

DOINGWHATWORKS



Presentation

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Effective Strategies That Boost Reading Comprehension

May 2009

Topic: Adolescent Literacy

Practice: Comprehension Strategies

Highlights

- Research suggests that direct and explicit teaching of comprehension strategies can result in improved literacy achievement.
- Comprehension strategies should be taught with a combination of modeling, feedback, and opportunities for independent practice.
- There are several key aspects of selecting text to be used for comprehension strategy instruction.
- Comprehension strategies can be taught across subject areas and will likely require additional professional development for middle and high school teachers inexperienced in teaching reading.

Full Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the overview on Effective Strategies That Boost Reading Comprehension.

Slide 2

Allie has read the same paragraph three times. Every time she gets a few lines in, she glazes over. Frustrated, she puts her homework aside and grabs a magazine.

Her science teacher, Ms. Bonner, knows that Allie and other students aren't getting as much as she'd like from their reading, but she doesn't see that as something she's supposed to fix. When students' low reading scores are discussed at a staff meeting, she thinks to herself, "I'm a science teacher, not a reading teacher. I wouldn't know how to teach reading."

Slide 3

By introducing direct and explicit reading comprehension strategies into the curriculum and across content areas, middle and high school students become more engaged and effective in their learning and gain a better understanding of their subjects.

Slide 4

While research suggests that implementing any reading strategy will result in comprehension improvement, techniques that appear to be particularly effective in bringing students into stronger and more direct engagement with difficult texts include summarizing, asking and answering questions, and graphic organizers. Teachers who utilize more than one strategy in their instruction tend to see the greatest gains. After all, no one approach works for every text, and students' understanding will grow more sophisticated as they see how each new strategy complements their reading.

Slide 5

Regardless of which strategy is taught, it's important that teachers make it clear from the beginning what the strategy is, what it is used for, and how it will improve reading comprehension. When students understand why the strategy is being taught, they are more likely to use it when they are reading on their own. Indeed, comprehension strategies are only truly useful to students when they go from being a classroom exercise to being part of their regular reading experience.

Teachers should model the strategy, walking through each step and thinking aloud so that students can see how the strategy impacts how they think about what they are reading.

As students begin to use the strategy themselves, it's important to guide their practice and give feedback, either one-on-one, in small groups, or with student pairs. This transition from at-home to in-class reading assignments may require a shift in thinking for some teachers, who may need encouragement that the change will result in greater learning.

Slide 6

There are things to be aware of while selecting texts to use in teaching new reading strategies.

Be careful to select a text that works well with the technique you are planning to introduce. Main idea identification is often not well suited for narrative texts, and predictions can be difficult with some expository texts. A well-chosen passage can facilitate student understanding, but an inappropriate one can diminish confidence in the tool.

Be sure that the text is appropriate for the reading level of the students. Introducing overly complex texts while students are still learning a strategy is a recipe for increased frustration and discouragement.

Show students how the strategies apply to different texts, and repeat thinkalouds with different readings. This reinforcement will help students remember to use the techniques in their own independent reading.

Slide 7

One key danger to be aware of in teaching these strategies is that it is very easy to get so focused on the proper use of the tool that the actual goal is obscured or even forgotten. To avoid the strategies becoming rote exercises to be completed, students need to be reminded that the end goal is improved comprehension of the text.

Slide 8

Some teachers may feel that they are not "reading teachers" and that implementing this practice will take time away from content instruction. They may also feel that they don't have the background required to effectively teach reading skills. Additionally, many teachers have so deeply internalized their own comprehension processes that they find it difficult to articulate and share the expert strategies they use.

For all these reasons, it is essential that professional development is available to help teachers understand how improving student reading comprehension leads to deeper and faster mastery of material, allowing them to teach more content and not less. Even having teachers lead one another in practice thinkalouds

together can help them clarify their own thinking and communicate it effectively to students.

The payoff is potentially huge. Students will be able to tackle more challenging texts across subjects, which will enhance their ability to understand complex material in middle school, high school, and beyond.

Slide 9

Ms. Bonner got some training on reading comprehension strategy instruction and began to implement it in her class. Students like Allie began to show marked improvement, and soon Ms. Bonner found that lessons she previously spent weeks on could now be covered in days. Her students were really starting to get it, and her colleagues in the teacher's lounge were talking about improvements in their own classes as well.

Slide 10

To learn more about Effective Strategies That Boost Reading Comprehension, please explore the additional resources on the Doing What Works website.