SESSION 2: TEACHING ACTIVE COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Introduction

As I observe skillful teachers work, it occurs to me that...direct instruction even takes on an interactive quality, involving teacher demonstrations, modeling, and rehearsing with what students will eventually be expected to do independently.” — Dorothy Strickland

Overview

In the previous session, you identified some specific goals for your own learning in this course. In addition, you familiarized yourself with the standards for reading comprehension and analyzed your own practice with respect to those standards. In this session, you will learn about active comprehension strategies typically used by good readers and explore ways in which you can directly teach students to use these strategies.

Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

• List three strategies that good readers use to facilitate their comprehension and explain how you will recognize which strategies your students are using in your online journal.
• Explain the importance of techniques for direct instruction of comprehension strategies through online discussion.
• Critically evaluate a video clip of direct instruction of a reading comprehension strategy by providing specific examples of direct instruction in your online journal.
• Synthesize your learning about direct instruction and strategic reading by designing a lesson plan.

If you have not done so already, print the Assignment Checklist to keep track of your assignments for this course.
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Understanding Strategies Good Readers Use

Research indicates that students' comprehension is optimal when they are actively and strategically engaged in reading or listening to texts. We will begin this session by learning about the strategies that good readers use to help themselves understand text.

Strategies Good Readers Use

Read "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension" to gain a summary of what is known about reading comprehension and how this research base relates to effective instruction. As you read, pay particular attention to the discussion of strategies that good readers use. In particular, what are the active strategies that good readers use to help them understand what they read?

After you have read the chapter "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension," respond to the following in your online journal:

- List at least three strategies that good readers use to facilitate their comprehension.
- In your experience, which of these strategies do students tend to use most? Least?
- As a teacher, how do you know (or will you know) what strategies your students are using?

Differentiating your instruction for the various learning styles your students will bring to the classroom could help their comprehension.

Differentiated Instruction

Research indicates that students who are poor readers do not use the same "metacognitive strategies" as good readers. "Metacognitive strategies" are those that students use to monitor their own understanding as they read. Students who use metacognitive strategies generally realize when they do not understand and use "fix-up strategies," such as re-reading, to gain meaning. These strategies are particularly important for struggling readers. For more information about metacognition, visit NCREL's Metacognition Web page.

To learn about one specific strategy for fostering students' use of metacognitive strategies, read the following article:

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Direct Instruction of Strategies

In the previous section, you learned about various strategies that good readers use to help them understand text. Now we will begin to think about how teachers can teach students in grades 4-6 to use those specific strategies.

Direct Instruction in Reading Comprehension

Read "Our Students Are Ready For This: Comprehension Instruction in the Elementary School." This article discusses principles of direct instruction in reading comprehension. After you read the article, think about the following questions: What does "direct instruction" mean? What is one example of direct instruction of a reading comprehension strategy? You may wish to take notes in the notes section of your online journal.

Direct Instruction in Today's Schools

Researcher Dolores Durkin, in a now classic 1978-79 study, found that most teachers in the upper elementary grades did not actually provide very much direct instruction in comprehension to students. Instead, teachers frequently assessed students' comprehension by asking them questions or providing worksheets following reading. Engage in an online discussion by responding to the following question:

If Durkin's research were repeated in today's schools, and specifically in grade 4-6 classrooms, do you think the findings would be the same? What is the importance of direct instruction in comprehension strategies for students in grades 4-6?

Justify your statements by referring to the readings as well as examples from your professional practice.

As you complete the rest of the readings and assignments for this session, you should visit this discussion forum at least two or three times to continue the discussion. You may refer to the discussion rubric to review the expectations for participating in online discussions in this course.
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Guided Reading

With the reading about direct instruction in mind, view the video "Making Inferences (Part 1)" and then "Making Inferences (Part 2)," of a fourth-grade guided reading group in which the teacher is providing direct instruction in making inferences. In the first video, the teacher provides direct instruction in how to make inferences based upon the text and the reader’s prior knowledge. In the second video, the students practice making inferences based on excerpts of the text that the teacher reads aloud to them. As you watch the videos, think about what strategy the teacher is teaching and what makes this instruction direct.

After viewing the guided reading video, respond to the following questions in your online journal:

- What made this teacher's instruction direct? Provide specific examples.
- Were the students learning the strategy? How could you tell?

Lesson Plan for Direct Instruction Assignment

In this assignment, you will design a lesson plan for direct instruction of a comprehension skill. **Note:** the Putting It All Together section of the "Our Students Are Ready For This: Comprehension Instruction in the Elementary School" article outlines many possible skill focus areas for instruction.

1. Select a skill and a direct instruction technique to use and create a lesson plan to teach the skill you have chosen.
2. Use the lesson plan template to assist you in creating your lesson plan.
3. Remember to refer to the assessment rubric for this assignment.
4. Submit your lesson plan to your facilitator in a word processing document by the end of this session.

Additional Resources (not required)


Harvey, S. & Goudvis, A. (2000). *Strategies that work*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse. (This book is an excellent resource on how to help students learn to be strategic readers.)


Strengthening Reading and Writing Skills Using the Internet
(This article provides several strategies for using the Internet to improve reading comprehension.)

References


All IRA articles are used with permission from the International Reading Association.
Look Ahead

If you have not done so already, take a look at the final project and accompanying final project rubric. Consider the material in this session on direct instruction and see if you can use any of the ideas in developing your plan for a conference presentation on text comprehension.

In Session 3, you will learn specific strategies for helping students understand two specific kinds of text: expository text and multi-genre text. In this session, you will need to try out an instructional strategy with either a single student or a small group of students. In addition, you will need to try out an interactive with at least one student in this session. The same student may participate in both the interactive activity and the small group instruction, if you like.