an idea for what those unknown words mean."

8. "As you read this section, look for clues that would tell you how the author might feel about (insert a topic or character's name)."

How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?

- When first introducing "inferential reading" to students, use an everyday occurrence where they automatically draw inferences; design an activity that uses an inductive approach to identify the types of inferences that they constantly use in their daily activities.

20

- When students already understand what it means to "make inferences" in a real life context, then we need to provide a short piece of text with which they are working and have them annotate as many inferences as they can. The first time you may want to do this as a whole class using a transparency. After identification, they need to examine the process by which they arrived at their inferences and create a working list of types of inferences that skilled readers use. Post this list in your classroom for easy reference.

- Try to read short passages aloud on a regular basis, and use a "think aloud approach" to focus *only on the inferences* that you are making as you read. Have students practice this aloud as well, either in partners or small groups. As they do this, they can reference their list of types of inferences and add to it.

- A constant refrain in English classes is, "How do you know the writer meant this?" Beers suggests that we "remind students that authors don't expect readers to create inferences out of nothing. Authors provide information (that's the external text); readers use that information in a variety of ways to create their internal text. When authors aren't providing literal information, then they are implying something. Tell students that readers *infer* and authors *imply*." This sounds like a great statement to put on a poster; although I might reverse it to read: "Authors imply; therefore, readers have to infer."

- A suggestion Beers makes is to, "cut cartoons from the newspaper and put them onto a transparency. Read them aloud, and then think aloud the inferences that you make that allow you to perceive the cartoon as funny. Then let kids cut out their favorites and bring them in. Eventually, I give extra credit for kids who bring in cartoons they can't figure out. These allow us to discuss how inferencing doesn't work if you don't have the right background knowledge. Most often, students bring in political cartoons for this."

21

- Another great idea she suggests is to use bumper stickers or signs and have students write the internal text that comes from the external text.

Key Concept Synthesis

Use this Strategy:

We can use this strategy before reading, during reading, and after reading.

Targeted Reading Skills:

- Condense or summarize ideas from one or more texts

- Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information

- Compare/contrast information from one or more texts

- Make text-to-text, text-to-self, and/or text-to-world connections

What is it?

When students are given "dense" reading material, they often become frustrated and remark, "I read it, but I don't get it!" or "I didn't know what was important and what wasn't." For many young readers, this frustration builds and they approach difficult texts feeling defeated before they even begin. One strategy we can use is to provide a framework for the reading by creating a focus on the key concepts. The process involves identifying the key concepts as they read, putting those concepts in their own words and explaining why the concept is important and/or making connections to other concepts.

What does it look like?

Using this strategy requires helping students to use a number of textual clues that will help them determine the key concepts in a reading. Some elements that will aid students in the identification of key concepts are:

- Examining the text structure for any elements that the writer/publisher may have used to indicate major divisions in the subject matter (e.g. titles, subtitles, bold headings, and supportive graphics or visuals)

- Determining which sentence in a paragraph is the topic sentence; as texts get more sophisticated, students need to recognize that frequently it may not be the first sentence in the paragraph.

- Learning to identify statements that "forecast" main ideas or key concepts that will come at some point later on in the reading.

- Recognizing that transitions may sometimes help to identify a main idea or a possible shift in the writer's thinking. (e.g. *when compared to*, or *another possibility is*, or *in contrast*, etc.)

- Examining the summary statements in the paragraphs and/or the conclusions that summarize each section of the reading may help to verify and condense the main ideas or key concepts.

Providing models and guided practice where students have opportunities to identify and explain the above elements is crucial. Once students can understand and recognize these elements, provide them with sections of the current text they are reading and have them practice independently as preparation for the next class. As students become more proficient in recognizing these elements as they read, a powerful addition is to have them identify these elements in their own writing.

The graphic organizer below is a condensed version of the template that you can print off the web from *Tools for Reading, Writing and Thinking*.

Key Concept Synthesis

Directions: Use the following graphic organizer to identify the five most important concepts (in the form of single words or phrases) from the reading. Think about identifying the five most import concepts this way: If you had to explain the reading to someone who had not read the text, what are the five most important concepts you would want them to understand? *Use a highlighter and marginal notes to identify import concepts as you read, and then complete the graphic organizer once you have completed the reading.*

Five Key Concepts (with page #s)	Put the Concept in Your Own Words	Explain Why the Concept is Important & Make Connections to Other Concepts
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

How could I use, adapt or differentiate it?

- If this is a new strategy for your students, it is helpful to make copies of a section of the text so that they can highlight and annotate; this process alone will encourage a close reading of the text even before they complete the graphic organizer.

- When first using this strategy with your students, you may want to have them identify the various elements that helped them to zero in on the main ideas or key concepts. This could be noted in the Key Concept column under the concept or in the margins of the annotated text.

- For students that are more visual and/or artistic, they may want to use a mind map to capture the key concepts and their connections.

Once students have completed the graphic organizer, they can share their ideas with other students to discuss how/why they identified the key concepts they selected.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can choose the appropriate reading strategy to improve the students reading comprehension. We must use the strategy based on reading text that read by the students. And the use of reading strategy is different based on the purpose of reading.

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