

READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES IN A REMEDIAL ELEMENTARY
CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The demand on teachers to help students improve reading comprehension is tremendous. Students are expected to use higher level thinking skills while answering questions. There are a vast amount of strategies that have been suggested to help improve reading comprehension. This review discusses four specific reading strategies that will be researched and implemented into one remedial elementary classroom. Based on the research and the reflections from the use of the strategies in my classroom, it is suggested that each strategy is helpful in improving reading comprehension in remedial students as well as in regular education students.

Chapter I- Introduction

Statement of the Problem:

Two of the basic goals of reading are to enable students to gain an understanding of the world and themselves, while developing strategies by which they can comprehend texts independently (Tierney & Readence, p 249). Some research has found that, although a great deal of time is spent testing comprehension, there is actually very little time spent teaching comprehension strategies (Beers, 2003). Although what is happening in the text may be explained to the students, research suggests we are able to teach students how to comprehend text. Direct instruction of reading strategies that improve comprehension may aid children to become stronger at comprehending text independently. Based on research supporting direct instruction, I aim to study how I can better help all my students grow as readers. This paper will focus on four specific reading strategies. The four strategies that I have chosen are (a) using graphic and semantic organizers, (b) questioning the text, (c) using prior knowledge, and (d) using think-alouds. As I teach these strategies in my remedial reading classes, I will identify the strengths and challenges of each and reflect on how the research can help improve my teaching and my students' learning.

Research Questions

Based on one teacher's experiences, what are the strengths and challenges of teaching four reading comprehension strategies in an elementary remedial reading program?

Definition of Terms

Comprehension. The National Reading Panel defines comprehension as: "a complex process... often viewed as 'the essence of reading.'" Reading comprehension is... intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader.

Meaning resides in the intentional, problem-solving, thinking processes of the reader that occur during an interchange with a text. The content of meaning is influenced by the text and by the reader's prior knowledge and experience that are brought to bear on it. Reading comprehension is the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text." (Reutzel & Cooter, 2007).

Direct Instruction. "The Direct Instruction approach attempts to control all the major variables that impact student learning through the placement and grouping of students into instructional groups, the rate and type of examples presented by the teacher, the wording that teachers use to teach specific concepts and skills, the frequency and type of review of material introduced, the assessment of students' mastery of material covered and the responses by teachers to students' attempts to learn the material." (Stockard & Engelmann, 2010)

Graphic and Semantic Organizers. "Visual or graphic displays show visual interrelationships of superordinate and subordinate ideas using spatial arrangements, geometric shapes, lines, and arrows to portray the content structure and demonstrate key relationships between concepts." (Ozmen, 2011)

Metacognition. "A higher order thinking process dealing with a) knowledge about cognition and b) regulation of cognition." (Ghaith & Obeid, 2004)

Think-Alouds. "The conscious disclosure of thought processes while reading, has been proclaimed as an effective technique in helping readers acquire a variety of metacognitive comprehension strategies such as evaluating understanding, predicting and verifying, and self-questioning before, during, and after reading." (Ghaith & Obeid, 2004) "Teachers verbalize aloud each facet of a comprehension strategy by explaining, step by step, the thought processes

they used to generate a main idea, determine the meaning of the word through context, and so forth.” (Hitchcock, Dimino, Kurki, Wilkins, & Gersten, 2011)

Methodology

In this literature review, I will discuss the potential value of using direct instruction of reading comprehension strategies to help elementary remedial students to improve their comprehension skills. I will teach four reading comprehension strategies in my remedial program. The four strategies that I have chosen are (a) using graphic and semantic organizers, (b) questioning the text, (c) using prior knowledge, and (d) using think-alouds.

First, I will discuss the strategies from the view of educational experts, the history of each strategy as well as how the strategies are to be taught will be included in this section. In addition, I will share the effectiveness of each strategy as researched by the educational experts.

Next, I will include lesson plans in which I directly teach each strategy. The lesson plans will include the objective, how I will teach the strategy, and how I plan to evaluate the students’ comprehension growth. Also, I will share how the students respond to each strategy.

Finally, I will share my overall experience in teaching each strategy. I will discuss the strengths as well as the challenges of each. Based on my reflections from teaching the strategies, I will make suggestions on future research.

Summary

This review will discuss findings from educational experts on four specific reading strategies that focus on comprehension. Specific lesson plans that I have used in the remedial classes that support the direct instruction of the strategies will be included in the review. In addition I will share strengths and challenges that come from directly teaching the four specific strategies within my Title I remedial classes.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

The Importance of Comprehension

New studies in reading are showing that one out of five students has significant difficulty in reading acquisition (Hausheer, Hansen, & Dumas, 2011). Beers (2003) states

“Comprehension is both a product and a process, something that requires purposeful, strategic effort on the reader’s part- anticipating the direction of the text (predicting), seeing the action of the text (visualizing), contemplating and then correcting whatever confusions we encounter (clarifying), connecting what’s in the text to what’s in our mind to make an educated guess about what’s going on (inference) (p. 45-46).

As a result, teachers are finding that they must spend more time in explicit instruction to help students improve. Ness (2011) shares research that has shown comprehension strategies become automatic after eight weeks of continual instruction (p. 98). Unfortunately, many teachers struggle with teaching comprehension because they are unsure of the best practices and the difficulty in finding programs that are research-based (Dole & Liang, 2006). In a study observing 3,000 minutes of classroom instruction in two elementary schools, researchers found only 25% of the language arts instruction was direct instruction of comprehension strategies. Although the scope was a limitation, the study suggests teachers need to be instructed on strategies that can be used in the classroom to help their students to improve reading comprehension. Reading comprehension strategies can be taught to students of all levels and in all subjects and allow students to be given tools to help them to overcome reading obstacles that they may come across.

Using Think-Alouds

Think-alouds are a strategy in which the reader can make the internal dialogue about a text observable (Walker, 2005). As teachers are able to assess what the student is thinking while reading, they are able to prompt self-questions that can help students to better comprehend texts. Many researchers have studied the importance of using think-alouds in the classroom and one factor on which researchers agree is the importance of teacher modeling to help students learn to use this strategy. Several of the researchers also recommend the use of a self-evaluation sheet or a chart to help organize the thought process (Wilhelm, 2001).

Walker (2005) suggested in Figure 1 and Figure 2 the use of a self-evaluation sheet for students to use as they read. This includes “I made a prediction”, “I used information from the text”, and “I used information that I already know” (p. 688). While good readers are able to use think-alouds easily, struggling readers as well as new readers must make a conscious effort and must practice this strategy on a regular basis in order for it to become automatic. To help his students use this strategy Wilhelm developed a chart to help students to visualize the strategies that they have used while reading and to monitor their think alouds. Students check off whether the strategy was used and they make comments about how they used it or how they could have used it better.

FIGURE 1
Self-evaluation sheet

When I read,	Not at all	A few times	Sometimes	Most times
I made predictions.				
I used information from the text.				
I used information that I already knew.				
I connected information to see how it fit.				
I said "Oops" and revised a prediction when it didn't fit.				
I said "I knew it" when I was on the right track.				
Today my reading was _____ because _____.				

FIGURE 2
Self-questioning strategy

Modeling predictions

Self-question: "How do I begin?"

Response: "I need to predict what the author is going to say. A good strategy is to look at the title. From the title I predict that...." The teacher models using the title of the story to think aloud about how he or she made a prediction and at the same time writes "I predict" on the middle of the chalkboard.

Modeling sources of information

Self-question 1: "How do I check predictions?"

Response: "To check my prediction, I can think about what I already know or I can look for hints from the author." The teacher writes "I already know that" and "Hints from the author" on the chalkboard.

Self-question 2: "I wonder how it fits together?"

Response: "It fits because I know..., and the author says..., which can connect to support my prediction." The teacher demonstrates how he or she connects the two sources together to support a prediction.

Modeling monitoring

This self-question has three distinctive responses. Usually the teacher uses three different text segments to illustrate them.

Self-question: "Does my prediction make sense?"

Response 1: "Oops, that doesn't make sense. I need to check my thinking. So far, I'm on the right track with...but confused about...." As the teacher models this strategy, he or she writes "Oops" on the right side of the chalkboard. The teacher models self-talk related to making a mistake by saying "It's OK to make a mistake. I can change my prediction as I get more information. Now, I predict...."

Response 2: "Hmmm. Sometimes I am just not sure. Maybe it's.... Or maybe it's...." The teacher models being tentative when predicting by writing "Hmmm" on the middle of the chalkboard.

Response 3: "I knew it. That sure fits. So far I'm on the right track." The teacher models confirming the prediction as he or she writes "I knew it" on the right side of the chalkboard.

One study that researched the effectiveness of using the think-aloud strategy included 32 eighth-grade learners enrolled in a private school (Ghaith & Obeid, 2004). The 16 participants in the control group received regular reading instruction whereas the experimental group received direct instruction of the think-aloud strategy. Students in the control group began by observing

teacher modeling of the strategy then, as they became more comfortable with the strategy, they received instruction while practicing the strategy. Students in the experimental group were asked to use the think-aloud strategy on a given comprehension test. The study showed that there was a significant relationship between mastery level of think-alouds and overall reading. The study concluded with an interview of the students. Most of the students shared that they found the think-aloud strategy to be very beneficial to them and that they would use it in the future.

Morgan and York (2009) created a spin on the traditional strategy of think-alouds through the use of role playing. They discuss how students can gain knowledge of different cultures and the world around us through the use of exposing children to multicultural children's literature. This idea broadens students' views and helps them to have more empathy towards others. For this to be successful though, students must be taught how to think through the eyes of the characters and it requires repeated practice. For students to think like the characters, Morgan and York recommend that they role play using the main characters using juxtaposition, or looking at two things next to each other. The teacher must carefully select a story which leads to questions and will allow for students to create different perspectives. The authors caution the readers to select an authentic text that is free from stereotypes and also remind the teacher to be unbiased when role-playing or prompting questions. The questions that the authors use are: "Who am I?", "What are my experiences in life?", and "How did I choose to solve the problem in the story?" (p. 308). As the teacher goes through these questions looking at both sides, students are able to gain a broader view of the situation as well as getting into the heads and hearts of the characters. It is important for students to be able to empathize with others who are not the same as them and who have different viewpoints.

Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers, Including Story Maps

One of the main purposes of reading is to gain information or meaning of the text.

Students with learning disabilities or those who struggle with reading have a difficult time with this because they have a harder time using schema and making connections with the text (Gardill & Jitendra, 1999). Story maps are a visual tool that allows students to connect their thoughts to important elements in the text. Also described as an “attempt to show the students a path through a story” and that “It provides a set of guiding steps to lead the learner through a complex set of circumstances” (Smith, 1990, p. 308).

One study consisted of six middle school students who had been identified as learning disabled (Gardill & Jitendra, 1999). During their 40-50 minute classroom instruction time, researchers worked with the six students in using a story map with their text. The researchers began by modeling how to use the advanced story map which consisted of identifying problems or conflicts, identifying main characters, the setting, how the problem was solved, and the theme of the story. As the lessons progressed, the researchers led students in filling in the story maps that went along with the classroom story. Finally, students filled out the story maps on their own. Students were then quizzed on the reading material for which they had completed the story maps. A retelling of the story was also included in the quiz. All six students showed a significant growth in their reading comprehension-- up to a 55% increase from their baseline score--as a result of using advanced story maps to accompany their texts. The quality of the story retells also improved for the majority of the students within the research study. Although each student felt that the story maps helped them to better understand the material that they were reading, they did not care for the time that it took to fill out the story map. The researchers did suggest that the small size of the study could be a limitation and that a study on a larger scale would be beneficial.

Another larger study included 102 fifth graders from two elementary schools (Reutzel, 1985). Students were both given the task of reading the same narrative story. One group used a story map to help them to organize the story and they used it to review for the quiz. The second group was told to reread the story and to use the discussion questions to help them to prepare. Reutzel found that the students who used the story maps remembered more about the story and did better on the quizzes. The visual aid helped the students to improve their reading comprehension.

Research has shown that recalling information from memory is difficult for students with intellectual disabilities. One study looked at the effects of using a partial graphic organizer for students, as opposed to traditional note taking (Beth, Hsieh, Katayama, Odom, Robinson, & Vanderveen, 2006). The participants in the study included 114 undergraduate students who were enrolled in one of two educational psychology classes. One group was assigned to study for tests through the use of the notes that they took in class. The second group was given a graphic organizer that had some of the notes already written. Students were given a quiz each week to monitor their ability to use the notes to help them to do well on the quiz. Each week the students in the partial graphic organizer group had less information provided for them on their graphic organizer. By the end of the 15-week study the students were only given a graphic organizer that contained one column heading. Each week the students who used the graphic organizer scored higher on the quizzes regardless how much of the information was provided for them.

The authors discussed that the use of graphic organizers is ideal because they can be used by any level and in any subject (Beth, et al., 2006). Also, creating graphic organizers is a fairly simple task that can be done by most teachers using a computer or by hand.

As teachers are identifying students who would benefit from the use of a graphic organizer or story map, one research article suggested eight profiles of students in which five of the eight profiles the recommendation of a graphic organizer or a story map was given (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2006).

The first profile was described as the "Fuzzy Thinkers" (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2006, p. 51). These students are vague in their responses to questions and are not able to give many details in their response. The use of graphic organizers allows this group of students to better express their ideas through the support of a visual aid.

The "Left Fielders" is a group of students who tends to give responses that do not seem to relate to the story at all (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2006, p. 52). Although their responses are given with confidence, the use of a story map can help this group of students to find success as they are able to see more clearly where their connections have come from.

"Quiz Contestants", students who use their background experiences to come up with an answer that may not have anything to do with the text, benefit from the use of anticipation guides as a graphic organizer (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2006, p. 53). Like the "Quiz Contestants", the "Politicians" who try to sell you their thoughts using slogans and phrases benefit from graphic organizers (p. 54). Both types work well with small group discussions with their graphic organizers to allow the students to make the necessary connections to the text.

Finally, "Dodgers" are students who change the question to fit their thought process (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2006, p. 54). At first it may seem as though they have given a sufficient answer, through closer analysis it is clear that they have not answered the question that had been asked of them. Story maps are beneficial for this type of student because it forces them

to stay focused on the text and puts the information into a visual aid that the students can better connect with.

Graphic organizers including story maps are a way for students to see the material visually. Teachers can be flexible to meet the needs of the students by selecting the amount of information the students will be given to begin with and how much of the organizers that the students will be required to fill in on their own. Also, graphic organizers are a strong tool that can be used across the curriculum.

Questioning the Text/ Author

Stephanie Harvey (1990) discusses the importance of students questioning the text in order to improving reading comprehension (p. 16). The purpose of the article is to inform readers of the steps needed to take in order to successfully use the questioning the text strategy. To help students to understand how to question the text, Harvey models a verbal think aloud for students to be able to hear what her questions and thoughts are about the text. Questioning the text allows students to become better connected with the text and encourages students to read on. The first step is to select the text. It was recommended to begin with a picture book that will allow for more questions, yet is short enough to finish in time to allow for proper discussions. As the teacher introduces the strategy and models, students should have their notebooks in hand to write their own thoughts as well as ideas they want to remember from the reader. As the teacher models the think aloud process, sticky notes are placed on the pages in order to remind students of where their thoughts were and also to be able to go back in the end to answer questions and to see if the predictions were correct. The final step is for students to participate in guided practice. During this time students are asked to write their own thoughts in their notebook to share with

the class. As students begin to have inner conversations, they are able to understand the author more as well as the meaning of what they are writing.

At times the teacher may need to prompt the students in the types of questions that should be asked to help lead the conversation. As students struggle with not understanding the point that the author is trying to get across, one author suggests that students learn to view textbooks as ideas written by fallible authors (McKeown, Beck, & Worthy, 1993). All write their own thoughts in a way that they feel will come across accurately, but the point is not always clear to each reader. When students look at a confusing text and see it as a fault of the author and not because they are a poor readers, they have more confidence to better understand the material. The goal in this strategy is to take confusing or unclear texts and decide how to make them more understandable. Students work together and ask “What is the author trying to tell you?” and “What would you want to say instead?” (p. 562). Researchers found that even the struggling readers found great success with this strategy. Although viewed as poor readers, some are found to be strong thinkers based on this strategy. It seemed that the students enjoyed discussing in small groups their take on what the author meant and how they can reword it to make it clearer. As students make a deeper connection to what the author is meaning, the overall comprehension of the text is more likely to stick with the reader because of the connections.

Using Prior Knowledge

Unfortunately, authors often assume or take for granted that all students have a certain level of background knowledge (Maria, 1989). Often though, this is not the case for disadvantaged students that may come from a low socioeconomic status. To help these students succeed, the teacher must help them to recall necessary background knowledge that they do have and they must help students to build background knowledge when what they have is not

sufficient to meet the needs of the text. The main way that the author suggests to help build background knowledge is through the use of group knowledge. Simply telling the student the information is not enough. Although the prior knowledge of one student may not be enough, the collaboration of a group may provide a wealth of information. Students share connections that they have with the group and throughout the process, the students who are lacking in the background knowledge are now able to make more connections. For this strategy to be a success, the teacher must plan by carefully selecting texts and finding the central ideas from the text. If students are unfamiliar with the central idea, the teacher may need to have a backup plan on how to revise the central idea to something that the students may have more background information about. As students work together their background knowledge is grown and their ability to make connections to the text is more likely. Like all strategies, the teacher must first model the strategy and students must have regular practice using the strategy to help it to become automatic.

The researchers share that there is not one strategy that is better than the others. Teachers must get to know their students' strengths and weaknesses in order to select the strategy that works best for them. I will implement each strategy into my own lessons to see if my students show an improvement in comprehension.

Chapter III- Synthesis

In this section I will share what I have found to be the strengths and weaknesses of each comprehension strategy discussed in this review based on my classroom. I have taught several lessons which focused on each strategy to my students. The lessons are included in this section. I modeled each strategy to my classes. As my students became more comfortable with the strategies they used them on their own. Students also gave me feedback of their thoughts on each strategy and explained why they would or would not use the strategy in the future.

Think-Alouds

Think-alouds have been identified as a quick strategy that teachers of all ages and content can use to help improve comprehension (Walker, 2005). Another strength is that students are able to hear what strong readers are thinking while reading through teacher modeling. I did not find any weaknesses suggested by researchers.

Lesson 1.

Lesson Title: Introducing the Think-Aloud Strategy

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: October 14, 2011

Grade: 5th

Objective: The students will learn how to use the think-aloud strategy to help improve their reading comprehension.

Materials Needed:

Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

A transparency of chapter three broken down by paragraph

Lesson Steps:

1. "One way to help improve our comprehension, or what we remember about a story, is by making connections to the text and by creating mental pictures in our mind. If I am thinking in my mind about the text and about what the text reminds me of though, how can you know what I am thinking? I could tell you what I am thinking. Today we are going to learn a new strategy called a think-aloud. A think-aloud is when you write down or tell someone the thoughts that you are having while reading. The thoughts can be as simple as saying that you do or do not agree with what the character is saying, it could be that I am relating to the author based on something that I experienced, or I can ask questions of the author. The neat thing about this strategy though, is that it lets you see into my mind while I am reading which will help you to improve how you relate to the text. I will also be able to know your thoughts which will allow me to better help you better comprehend the text. We will continue to read Because of Winn Dixie beginning in chapter 3. As we read the story I am going to share my thoughts with you. If you have a thought to share at any time I would love to hear it."

"I started in on Winn-Dixie right away, trying to clean him up. First, I gave him a bath. *I would give my dog a bath in our bathtub. He used to always drink the soapy water and would always end up throwing up after the bath and it would be all bubbly. I used the garden hose and some baby shampoo. I wonder if the water was really cold?* He stood still for it, but I could tell he didn't like it. *Maybe he didn't like it because it was so cold.* He looked insulted, and the whole time, he didn't show me his teeth or wag his tail once. After he was all washed and dried, I brushed him good. I used my own hairbrush and worked real hard at all the knots and patches of fur stuck together. He didn't mind being brushed. *I am surprised that he didn't mind being brushed if he had so many knots in his hair, I think that this would be painful.* He wiggled his back, like it felt pretty good. *Opal*

is taking such good care of Winn-Dixie. She is acting like the mother that she wishes that she had. (DiCamillo, 2000, p. 20)

Reflection: The students were very attentive during this lesson. They wanted to know all of my thoughts about the text. I did have to stop them from going off on rabbit trails with my thoughts though. It was easy for them to get sidetracked. With practice though, I think this will get better. My students were very quiet at first, not wanting to share their ideas. I had the perfect opportunity to get them involved though when I read the line that Opal used her own hairbrush and toothbrush on Winn-Dixie. Each one of my students scrunched up their faces in disgust. I immediately asked them what they were thinking and what mental picture was in their head. They felt more relaxed when I was able to help them share their thoughts. When I questioned them about the chapter they seemed to have an easier time remember the content because they were able to connect it to one of our thoughts. The students shared that they are excited to use this strategy again.

Lesson 2.

Lesson Title: Using Think- Alouds to Boost Comprehension

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: October 17, 2011

Grade: 5th

Objective: Students will use the think-aloud strategy to be able to better comprehend chapter

four in Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Materials Needed:

Because of Winn Dixie

A photo copy of chapter four in the book so that students can write their thoughts next to the text

Lesson Steps:

1. The lesson will begin by reviewing the think-aloud strategy. I will model the strategy by reading the first paragraph in chapter four of Because of Winn Dixie. As I read the paragraph I will share my thoughts aloud with the students.

"One", said the preacher. We were sitting on the couch and Winn-Dixie was sitting between us. Winn-Dixie had already decided that he liked the couch a lot. *I don't like going to houses where the dogs are in control. There have been times when I have tried to move a dog to sit down and they won't budge and they have looked at me like I am crazy to even thinking of moving them from their spot.* "One," said the preacher again. Winn-Dixie looked at him kind of hard. "Your mama was funny. She could make just about anybody laugh." *I wonder how she made them laugh. Did she tell jokes, was she sarcastic, or did she act silly? I hope they tell us more about her sense of humor.*

(DiCamillo, 2000, p. 26)

2. Students will be given time to read the first two pages of chapter four. As they develop mental images of the text or connections they will write them down on the copy provided to them. The students will be encouraged to give specific details of their thoughts to help enhance the connections.

3. As the class rereads chapter four aloud the students will share the connections and the images that were made.

4. The class will continue the think-aloud process with the rest of chapter four. When the group has finished, we will review their think-alouds as before in step three.

Reflection:

With this being the first time that the students used this strategy on their own, they were hesitant to share what they wrote. I could tell that they were nervous about doing the strategy wrong or having a thought that was silly. As they began to share I could see the students becoming more confident with what they wrote. Most of what the students wrote consisted of a picture that they saw when they read a sentence, or what their thoughts were about the characters. In the next lesson I will model the strategy again with deeper thoughts of how to connect my background knowledge to the text. Also, I will model more questions of the text to help form a better connection to the author's thought process. When I asked the students what they thought about the strategy they all agreed that they liked the strategy and that they thought that it was neat to hear what everyone was thinking.

Strategy Summary

I agree with the researchers that this strategy is very helpful in helping students to improve their reading comprehension. As students became more comfortable they were eager to share their thoughts. The lessons did not take a great deal of preparation and students benefited greatly from it. The responses to comprehension questions improved as students were able to connect the questions to earlier thoughts and mental pictures. The fifth grade students also shared that they enjoyed using this strategy and would continue to use it in all of their subject areas.

One weakness that I found was that the students tend to go into side conversations when using this strategy. For example, when I shared my thoughts about bathing my dog, they wanted to know what kind of dog I had, his name, and how long I had him for. I had to direct the students back to the story several times.

Graphic and Semantic Organizers, Including Story Maps

Graphic organizers are visual aids that can help students to better comprehend text (Smith, 1990). There are many types of graphic organizers that can be used across the curriculum and with any age. The amount of information that is given to students on the graphic organizer can also vary depending on the level needed by the students.

Lesson 1.

Lesson Title: Using a Graphic Organizer to Help Improve Comprehension

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: October 23, 2011

Grade: 5th

Objective: Students will use a "cluster web" graphic organizer to help students to better understand and comprehend the main characters in Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Materials Needed:

Because of Winn Dixie

Graphic Organizer

Transparency of the Graphic Organizer

Lesson Steps:

1. "Today we are going to review the main characters that we have met so far in our book. It is important to better understand our characters so that we can relate to what the author is trying to say through them."
2. Explain to the students that the center circle is where we write the topic of the organizer. The second layer of circles is where we write the main characters' name. Finally, the outer circle is where we write details about the main characters.

3. As a group students will complete the graphic organizer based on the four main characters that we have met so far in the book.

4. Once completed, explain to students that as we learn more about our characters, or if we meet new characters we will add circles to the organizer.

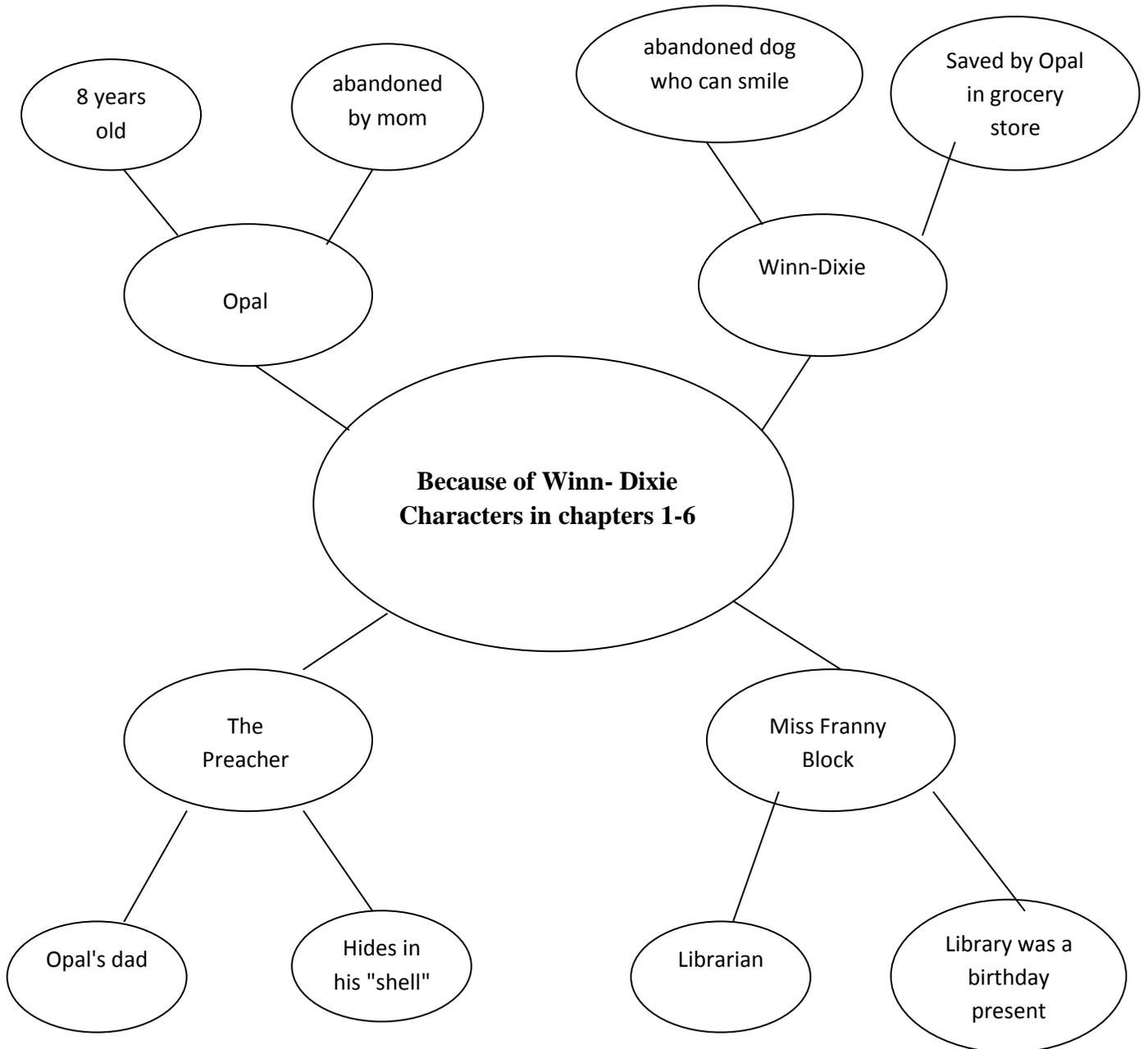
Reflection: The students worked well with this type of graphic organizer. Many of the students drew additional circles to add more details about the characters. They shared that they were excited to add more characters to their organizer.

Topic: Because of Winn-Dixie Characters

Name _____ Date _____

Cluster/Word Web 1

Write your topic in the center circle and details in the smaller circles. Add circles as needed.



Lesson 2.

Lesson Title: Using a Story Map to Help Improve Comprehension

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: October 19, 2011

Grade: 5th

Objective: Students will use a story map to help students to describe the beginning of Because of Winn Dixie by Kate DiCamillo

Materials Needed:

Because of Winn Dixie

Story Map

Transparency of the Story Map

Lesson Steps:

1. " Today we are going to review the first two chapters in Because of Winn-Dixie. Who can tell me how the story began? (Allow one of the students to tell me that it began when Opal found Winn-Dixie in the grocery store) This beginning act will change Opal's life and is the basis of the rest of the story. We are going to use a story map to help us to sort out how the beginning of the book to help us to understand what the author is sharing with us."
2. Walk through each step of the Story Map together.

Reflection: The students struggled with the difference between the "problem" and the "plot/events." They felt that it was very similar and they were unsure of how to break it apart. I will have to focus on this more the next time that we use the story map.

Name _____ Date _____

Story Map 1

Write notes in each section

Setting:	Time:	Place:
Naomi, Florida	Summertime	Winn-Dixie Grocery Store



Characters:

Opal- young girl who recently moved to Naomi.

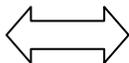
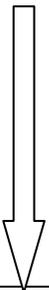
Winn-Dixie- Abandoned dog running loose in grocery store

Preacher- Opal's father, he spends most of his time writing sermons. He does not talk about Opal's mom



Problem:

Opal says that Winn-Dixie is her dog.



Plot/Events:

After Opal tells the store manager that the dog is hers to save him she realizes that she has to take him home to the preacher. She lives in a trailer park that does not allow animals so she knows that this could be a problem.

Resolution:

Opal's father has told her that they must take care of the less fortunate. Opal tells the preacher that she has found someone less fortunate who needs a home. At first Opal's father would not allow Winn-Dixie to stay. Winn-Dixie smiled at the preacher which made Opal's dad like him. The preacher agrees to let Winn-Dixie stay as long as he is quiet.

Strategy Summary

I found the graphic organizers to be very beneficial to my students. Their comprehension scores improved a great deal when a graphic organizer was used. Through research I also found a plethora of organizers that can cover many aspects of comprehension (see for e.g. www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizeredhelper.com/teachers/graphic_organizers.htm).

. The students seemed to like having a visual to help them to organize their thoughts on the story.

One weakness of using a graphic organizer is that it is very time consuming. If a general template is being used it is easier, but to meet specific needs of a story it takes more time to develop a template for the organizer. Several of the students complained that there was too much writing involved with the graphic organizer. Although there was more writing involved, the students still agreed that the graphic organizers were helpful to them.

Questioning the Text/ Author:

Often times as students read they get distracted. Although they are reading the words, their mind is thinking about other things. Questioning the text or the author helps students to continue to think about what they are reading (Harvey, 1990). Often times many of the questions that readers have while reading will be answered later on in the text. This is not always the case though, occasionally additional research may be needed to find answers to the questions. There are also times when the questions will remain unanswered. This strategy is helpful because it can be used in all types of texts.

Lesson 1.

Lesson Title: Questioning the Text/Author

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: November 1, 2011

Grade: 4th

Objective: The students will improve their comprehension by questioning the text and the author.

Materials Needed: Multiple Skills Series Story

Lesson Steps:

1. Explain to the students that careful readers ask questions when they read. As they ask questions it helps them to understand what they are reading. Asking questions keeps you thinking about what the author is telling us so we stay focused.
2. Begin to read the text aloud. Share with the students the questions that I am thinking about in reference to the text. As I share my questions or when a student shares a question write the question on a sticky note. Place the sticky note in the text where we had the question.
3. When a question is answered mark the sticky note with an "A" to show that it has been answered. Place the sticky note where the answer was found.
4. As students have time for guided practice remind them that questioning what we are reading helps us to remember what we have read.

Reflection: The students responded well to this strategy. They particularly liked it when one of the questions was answered. The students were amazed by how much they remembered about the story because they were constantly thinking about the questions and seeing if the questions were answered. I plan to spend more time on this strategy because it seems like it is one that the students could easily use on their own in their regular classroom.

Strategy Summary

As my students became more familiar with this strategy I did see their comprehension scores improve. It took time for the students to begin to question the text in ways that would be

beneficial to them. At first they seemed to ask questions that were silly or did not seem to be relevant to the story. With more practice, I am confident that the students will improve the types of questions that are being asked. I found that one of the greatest strengths of this strategy was that students could easily use this in any subject without adding a great deal of additional work. Whereas the graphic organizer requires more work from the students, questioning the text does not add additional work to their load. As a result, I have found that the students prefer to use this strategy than the graphic organizer when given the choice.

A weakness that I saw in this strategy with my students is that it is more difficult for students to know how much is enough to help them. The graphic organizer gives the students a clearer picture of what is expected from them. For example, each box of the diagram must be filled out in order to receive full credit. When questioning the text, it is harder to set a number of questions that the students must ask in order to comprehend the necessary material.

Using Prior Knowledge

As students activate prior knowledge before reading, they are preparing themselves for what they are about to read. Accessing prior knowledge allows students to get into the right mindset about what they are going to read. Prior knowledge helps students to understand the vocabulary that might be used in the text as well as help them to make predictions about the text. Students are able to have more confidence about what they are about to read when they feel as though they are already partially connected to the text (Maria, 1989).

If students lack prior knowledge about the subject area, then they may not see as much success in the comprehension of the text. Students can share their personal experiences or knowledge with the information to help those who are less familiar with the topic. If all of the students seem to have limited prior knowledge about the subject, the teacher may need to take

the time to help build background knowledge through other texts; his/her own experiences or knowledge, or the use of other resources.

Lesson 1.

Lesson Title: Using Prior Knowledge to Help Improve Comprehension

Teacher: Thea Leddy

Lesson Date: November 15, 2011

Grade: 3rd

Objective: Students will use a K-W-L chart to activate prior knowledge about bears to help improve reading comprehension.

Materials Needed:

K-W-L Chart

Bears by Emma Helbrough

Lesson Steps:

1. “Today we are going to read a book about bears. When I say the word “bear” what do you think of? Before we read the story we are going to use a K-W-L chart to think about what we already know about bears, and what we want to learn about bears. After we read the story we will write down some things that we learned about bears from the story.”
*Hand out the K-W-L charts
2. “Have any of you ever used a K-W-L chart before? The ‘K’ stand for what do I know about bears. I want you to take a few minutes to brainstorm and write down everything that you know about bears. This could be types of bears, where bears live, and what bears eat. Absolutely anything that you know about bears can be written down. This strategy is called activating prior knowledge. If we think about what we already know about the

subject, we will be able to better connect with the text and remember more about what we have read. It also helps us with vocabulary which will help us to read better.” *Have the students share what they know about bears.

3. “The next box is the ‘W’ box. This is what we want to learn. You both know a lot about bears, but what is there that you hope to learn from this book? You might know something general about bears, but what is something specific that you might want to learn? Take a few minutes and write them down on our chart.” *Discuss what the students want to learn.
4. Read the book Bears to the students
5. “Wow, I learned a lot of neat things about bears. Now we look at the last box, the ‘L’ box. This is where we write what we have learned. Think back to the story. Did either of you learn something that you had wanted to? Or what were some additional facts that you learned? I want you to write down some things that you learned.” *Share what they learned about bears.

Reflection:

I was really surprised with how well my students did using this strategy. There are two boys in the class and they are not strong writers, so I was curious how they would do with so much writing. One boy filled the entire chart up and was disappointed that he couldn’t write more. Both boys had completely different things written down about what they knew about bears. One boy focused more about the hunting of bears and how they can be used as wall hangings or rugs. The other boy talked about the types of bears and what they ate.

At first the boys struggled with thinking of some things that they wanted to learn about bears. After giving them some suggestions, they were both able to write several things that they wanted to learn.

The book that I chose was perfect for this activity in the way that it shared a lot of new and interesting facts for the students about bears. At the end, the students were both so excited to write down and share what they learned. It was encouraging to see them both be so excited about reading and talking about the book. The students asked when we could do a K-W-L chart again, so I knew that they found it to be helpful and interesting.

Strategy Summary

The K-W-L chart is a strategy that the students in my Title I classes found to be very beneficial. The strategy was used in each of my grades, first through fifth. The younger students had a more difficult time writing their thoughts so we adjusted it to be more of a classroom discussion.

When students were asked questions about the text following filling out the K-W-L chart they were able to remember more about the text than when they only read it. Although it took more time to use the chart, I found that we had to spend less time in going over incorrect answers of the students.

I was surprised that the majority of my students had never seen a K-W-L chart before. Several of the students asked if they could make their own chart for their classes to help them. After seeing the success of this strategy with my Title I students, I plan to encourage the other classroom teachers to use K-W-L charts as well as other activating prior knowledge activities with their students.

Each strategy discussed in this chapter has both strengths and weaknesses that need to be assessed. It is critical that the teacher selects the strategy that will work best with their students and the text selected. Also, although the strategies have been looked at pertaining to remedial students, each strategy could also be beneficial in the regular education classroom.

Chapter IV: Conclusion

This review presented the findings of many researchers on the topic of strategies that help improve reading comprehension. Specifically, this review presented research on four reading comprehension strategies to be used in elementary remedial programs.

Recommendation

Today students face many challenges in reading. One area that many students struggle in is reading comprehension. Based on the research provided in this review, it is suggested that each of the four reading comprehension strategies, (a) think-alouds, (b) questioning the text/author, (c) using prior knowledge, and (d) using graphic or semantic organizers, can be beneficial to remedial students. Teachers must know the strengths and weaknesses of their students to help them to select the strategy that will be most helpful to them for a particular text.

The research also showed that each strategy can be used across the curriculum and at any age level. As a result, the strategies are not only beneficial to remedial students, but all students could benefit from the strategies. Teachers must be trained in the use of the strategies though for them to be able to correctly model them to their students. Also, as teachers see success in their remedial students after using the strategies they may be more inclined to use the strategies in their classrooms.

One way that teachers can implement the strategy of questioning the text and questioning the author is through the use of the "Question-Answer Relationship" (QAR). QAR helps teachers and students to use specific language to discuss processes of reading comprehension that are more difficult to explain (Raphael & Au, 2005). Students are taught the types of questions that there are and how to develop a plan to find answers to the specific types of questions (Cortese, 2003).

Several of the strategies discussed were found to be time consuming for the teacher as well as for the students. Although this is the case, these strategies have been found to help the students to improve. It is critical that teachers take the time to plan the strategies carefully for students to have success. As students become more familiar with the strategies, they will take less time to complete because of automaticity. Also, strategies such as using graphic organizers can be adapted to meet the time constraints or the needs of the students. For example, the teacher may find that it is necessary to provide more information on the graphic organizer to help eliminate the time needed to fill out the graphic organizer.

Areas for Further Research

Although a great deal of research has been done on the four strategies discussed, there is always additional research needed to help support the use of the strategy. Also, larger sample sizes allows for less errors to occur.

For my remedial students I plan to continue to use the strategies with them to see improvement of reading comprehension over an extended period of time. In addition to using the strategies in my classes, I plan to encourage the regular education teachers in my building to use the strategies with their students. I will train the teachers how to model the strategies for the students and will help develop ways to use the strategies with the district's curriculum.

Summary

This review presented four reading comprehension strategies for elementary students. Based on the findings of these studies the reviewer recommends the use of each strategy in elementary remedial classrooms as well as regular education classrooms. Further research will help identify other ways to use these strategies with the students as well as additional reading comprehension strategies that can be beneficial to students.

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