

Purpose: The purpose of this action research presentation is to discuss how explicit comprehension instruction can take place along with writing, in the kindergarten classroom. **Methodology:** This action research project took place in a suburban kindergarten with learners of diverse ability levels and ESL students as well. In this classroom small group instruction was the vehicle for literacy. The teacher worked with a small heterogeneous group of kindergarten readers. The group size was about 4-6 on a given day. This took place within the second semester of the kindergarten year. The documentation of the strategy was anecdotal and based on the principles of action research. **Results:** This prior knowledge activation strategy presented benefits of the children using the vocabulary from the story in their journal entries. Another benefit was that the children were forced to use their inventive spelling skills and explore the grapheme-phoneme relationship. The final benefit of this strategy was that the children were motivated more and more each time the strategy was presented to listen and have their own independent discussion of the story, the characters and its events. It allows optimal participation from all members of the group and a constant flow of communication about the story. **Conclusions:** The outcome of analyzing and using this strategy in the classroom is that it plays upon the natural curiosity of young children as a motivator for reading. Another outcome is that the teacher found a strategy that adheres to the ability levels of all children. The relationship of this strategy to the purpose of the research is manifested in the rich discussion and authentic work samples of the students. **Recommendations:** It is imperative that teachers offer more strategies that activate the prior knowledge of the beginning reader. These and other developmentally appropriate strategies with regards to cultural and linguistic diversity make for lifelong learners and independent readers.

The Power of Prediction: Using Prediction Journals to Increase Comprehension in Kindergarten.

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Introduction

Educators looking for techniques to help students enhance their reading ability are faced with contradictory advice from research authorities. Some propose emphasizing phonics while others endorse a whole language approach. Phonics supporters establish their approach in behaviorist learning theory and substantiate their assertions about its efficacy by steering to comparison studies; similarly, whole language proponents base their methodology in constructivist learning theory and found their assertions on ethnographic research (Chall, 2000; McQuillan, 1998). As informed educators, we are advocates of a balanced literacy approach, pulling devices and techniques from both aspects. But what of this balanced approach and the early childhood classroom, especially kindergarten?

The 21st century kindergarten is a dynamic place. The learning that takes place is integrated and multi-leveled, especially in literacy. Young children come to school full of wonder and a sense of “I am smart.” What many children believe is that they came to school knowing how to read already. Early childhood educators should capitalize on this “teachable moment.” In the case of this strategy, that means capitalizing on curiosity and wonder? But how can we link and why should we link this to reading?

Reading comprehension is the most important part of literacy. Here is what research says.

Active Comprehension Strategies

Fluent readers appear active as they read. This can be observed when listening to adept readers think out loud as they read through a text (Dressley & Afflerbach, 1995) Fluent readers have an awareness or acuity of what it is they are reading. Looking at the text globally, read based on interest in the text from the preview of the text initially, correlate prior knowledge with what they are reading, alter their schema when incorporating new information, deduce meaning of new words using context clues, and make notes about the content of text read as they read. They also summarize and focus in on key points during and after reading. Readers who are not as adept don't display this type of active reading.

Literacy researchers have created techniques or strategies that stimulate and enhance reading that is active and increases comprehension. Of the many strategies developed, the strategy of prediction is one of the most effective documented.

Research tells us that fluent readers employ several strategies or techniques at a time to analyze text. They possess a repertoire of strategies to draw from; similar to a toolbox. Fluent readers mix and match strategies as needed. At first the strategies are introduced by the teacher and modeled by the teacher. As the students use the strategy repeatedly, they become confident and venture to use it on their own terms, outside of teacher directed instruction.

It is the intention or goal of reading teachers to get the students to regulate the use of the strategies independently. This is reflected in reciprocal teaching. Teachers are encouraged to model and apply these strategies and expect students to use them continuously. This is also a type of coaching.

Historically, there has been an inclination to focus reading instruction in the primary classroom on word recognition and phonics. As well, this is also a prime time to introduce comprehension strategies to emergent readers.

Prediction

What is prediction? A prediction strategy at its best is conceiving a prediction then, subsequently reading the text to find out what happens. That also includes activating background knowledge, peeking or previewing and over viewing or summarizing. Though often seen as a single strategy, it is actually a multifaceted on going process. This is reflective of schema theory. The supposition of moving from what the reader already knows with what it is anticipated the students will learn from the text. This type of text is substantial in the kindergarten classroom.

Strategies like the ones mentioned previously encourage students to generate thoughts or outcomes about how characters might act or react based on the setting, situation, events, or other characters. These techniques are found to be highly effective for less able readers or emergent/beginning readers.

Research has found also that strategies that include prediction increase overall or global understanding of a story.

Small Group Instruction

Teachers can reduce or remove the comprehension abyss for students experiencing difficulties in comprehension by employing the small group milieu. It is more convenient to discuss and probe concepts or events in the story. This environment most importantly, allows young readers to be risk takers. In a small group the safety net is stronger and more forgiving, as well as intimate.

Activating Personal Knowledge

Many times readers, especially inexperienced ones, begin reading without consideration as to what they can bring to the text. This can hinder the essence of what the text is attempting to communicate or convey. Before reading activities that initiate or ignite background knowledge, teachers guide students toward the concept of text and aid in comprehending the text before the reader.

Focus on Prediction and Prior Knowledge

Why bother to focus on prediction and prior knowledge? Well let's look at it from this perspective. Many teachers are concerned with the lack of background knowledge

readers possess. The second concern that they should focus on as well is inappropriate or inaccurately interpreted information about background concepts. By accounts of reading researchers, inaccurate background knowledge is actually worse than no background knowledge at all (Eco, 1990). Often times, the less able reader will force the information gleaned from the text to fit warped or inaccurate misconceptions located in their background schema. The prediction journal is a simple yet authentic spin-off of think sheets (Dole & Smith, 1987).

Similar to the think sheets, the emergent or beginning reader responses are recorded and used later to engage in comparison and contrast with textual information. In an after-reading activity, readers record post reading responses to complete the thought (prediction analysis) process.

Making Global Predictions

Successful readers seem to constantly and routinely predict what they will be reading just prior to getting into the next portion of the text. Their experience or prior knowledge permits skillful readers to make these continuing predictions. In fundamental nature, they think beforehand by look forward to approaching words and thoughts by withdrawing what they recognize about the configuration of the language, about the focus of the reading passage, and about the perspective of the reading circumstances. Reading for them is making forecasts and then substantiating the truthfulness of those predictions.

Though talked about in this context as a significant pre-reading strategy, prediction never comes to a close throughout reading. As the teaching recommendations

demonstrate, predictions are prepared and then established, amended or discarded based upon the sequence in which the text was read. When readers manufacture nonsensical vocabulary or use expressions that do not fit into the course of the text, it is evident that they are not foreseeing connotations. Readers must be taught that taking chances and speculating is a part of the reading progression. Teachers must illustrate to students that reading is a foretelling and validating activity.

Strategy Documentation

In this classroom small group instruction was the vehicle for literacy. I worked with a small heterogeneous group of kindergarten readers. The group size was about 4-6 on a given day. This particular group was a highly motivated group who had confidence in their ability to “read.” I used a literature-based reading program and reading aloud was a big part of the guided reading portion of the balanced literacy framework. At each lesson I would begin with showing the children the cover of the book. Then I would give the children a lead phrase or a sentence starter like “I think that this story will be ...” or “I think that the character will end up...” After each student had an opportunity to share their predictions, they were given their “prediction journals” in which they could write or draw their predictions in the journal. I then read the story or part of it (depending on how long it is) using guided reading questions during the story. After reading the story I allow each one of the children to discuss their predictions and what actually happened in the story. After the discussion they go back to the same page in their journal and write or draw whether their prediction was the same or different and if it was different, how so. As I continued to use this comprehension strategy, the children became comfortable with

the strategy. They star to manipulate the strategy. This became evident in their journal entries. The used phrases like “I was almost close” or I am right a little bit.” When I asked them to explain the children would go into detail about where in the story it differed from their predictions. This strategy presented other benefits like encouraging the children to want to use the vocabulary from the story in their journal entries. Another benefit was that the children were forced to use their inventive spelling skills. The final benefit of this strategy was that the children were motivated more and more each time the strategy was presented they were motivated to listen and have their own independent discussion of the story, the characters and its events. They even modeled the strategy when participating in center time at the reading center. This strategy is one that is simple yet effective. It allows optimal participation from all members of the group and a constant flow of communication about the story. Being inquisitive with this strategy goes a long way!

Conclusion

It is imperative that we offer more strategies appropriate for the classroom of the beginning reader. Here are a few. Text Impression (Silberman, 1996) is a thinking-reading tactic that uses significant or noteworthy vocabulary to kindle and guide predictions. Prior to reading, the teacher records a few significant or noteworthy words from the text on display. The group converses about the words and forecasts what the passage will be about. After the students have finished the reading, they balance the author's use of the words with their forecast. Reader’s predictions could be used to create new passages with their thoughts.

The Inferential Strategy (Hansen, 1981) assists the students' capacity to link new concepts with their implicit or personal knowledge. The teacher examines the reading passage and selects three or four themes that are significant or not easy to comprehend. For each vital idea, two questions are created. The first question should draw on experiential knowledge related to the theme or concept, while the second question supports student's tenacity to formulate a prediction about the theme's function in the reading passage. Prior to reading, responses to the questions are communicated. Readers then engage in the selection, evaluating their experiential knowledge and predictions to what actually materializes in the text and evaluating the fundamental ideas.

Occasionally students' available knowledge is insufficient and teachers need to supply them with supplementary information that will allow evocative reading to transpire. This is required most often with expository selections. One of the simplest means to give essential knowledge is for the teacher to discuss or talk to the readers.

By elucidation, telling tales and giving numerous examples, teachers can typically construct enough experiential knowledge for students to understand the selection. Two practices can be used to steer teachers in imparting text-specific background information. A graphic organizer is fashioned when the chief notions of a reading text is set in a graphically descriptive pecking order. While this graphic organizer is presented to the class, the teacher explicates what the concepts denote, why they are significant, and how they are connected. These and other developmentally appropriate strategies with regards to cultural and linguistic diversity make for lifelong learners and independent readers. This is the ultimate goal for all children.

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