READING 1: OAKHILL DRIVE ROUND TERM 1, 2022

EFFECTIVE COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION: This reading is an extract from Chapter 5 of the book *Strategies that Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding, Engagement and Building Knowledge Grades K-8*, Stephanie Harvey and Anne Goudvis, Revised 2017. It focuses on explicit instruction through the gradual release of responsibility, classroom tone and assessment of comprehension.

Effective Comprehension Instruction: Teaching, Tone, and Assessment

Anne closed Allan Baillie's *Rebel* after reading the last page out loud to a group of eighth graders. This clever picture book, about the courageous response of a group of rural Burmese peasants to a dictatorial military strongman, was one of her favorites. She glanced up at the clock and noticed the time slipping away. She really wanted to confer with the kids, and she couldn't wait to read their responses to this compelling story. Feeling pressed for time, she asked the kids to divide a sheet in half and mark one column What the Text Is About and the next column What the Text Makes Me Think About. She had found this form useful in the past to get at children's deeper thinking. Although she had never introduced the form to this group, it appeared to be self-explanatory.

As the students returned to their tables to respond on this form, Anne sat down at one table and began to confer with Jasmine. Others at the table soon joined in, and a lively book discussion ensued. The kids brimmed with questions and

comments. With Anne present, they talked about what really went on in the story, where it took place, who these people were, and why they were fighting.

As she began to construct meaning from the discussion, Jasmine wrote the following in the first column: "This was about some people in Burma who used to be free and now were under the control of a bad government and an even worse general. The people rebelled in a surprising way." "Great thinking," Anne commented to Jasmine. In the second column, Jasmine wrote that the book reminded her of stories her grandfather had told about Vietnam. Anne felt pleased with Jasmine's summary and viable connection. She left the table with Jasmine writing about her grandfather's Vietnam experience and her table group writing about all kinds of things.

The bell rang and Anne collected the forms as kids filed out the door. Her heart sank as she paged through them. With the exception of the kids at Jasmine's table and a few very prolific writers who always filled entire pages regardless of the instruction, most of the forms stared blankly at her, hardly a word written in either column. She knew the form couldn't be at fault; it had worked effectively in the past. As Anne pondered the disappointing results of her instruction, she realized that she had once again made a familiar mistake.

Almost every time she reflected on why a certain lesson had been ineffective, she concluded that it was because of a lack of explicit instruction. She either hadn't modeled explicitly enough what she was trying to do or she hadn't given her students enough time to practice what she had shown them. If she had modeled how to use this form on the document camera rather than giving a series of directions, she suspected, things would have gone quite differently.

The next time Anne saw Steph, she described the debacle. Steph could only smile knowingly. She herself had repeatedly told her own kids that it was okay to make a mistake as long as they didn't make the same mistake over and over. But when it came to delivering instruction, she, too, continued to make the same mistake over and over. Like Anne, whenever Steph cut corners on modeling, her instruction suffered.

Don't surrender to the clock. It takes time to show kids how, but it is time well spent. When it comes to instruction, it is nearly impossible to be too explicit.

Effective Comprehension Instruction

Teaching kids to comprehend means we show them how to construct meaning when they read. Strategy instruction is all about teaching the reader, not merely the reading. Comprehension instruction is most effective when teachers do the following:

- Teach with the end in mind
- Plan instruction that is responsive to the individual needs of students
- Model their own use of comprehension strategies over time
- Remind students that the purpose for using a strategy is to construct meaning and engage in the text
- Articulate how thinking helps readers better understand what they read

- View strategies as a means to an end with the goal of building a repertoire of thinking strategies
- Model their oral, written, and artistic responses to the text
- Gradually release responsibility for using strategies to the students, always moving them toward independent reading and thinking
- Provide opportunities for guided and independent practice
- Show students how comprehension strategies apply in a variety of texts, genres, and contexts
- Help students notice how strategies intersect and work in conjunction with one another
- Build in large amounts of time for actual text reading by the students
- Make sure students have many opportunities to talk to each other about their reading
- Provide opportunities for students to respond by writing and drawing
- Take time to observe and confer directly with students and keep records of those observations and conferences to assess progress and inform instruction
- Use student work and talk to assess past instruction, guide future instruction, and assess and evaluate student performance

Explicit Instruction: The Gradual Release of Responsibility

When teaching, our job is to make what is implicit, explicit. Explicit instruction means that we show learners how we think when we read, as Steph did in Chapter 1 when reading *Up North at the Cabin* (Chall). We explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies so that readers can use them to construct meaning. We are likely to teach a strategy by modeling it; guiding students in its practice in large groups, small groups, and pairs; and providing large blocks of time for students to read independently and practice using and applying it. This is what Pearson and Gallagher (1983) call the gradual release of responsibility framework for instruction.

In our work, we make a distinction between what might be called "mentioning" and explicit teaching. Published reading programs often simply mention comprehension strategies rather than teach them. For example, basal teacher's guides might direct teachers to ask readers to infer a character's motivation without teaching kids how to infer. This entire book is about explicitly teaching the thinking that is at the foundation of comprehension instruction. Effective instruction always involves modeling, guiding, and giving kids time to practice.

We've adapted Pearson and Gallagher's gradual release framework as follows:

Gradual Release of Responsibility

Connect and Engage

- The teacher builds intrigue and interest in the topic.
- The teacher activates and ascertains students' background knowledge.
- Students interact to connect the new to the known.

Teacher Modeling

- The teacher explains the strategy.
- The teacher models how to effectively use the strategy to understand text.
- The teacher thinks aloud when reading to show thinking and strategy use.
- Students turn and talk to express their thinking.

Guided Practice

- The teacher purposefully guides a large-group conversation that engages students in a focused discussion that follows a line of thinking.
- The teacher and students practice the strategy together in a shared-reading context, reasoning through the text and co-constructing meaning through discussion.
- The teacher scaffolds the students' attempts and supports student thinking, giving specific feedback and making sure students understand the task.

Collaborative Practice

- Students share their thinking processes with each other during paired reading and small-group conversations.
- The teacher moves from group to group, assessing and responding to students' needs.

Independent Practice

- After working with the teacher and with other students, the students try practicing the strategy on their own.
- Teachers confer during independent reading to meet the needs of each reader.
- The students receive regular feedback from the teacher and other students.

Sharing

- Students come together to share thinking, learning, and understanding.
- Students reflect on their reading process and the reading content.

Application of the Strategy

- Students use the strategy in authentic reading situations.
- Students use the strategy in a variety of different genres, settings, contexts, and disciplines

(Fielding and Pearson 1994; adapted by Harvey and Goudvis in 2016)

In the past few years, we have come to understand that modeling should be short and sweet. Kids' waving hands and whispered comments have sent us this message loud and clear. If all we ever did was think out loud about a piece of text, kids wouldn't listen for long. So we model for a few minutes, just long enough to get our point across, and then quickly engage kids in guided practice. Most of our instructional time is spent in guided practice, because that is where we can best support students as they move toward independence. We ask them to talk to each other frequently throughout the lesson, process the information, and share their thoughts and opinions. As soon as we sense they are ready, we send them off to practice either collaboratively or independently. At the conclusion of the work time, we bring kids back together to share their thinking. For more on modeling that keeps kids engaged, check out Debbie Miller's chapter "Not So Gradual Release" in *Comprehension Going Forward* (2013).

Teaching Comprehension in the Reading Workshop

Strategic reading takes hold in classrooms that value student thinking. In our work in classrooms, we've noticed that the classroom context makes all the difference for effective strategy instruction. The comprehension instruction described in this book is a natural complement to the workshop model. Our notion of workshop has expanded in recent years so that we now include researching workshop, where we teach science and social studies, as well as reading and writing workshops. Kids read a variety of genres, texts, and topics in these workshops. They read poetry and literature to enhance their understanding and love of reading. They read a wide range of nonfiction and they do a great deal of focused content reading in science and social studies.

In the workshop, the teacher models a whole-group strategy lesson and then gives students large blocks of time to read and to practice the strategy in small groups, pairs, or independently. During this time, the teacher moves about the room, slides her chair up next to readers, and confers with them about their reading. Sometimes the teacher meets with small, flexible groups to provide additional needs-based instruction. At the end of the workshop, the whole group comes together to share their learning.

The workshop model emphasizes choice in book selection. Reading researcher Richard Allington recommends that readers choose much of what they read. We know that readers get better at reading when they choose books they can and want to read. Kids can choose from any book under the sun or they can choose from a number of options the teacher offers. Allington refers to the latter as "managed choice" (1994). For instance, a language arts teacher may offer several books from which kids choose and form literature circles. A social studies teacher may offer a dozen picture books on the Civil War to build background knowledge of the topic. We need to fill our rooms with terrific books at every level, on every conceivable topic, to ensure that kids get their hands on books they want to read. In Chapter 4, we describe how we choose books and how we help students choose their own books to read independently when practicing various comprehension strategies.

But it is important to keep in mind that comprehension strategy instruction can and should be taught in any classroom context and with many different materials. Some teachers use a four-block instructional model; others organize their teaching around guided reading and balanced literacy. Some use published anthologies, basal readers, or scripted programs. But whatever resources or structures you choose, kids need comprehension instruction to read, write, and talk about their thinking. And they need to learn reading strategies that support them to understand what they read.

Strategy Instruction: A Means to an End

Comprehension instruction is not about teaching strategies for strategies' sake. It *is* about teaching kids to use strategies purposefully to read any text for any reason, and to walk away from their reading experiences with new understanding that may generate still more learning. Comprehension strategies are interrelated, and we don't keep this a secret from kids. We show them how strategies overlap and intersect. We demonstrate how readers weave them together for a more engaged, rewarding read.

We frequently walk into classrooms and hear kids bursting with connections and questions. As the conversation continues, we sometimes find ourselves feeling a little queasy if it appears kids are using strategy language without understanding the thinking behind it. This suggests that they may not realize that the purpose of a strategy is to help their understanding. Comprehension strategies are not an end in themselves, but rather a means to understanding. Our classroom instruction must reflect this.

Launching Strategy Instruction

There's a big difference between introducing and teaching kids strategies for the first time and how they will eventually use a repertoire of strategies to construct meaning. For practical purposes, when we first teach a strategy, we model the strategy on its own so we don't confuse kids. If we introduce all the strategies at once, kids simply can't handle all the information. When we launch a strategy, we clearly explain and demonstrate how we use it to better understand what we read. For instance, we show kids how we think when we ask a question and how that question helps us to make meaning. Then we give kids time to practice with their peers and on their own.

Our launch lessons don't resemble classic mini-lessons, in that they take longer than five or ten minutes. When we launch a strategy, we keep kids up close for about half of the workshop time. Armed with clipboards, sticky notes, and pencils, they interact with the text and one another throughout the lesson. After we have modeled for a few minutes, we quickly engage the kids in doing the work right in front of us. Our purpose is twofold: first, we can see what they are doing and notice who is on target and who needs more support. Second, and most importantly, we are scaffolding the lesson, so that they can get a full, rich, complete experience with using a strategy to understand an entire text.

One at a Time? For How Long?

We are often asked, "Should I really teach the strategies one at a time?" Or, "I've been teaching inferring for seven weeks. When should I move on?" The real questions are whether or not we teach strategies in isolation and how long we focus on a particular strategy. The short answer is that we introduce the strategies one at a time but quickly move on to introduce additional strategies so that kids build a repertoire of strategies and use them flexibly to understand what they read. Otherwise, instruction may become all about the strategy rather than using the strategy as a tool for understanding. If kids think about strategies only in isolation, they tend to think about how many connections they can come up with rather than how their connections foster understanding. The last thing we want is for strategy use to become rigid and rote.

And we don't wait very long to let kids know that readers don't use strategies in isolation. Why would we teach them only to ask questions throughout an entire book or make connections just as they read a poem? Readers weave a variety of strategies together to make sense of text. Comprehension strategies work in concert. Once kids ask a question, an inference is never far behind. So when we hear kids making inferences before we've introduced inferring, we celebrate their great thinking. "Oh, oh! No inferring today. Remember, we are working on questioning right now!" is not a refrain we hope to hear. The last thing we want to do is limit kids' thinking, directing them away from one strategy because we happen to be teaching another.

In *The Comprehension Toolkit* (2016), a resource we created for comprehension instruction with informational text, we share lessons that demonstrate how the strategies build on each other over time as well as a range of options for teaching comprehension strategies. Time frames vary, but in our opinion it makes sense to introduce all of the comprehension strategies described in this book within a reasonably short time period. For instance, we might introduce and explore all the strategies within a couple of months. Kids need to learn how to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words long before February comes around. Even as we introduce a new strategy, kids keep using the ones already in their repertoire. That is the point. We don't introduce a strategy and never mention it again. We continue to model, introduce, and use various comprehension strategies throughout the year and across the curriculum. We teach and reinforce the strategies in all curricular areas, including science, social studies, and mathematics. Comprehension instruction is cumulative and recursive.

Is There a Sequence?

One question that crops up more than any other is, "In what order should I teach the strategies?" Although we believe there is no one sequence for strategy instruction, teaching kids to monitor their comprehension comes first. We begin by explicitly teaching students to monitor their comprehension, listen to their inner voice, and leave tracks of their thinking. Once they understand how to monitor their thinking, they are able to use a repertoire of strategies and apply them when reading.

For clarity's sake, we introduce specific strategies in each chapter. But we do not believe there is any one sequence for teaching comprehension strategies.

What matters is that children use them flexibly according to the demands of the text and the task they encounter. For instance, we view activating background knowledge as a foundational strategy, because it is something kids need to do from the get-go. They will need to be taught to notice new information and learning before they can determine important information. On the other hand, we may want to teach kids to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words on the first day of school because they're reading complex text with a ton of unfamiliar concepts and vocabulary. So rather than following a prescribed sequence, we consider what our kids need to learn, what they are reading, and which strategies will best facilitate their learning.

Above all, we take our cue from the kids. So as you read this book, let your kids lead the way. Maybe you go through the strategy chapters in order, or maybe not. Perhaps your fourth graders learned as much as they ever needed to know about making connections in the primary grades, so skip some of the connection lessons. After all, if we find ourselves teaching connections year after year after year, Houston, we've got a problem! So as you use the lessons in the second part of this book, we suggest dipping in and out of the strategy chapters on an as-needed basis. Our goal is to teach a repertoire of strategies to further engagement and understanding and to build knowledge.

Setting the Tone: Building a Literate Community

In a thinking-intensive classroom, literacy is an active process. Teachers set a tone that values student curiosity and thinking and respects all voices and visions. We work hard to build a community of thinkers, expressers, listeners, and learners, a community where kids and teachers care and wonder about one another's interests and ideas and take time to talk about them, think about them, and explore them. Some of the principles that guide our practice follow.

Foster Passion and Curiosity

Einstein said, "I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious." An interesting assessment, considering the source. It was his passion and curiosity that led to his discoveries. Passion is contagious. So we share our own. Students enter our classrooms brimming with curiosity, and we want school to encourage rather than squelch it.

An Environment That Values Collaborative Learning and Thinking

In classrooms that promote thinking, students and teachers co-construct meaning in large groups, small groups, and conferences; through discussions, book groups, and partner work. Everyone gets a chance to weigh in with meaning.

Large Blocks of Time for Extended Reading and Writing

The importance of independent reading cannot be stressed too much. Reading volume is a strong indicator of reading achievement (Cunningham and Stanovich 2003). The more we read, the better we read. If we want students to get better at reading, they need to read a lot and think about what they are reading. If we only went to a piano lesson on Monday and never sat down to practice the rest of the week, we wouldn't get any better.

We need to build in time for readers to read on their own and practice using strategies in self-selected text that they can and want to read. Richard Allington (1994) notes that high-achieving students spend much more time reading than their lower-achieving counterparts, providing evidence that time spent in independent reading makes a difference. Reading actually makes you smarter (Stanovich 2000), and our kids need to know this.

Language Matters

The language we use determines what happens in our classroom far more than the lamps, desks, and bookshelves. In his books *Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning* (2004) and *Opening Minds* (2011), Peter Johnston suggests that teaching and learning are all about language. What we say and how we say it make a difference for our kids. Using respectful language that values their thinking sets a tone that encourages their participation and their trust. When we begin to hear kids using and understanding language that we have shared through instruction, we know that they are learning in ways that matter. We hope our kids adopt and adapt our teaching language as their learning language. Language shapes and expands thinking.

Authentic Response

In active literacy classrooms, students have opportunities to respond to reading in a variety of ways—talking, writing, drawing, blogging, creating, and so on—giving them an opportunity to make their thinking visible and bring it to life.

Responsive Teaching and Differentiation

One size does not fit all. Responsive teaching is intentional, flexible, and adaptive. Good instruction is good instruction for all kids. We want all of our students to experience the kind of lessons we have designed in this book. Participating in shared reading allows all kids to be part of a community of thinkers and learners. We understand that children differ, so we differentiate by offering a range of response options and a variety of text at different levels. For more information on ways to differentiate instruction for kids with special needs, pick up a favorite of ours, Patrick Schwarz's *From Disability to Possibility* (2006).

Text Matters

Surround your students with text of every conceivable genre, style, form, and topic. Richard Allington reminds us that when teachers use a "multi-source, multi-genre curriculum" (1994), instruction tends to be more thoughtful and effective. When rooms are filled to bursting with a vast array of print, kids pick it up. For more on this, see Chapter 4, "Twenty-First Century Reading: Books and Beyond."

Room Arrangement Matters

Long gone are classrooms characterized by desks in rows and no talking. It's nearly impossible to participate in the discussion if all you see is the back of someone else's head. In classrooms that value thinking, kids sit at tables or desks in clusters so that they can easily talk to one another and collaborate. We

provide instruction in a comfortable meeting place where kids, no matter their age, sit up close in front of the teacher so they easily focus on the instruction and listen to and interact with one another. We also create quiet spaces and nooks and crannies for them to read independently or work in small groups. When we create our classroom spaces, we keep bookstores or libraries in mind. Kids thrive in intimate, comfortable surroundings.

Accessible Resources

In classrooms that value thinking, resources that support literacy are easily accessible. Clipboards act as portable desks so kids can sit up close to the teacher and respond. Pads of sticky notes top the supply list. Notebooks and journals fill student cubbies and desks. Books, although we love them, aren't the only resources. Sharing short articles, images, infographics, and videos that we can project for all to see makes text accessible to everyone. And good news! Many online resources are free.

Assessing Comprehension: Teaching with the End in Mind

Reading assessments, like rodents, run rampant. DIBELS, DRAs, IRIs, SATs, ACTs. You name it, kids have taken it, and sometimes for hours and hours on end. Unfortunately, too often test preparation has become the default curriculum. Assessment is not only about what our kids do, but also about how effective our instruction has been. When we reflect on evidence of their learning and understanding, we revise and shape our subsequent instruction. Authentic assessment provides us with three very important pieces of information that guide our instruction:

1. *Our students' learning and progress.* By looking carefully at our kids' work and listening to their words and thoughts, we derive an authentic understanding of how they are doing and what they have learned or not learned.
2. *Past instruction.* What kids learn depends on how well we have taught it. If kids don't get it, we need to rethink our instruction and change it accordingly. If most of the class doesn't get it, it is our responsibility. If 25 percent of the class doesn't get it, it is still our responsibility. And frankly, if one child doesn't get it, it remains our responsibility. It's not about teaching the same lesson over and over again, because that doesn't work. We need to redesign our lessons, keeping in mind what we have learned from our kids and letting that information guide our instruction.
3. *Future instruction.* Responsive teaching and assessment go hand in hand. Based on what we see in students' work, the evidence of their understanding, we design subsequent instruction that is tailored to what they need. We plan our next steps based on what we notice in their work that needs attention and elaboration. Kids all have different needs. Some are quickly ready for independent practice. Others need more time, support, and guided practice. We may convene a small group or we may confer individually, depending on need.

Finding Out What Students Are Thinking

When we lead a discussion, we notice and evaluate children's responses. When we look over their written responses after class, as Anne did after reading *Rebel* (Baillie) out loud, we learn what we have to teach or reteach the next day. The only way we can confidently assess our students' comprehension is when they share their thinking with us. Readers reveal their comprehension by responding to text, not by answering a litany of literal questions. Personal responses to reading give us a window into students' minds. We connect with their thinking when we know what's going on for them as they read.

All the lessons, discussions, and responses described in this book have one purpose: to move kids toward independence as readers. What ultimately matters is that students internalize comprehension strategies that promote understanding.

We find out if readers are understanding what they read in the following ways:

We Listen to Kids

We can't stress enough how much we learn about kids' reading and thinking by simply listening closely to what they say. If we listen, they will talk. Sometimes kids might say, "I made a connection" or "I'm inferring." Using the language isn't enough, however. We check to see that there is substance underlying their statements.

We Read Kids' Work

We read their responses closely, looking for evidence that they are constructing meaning. And we use these responses to design future instruction.

We Confer with Kids

The reading conference provides an ideal opportunity to talk one on one with students and help them sort out their thinking and come to a deeper understanding of how reading strategies support comprehension. Sometimes, discovering what readers are thinking only takes asking them. Those natural talkers are only too happy to fill you in on their thinking. Those more reticent kids may surprise you and open up, too, if you only ask.

We Listen In on Conversations

Even though we were both taught that eavesdropping is rude, we know that it's invaluable when trying to find out what kids are thinking about their reading. Listening in on conversations kids have with one another is a surefire way to get at their honest thinking.

We Observe Behavior and Expressions

A scrunched-up nose, a raised eyebrow, or a quizzical look lets us know what a reader is thinking. We watch kids carefully and notice their expressions while they read to give us a glimpse into their thinking.

We Chart Responses

We record what kids say in class discussions on charts. This holds their thinking and makes it visible, public, and permanent. Students can refer to the

charts during discussions or use them as guides when crafting their own responses.

We Keep Anecdotal Records of Conferences and Conversations

In classrooms where we work, teachers keep track of student thinking by taking notes of interactions they have with students and reviewing them regularly. Teachers have a wide variety of resources in which to record student learning and progress, including notebooks, binders, and so on. Current technology apps makes documenting and sharing kids' learning a breeze.

The chapters in Part II of this book include a variety of comprehension lessons. At the end of each chapter, we share some student work accompanied by our running commentary. We show and explain how we look at the work and think about it to get an idea of how our kids are doing and where they need to go next.

What About Grades? Moving from Assessment to Evaluation

There is no need to grade students on what they know when they walk in the door. We need to grade them on what they learn from what we have taught. When we give students grades to evaluate them, we make sure the grades are based on evidence gleaned from ongoing and authentic assessment. This is how assessment informs evaluation. When we assess our kids' progress, we look for a demonstration of understanding. Work samples, student talk, and artifacts are the evidence we use to assess their learning. Grades are all about evaluating what kids have learned through practice. We evaluate and give grades only after students have had a lot of time to internalize the strategies and skills we have taught. We base our grades on a substantial body of evidence that stands as proof of kids' learning.

Grading a stack of worksheets and packets doesn't provide us with information about authentic learning. So we look at constructed and more open-ended responses that require kids to show us their thinking and learning. This evidence comes in the form of responses on sticky notes, two- and three-column think sheets, short and longer summary responses, notes from discussions, thoughtful illustrations, and journal and notebook entries.

We constantly check what kids are doing against what we have taught them and the outcomes we hope to achieve. We review and save work that demonstrates understanding as well as work that doesn't, and we design instruction accordingly.

After students have had plenty of practice and we have collected a good deal of their work, we grade them, holding them accountable for what they have learned. Much of our grading is done using rubrics that directly correspond with and measure what we have taught. So in the end, we evaluate students to measure their learning, to "grade" their understanding, and to satisfy the norms of school and society.