

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 471 386

CS 511 573

AUTHOR Johnson, Andrew P.
TITLE Teaching Comprehension Skills.
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education;
Instructional Effectiveness; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading
Improvement; *Reading Instruction; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Teachers cannot expect that students at any level know how to create meaning with expository text. Students' ability to comprehend expository text can be improved through the use of comprehension skills. In order to learn the skills, they need to be broken down into specific steps and taught explicitly. Six comprehension skills are described in this paper along with strategies for effective instruction. (Contains 25 references and a figure listing comprehension skills.) (Author/RS)

ED 471 386

Teaching Comprehension Skills.

by Andrew P. Johnson

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

A. Johnson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Teachers can not expect that students at any level know how to create meaning with expository text. Students' ability to comprehend expository can be improved through the use of comprehension skills. In order to learn they skills, they need to be broken down into specific steps and taught explicitly. Six comprehension skills are described here along with strategies for effective instruction.

Andrew Johnson, Ph.D.

Department of Educational Studies: Special Populations

313 Armstrong Hall

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, MN 56001

phone: (507) 389-5660

fax: (507) 389-5888

email: andrew.johnson@mnsu.edu

TEACHING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

This article describes strategies that teachers of all levels and subject areas can use to improve their students' comprehension during the reading of expository texts.

Narrative and Expository Texts

First, a distinction must be made between narrative and expository texts as the purpose for reading each is different. The foremost purpose for reading narrative texts is to enjoy the story. Here, the goal of the teacher is to get students to enter into the story, to relive it in some way, or to create connections to real life emotions or experiences (Rosenblatt, 1983; Zarillo, 1991). Asking students to pull out and recount details from narrative texts results in what Richard Allington calls gentle interrogation (1994). This should be avoided as it does little to produce literate conversations, it keeps students from entering the text world, and it makes reading a less pleasurable experience. Think how you would feel if somebody insisted that you identify the plot, climax and resolution of a novel that you were enjoying, and then asked you to list story details in order to make sure you really were reading the story. Instead, activities and questions for narrative text should be designed to engaged the reader's emotion imagination and experiences.

Expository texts, however, have the sole purpose of informing the reader. The goal here is to extract information and construct meaning. Comprehension skills should be used with expository text to help students achieve this purpose.

What is Comprehension?

Comprehension is the act of constructing meaning with text (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Glover, Ronning, & Bruning, 1990). Meaning does not reside in the text alone waiting for the reader to passively absorb it. Instead, the reader plays an active role, using information in the head to filter, organize, interpret, and generate relationships with incoming information and to ultimately construct meaning (Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Fitzpatrick, 1994; Gunning, 1996; Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). Comprehension then, is an interaction between word identification, knowledge, and comprehension skills (Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham & Moore, 1995).

The Need for Comprehension Skills

Currently, little time is spent in most classrooms teaching students how to comprehend text (Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). Instead, much of reading instruction is spent developing accurate and automatic word identification skills and increasing oral reading fluency. This, however, does not guarantee that students will develop the skills necessary to effectively read expository text. And, while wide reading is important, this also does little to prepare students for careful, thoughtful reading of expository texts (Cunningham & Wall, 1994). Finally, simply exposing students to comprehension work sheets or other tasks requiring them to recall information found in a text also does very little to increase their ability to comprehends texts (Dole et al, 1991; Reutzel & Cooter, 1996). In order to improve students' ability to comprehend texts independently, explicit instruction is needed in the use of various comprehension skills (Guthrie, Van Meter, McCann, Wigfield, Bennett, Poundstone, Rice, Failbisch, Hunt & Mitchell, 1996).

Even at the college level, it is often assumed that students have the skills needed to successfully comprehend expository text. Yet, there is little evidence to suggest that students at any level will learn these skills if they have not been explicitly taught. And, while there are

many pre-reading activities that teachers can use to help students comprehend what they read, these activities do little to ensure that students will learn the skills necessary to comprehend a piece of expository text independently. An important goal for teachers of reading then is to increase students' ability to create meaning with text (Gunderson, 1996), and this is best done by explicit instruction (Cunningham & Wall, 1994; Dole et al., 1991; Duffy, 1993; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Rabren & Darch, 1996).

What are Comprehension Skills?

Comprehension skills are the strategies a reader uses to construct meaning and retrieve information from a text. Comprehension skills are very much like thinking skills. A thinking skill is a cognitive process that can be broken down into steps and taught explicitly (Johnson, 1996; Perkins, 1986). Comprehension skills are also cognitive processes which can be broken into steps and taught explicitly. Three types of comprehension skills are recommended here: pre-reading skills, during-reading skills, and post-reading skills (see Figure 1). These skills can be easily learned and flexibly applied to a wide variety reading situations.

 Insert Figure 1 about here.

Pre-Reading Comprehension Skills

Pre-reading skills are used primarily to activate relevant schemata. Schemata are hypothesized knowledge structures in memory that contain elements of related information (Glover et al., 1990). By activating these, the reader is able to connect new knowledge to knowledge already in memory.

Preview and overview. Using this skill, the reader first notes the title and subheadings to get a sense of the structure of the text. Next, the first and final paragraph are read to get a sense of the content. This helps the reader interpret the text as it is then read. Finally, the text is read.

Web and brainstorm. Here, the structure of the text is used to create a semantic web. The title or topic of the article is used as a central node. The headings of each section are used as sub nodes. The reader then brainstorms on each sub node to generate relevant knowledge. The web provides a visual organizer that shows the relationship between concepts which are then used to help the reader interpret the text. This same web can also be used as a post-reading skill. Here, the reader uses the information gleaned from the text to add to and refine the web.

During-Reading Comprehension Skills

During-reading comprehension skills are used to monitor comprehension, to evaluate ideas gleaned from each paragraph, and to begin to organize ideas within the structure of the text.

Paragraph re-read. This skill is used by many expert readers intuitively. First a paragraph is quickly read to get a general sense of its content. Next, the paragraph is read a second time. Finally, the reader analyzes the structure and content of each paragraph and evaluates the information in order to find an important sentence or idea. This also helps the reader to make connections with the other ideas found in the text.

Read and pause. This skill is designed primarily to monitor comprehension and develop metacognitive awareness. Here, the reader pauses after each paragraph to see if there is

sufficient understanding, then either returns to re-reads the paragraph or continues reading the next paragraph. Some readers find it helpful to use a 3x5 inch index card to help focus and concentrate when reading. The card is moved to the bottom of each paragraph as it is being read.

Post-Reading Comprehension Skills

Post-reading skills are used to reconstruction important ideas, organize those ideas, and evaluate those ideas within the structure of the text.

Article re-read. First, the text is read quickly to provide the reader with a sense of topic. This knowledge is then used to interpret, sort, and evaluate the information as the text is read a second time. Finally, interesting or important ideas are recorded.

Sequencing. First, interesting or important ideas are recorded as the text is being read. Then, those ideas are evaluated and arranged in order of their importance. Finally, the readers adds their own ideas and interpretations to the list.

Teaching Comprehension Skills

A review of research indicates that students appear to benefit whenever cognitive processes are made clear and explicit (Adams, 1989; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1992; Chance, 1986; Collins, Brown, & Neuman, 1989; Johnson, 1996; Marzano, 1991). It makes sense then, that explicit instruction be used in the teaching of comprehension skills. Effective skills instruction of any kind incorporates five components: (a) direct instruction and modeling, (b) identification of the procedural components, (c) guided practice, (d) regular practice, and (e) application or use in other areas to ensure transfer (Collins et al, 1989; Fielding & Pearson, 1994; Hobbs & Schlichter, 1990; Perkins, 1986; Pressley, Harris, & Marks, 1992). Each of these components are described here as they relate to comprehension skills. Also included is an example of an 8th grade science teacher, Mr. Naegel, teaching a comprehension skill to his students.

Direct Instruction and Modeling

First, the teacher selects a comprehension skill to teach, introduces it, then explains how it should be used. The teacher then reads a short piece of text out loud using cognitive modeling to demonstrate exactly how the comprehension skill is applied. This component is used to provide students with an overview and should be relatively brief.

Identification of the Procedural Components

This component is often intertwined with direct instruction and modeling. Here, the teacher identifies the specific steps used with the comprehension skill. It is helpful to use a thinking frame to teach these steps. A thinking frame is a concrete representation of a particular cognitive skill, broken down into specific steps and used to support the thought process as students begin to learn any skill (Johnson, 1996; Perkins, 1987). Thinking frames can be constructed in poster form and placed in the classroom for effective teaching and easy review.

Guided Practice

Guided practice, sometimes referred to as scaffolded instruction is provided when the teacher takes the whole class through each step of the skill (Johnson & Graves, 1997). The goal during this component is to provide the support necessary to allow students to learn to use the skill independently. Here, the teacher (a) teaches a comprehension skill initially; (b) takes the whole class through each step of the skill several times; and (c) designs an activity so that students can practice the skill independently.

Regular Practice

Like any skill, students need regular practice in order to be able to use comprehension skills effectively. Fielding and Pearson (1994) suggest that students practice comprehension skills every day. Any time students are asked to read expository text, they should be reminded to use a comprehension skill. This is where thinking frames are useful as the teacher can quickly point to the steps and encourage students to use a comprehension skill with which they are comfortable.

Integration into the Curriculum

Comprehension skills should be used throughout the curriculum at all levels whenever students are asked to read expository text. Even high school and college instructors should remind students of the steps necessary to successfully comprehend a piece of expository text. Using comprehension skills this way provides students with additional comprehension practice as well as helping them to more effectively construct meaning with assigned texts.

Final Word

Teaching comprehension skills in this manner will help students at all levels become more effective readers of expository text. It is not necessary or effective to teach all six comprehension skills listed here. Instead, select a few skills to teach each year. Provide experiences and allow students to experiment in order to find the comprehension skills that work best for them. Instruction in comprehension skills should begin in the primary grades and continue on through high school and beyond. Teaching comprehension skills at all levels and in all subject areas is one way to ensure that students will be ready to comprehend expository text found on college campuses and in the work place.

References

- Adams, M.J. (1989). Thinking skills curricula: Their promise and progress. *Educational Psychologist, 24*, 24-77.
- Allington, R.L. (1994). The schools we have. The schools we need. *The Reading Teacher, 48*, 14-29.
- Bereiter, C., & Scardamalia, M. (1992). Cognition in curriculum. In P.W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook on research on curriculum* (pp. 517-542). New York: American Educational Research Association.
- Chance, P. (1986). *Thinking in the classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Collins, A., Brown, J.S. & Neuman, S. (1989). Cognitive apprenticeship: Teaching the crafts of reading, writing and mathematics. In L.B. Resnick (Ed.), *Knowing, learning, and instruction: Essays in honor of Robert Glasser* (pp. 453-494). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Cunningham, P.M., Moore, S.A., Cunningham, J.W. & Moore, D.W. (1995). *Reading and writing in elementary classrooms: skills and observations* (3rd ed.). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Cunningham, J.W. & Wall, L.K. (1994). Teaching good readers to comprehend better. *Journal of Reading, 37*, 480-486.
- Dole, J., Duffy, G., Roehler, L., & Pearson, P.D. (1991). Moving from the old to the new: Research on reading comprehension instruction. *Review of Educational Research, 61*, 239-264.
- Duffy, G.G. (1993). Rethinking strategy instruction: Four teachers' development and their low achievers' understanding. *The Elementary School Journal, 93*, 231-247.
- Fielding, L.G. & Pearson, P.D. (1994). Reading comprehension: What works. *Educational Leadership, 31*, 62-68.
- Fitzpatrick, K. (1994). Improving reading comprehension using critical thinking skills. *Reading Improvement, 31*, 142-144.
- Glover, J.A., Ronning, R.R. & Bruning, R.H. (1990). *Cognitive psychology for teachers*. New York: MacMillian.
- Gunderson, L. (1996). Reading and language development. In V. Froese (ed.), *Whole-language: Practice and theory*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Gunning, T.G. (1996). *Creating reading instruction for all children*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Guthrie, J. Van Meter, P., McCann, A., Wigfield, A., Bennet, L., Poundstone, C., Rice, M., Failbisch, F., Hunt, B. & Mitchell, A., (1996). Growth of literacy engagement: Changes in motivations and skills during concept-oriented reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*, 306-332.
- Hobbs, D.E. & Schlichter, C.L. (1990). Talents Unlimited. In A. Costa (Ed.), *Developing minds (Vol. 2)*. (pp. 65-68). Alexandria, VI: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Johnson, A. (1996). Inference: A thinking skill to enhance learning and literacy. *Wisconsin State Reading Association Journal, 40*, 19-24.
- Johnson, A. & Graves, M. (1997). Scaffolding: A tool for enhancing the reading experiences of all students. *Text Journal of Reading, 3*, 31-37.

- Marzano, R. (1991). Tactics for thinking: A program for initiating the teaching of thinking. In A. Costa (Ed.), *Developing minds (Vol 2)* (pp. 65-68). Alexandria, VI; Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Perkins, D.N. (1986). Thinking frames. *Educational Leadership*, 42, 4-10.
- Pressley, M., Harris, K.R. & Marks, M.B. (1992). But good skill users are constructivists! *Educational Psychology Review*, 4, 3-31.
- Rabren, K. & Darch, C. (1996). The strategic comprehension behaviors of students with learning disabilities and general education students: Teachers' and students' perspectives. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 29, 172-180.
- Reutzel, D.R. & Cooter, R.B. (1996). *Teaching children to read*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall.
- Rosenblatt, L.M. (1983). *Literature as exploration* (4th ed.). New York: Modern Language Association.
- Zarillo, J. (1991). Theory becomes practice: Aesthetic teaching with literature. *The New Advocate*, 4, 221-234.

FIGURE 1: Comprehension Skills

Pre-Reading Comprehension skills

Preview/Overview

1. Look at the title and headings.
2. Read the first paragraph and last paragraph.
3. Read the article/chapter.

Web and Brainstorm

1. Look at the title and headings.
2. Create a web using the title/topics as a central node.
3. Using section headings as sub nodes.
4. Brainstorm on each sub nodes.
5. Read the article/chapter.
6. Add to and modify the original web.

During-Reading Comprehension skills

Paragraph Re-Read

1. Read each paragraph quickly.
2. Re-read to find important sentence or ideas.
3. Continue.

Read and Pause

1. Read a paragraph.
2. Pause and check. (Do I understand?)
3. Return or resume.

Post-Reading Comprehension skills

Article Re-Read

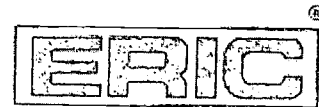
1. Read the article/chapter.
2. Re-read the article/chapter.
3. Note or record important ideas.

Sequencing

1. As you read, list important ideas.
2. After reading, arrange ideas in order of their importance.
3. Look for your own ideas to add.



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



CS 511 573

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: <u>Teaching Comprehension Skills</u>	
Author(s): <u>Andrew P. Johnson</u>	
Corporate Source:	Publication Date: <u>2002</u>

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

Level 1

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) and paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Signature: <u>A. Johnson</u>	Printed Name/Position/Title: <u>Dr. Andrew P. Johnson, Professor</u>	
Organization/Address: <u>MSU - Mankato</u> <u>313 Armstrong Hall</u> <u>Mankato, MN 56001</u>	Telephone: <u>507-389-5660</u>	FAX:
	E-Mail Address:	Date: <u>9-26-02</u>

Sign here →
please



(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:
Address:
Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:
Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: <http://ericfacility.org>