

Reading in the Middle

A newsletter for the Middle School Reading Special Interest Group
of the International Reading Association



This issue of *Reading in the Middle* offers an exciting combination of teaching tips, great reads, and research to assist you in reaching all the needs of your middle school students.

Emily Pendergrass offers some great insight into struggling readers in her article “Privileges Not Normally Extended to

Struggling Readers.” Also, check out the teaching tips by Mohammed Darabie. As always a great book list is included in this issue.

We hope that you find some useful information here and enjoy the issue.

**Privileges Not Normally
Extended to Struggling
Readers: Builing Success
in the Classroom**

By Emily Pendergrass

Page 3

**Teaching Tips In The Middle
School Classroom: A Schema-
Based Method of Teaching
Reading Comprehension**

By Mohammed Y. Darabie

Page 8

**Book List:
The Latest & Greatest to Enjoy
By Dr. Nance Wilson**

Page 15

Continued on **2**



MSRSIG

Editor: Nance S. Wilson

Officers:

President/Chair:

Nance S. Wilson

Past President/Chair:

Eileen Diamond

Secretary:

Cathy Denman

Treasurer:

Billie Jo Dunaway

Editorial Staff:

Billie Jo Dunaway

Review Board Members:

Sherron Roberts

University of Central Florida

Jeffrey Kaplan

University of Central Florida

Vicky Zygouris-Coe

University of Central Florida

Melanie Koss

Northern Illinois University

Susan Beecher

Orange County Public Schools, FL

Kathy Vanstron

River Trails District 69, IL

Call for Manuscripts

Reading in the Middle publishes original contributions on all facets of language arts learning, teaching, and research focusing on young adolescents. Reading in the Middle offers middle level educators a practical guide to best practices in middle schools.

Reading in the Middle follows specific submission guidelines. Articles should:

- be approximately 3,500 words and, when appropriate, include photocopied (originals will be requested upon acceptance) samples of students' work, photographs of students working, charts, diagrams, or other visuals (work submitted by students may be of any length up to 3,500 words);
- offer specific classroom practices that are grounded in research;
- be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font;
- include 100-word abstract and bulleted list of key points;

- follow the current edition of the publication manual of the American Psychological Association—please do not include an abstract, footnotes, endnotes, or author identification within the body of the text.

- identify any excerpts from previously published sources; should their use require a reprint fee, the fee payment is the responsibility of the author.

To submit a manuscript:

- submit a copy of your manuscript for blind review as a Microsoft Word file to MSRSIG@gmail.com
- attach a separate cover letter that includes your name, affiliation, home and work addresses and telephone numbers, fax number, email address, and issue for which you are submitting. Your name should not appear anywhere in the text.

Privileges Not Normally Extended to Struggling Readers: Building Success in the Classroom

By Emily Pendergrass

“Why did Ms. Roberts make fun of my pants?” Kay says through tearful eyes. “My granny made these pants for me before she moved out. I can’t help it that I am too fat for Hollister. I hate school. Crap like that makes me want to drop out!”

Kay is a working class student in a school of fairly affluent students and families. While standing in the hall, she overheard a teacher making fun of her homemade pants. Kay has been labeled a struggling reader and has been placed in a Title I Reading Class, but her assessment profile reflects differently. Her teachers recommended her for the Title I Reading Class based on classroom performance and observation, but after a close reading of her permanent record, she does not need intensive remediation. She passes standardized criterion and norm-referenced tests and reads slightly below grade level on other assessments (i.e. Woodcock-Johnson). Social class is a construct we do not discuss regularly; however, it influences our lives and our choices as students and teachers (Noblit, 2007).

Many of the students I interact with daily come from working class backgrounds and struggle in school. I embarked on a journey this year to counteract some of the oppression of schools and offered these students academic privileges that are not normally extended to students who have been labeled as struggling in the hopes of creating more scholastic achievements and building self-concept. Brantlinger (2007) spoke of “lesser schooling for poor children” indicating that low-income students receive a substandard education because they are perceived as “at-risk.” I wanted to take action and offer more schooling for these students. In this article, I will discuss a rationale for including “elite” practices with struggling readers and some actions that teachers must take to ensure student success. Then I will share some of my attempts to shift the field for these adolescents and also offer

some insights into the complications that may arise in trying to level the educational playing field.

Rationale for Extending Privileges

Class status and labels are often assumed and assigned at a glance, and I believe that we as teachers, often teach the students based on the labels we assign. There is a collection of forces that influence academic success including but not limited to family background, social class, varying investments in and commitments to education. I wondered if it was possible to shift typical remediation practices to build educational achievements and academic agency, which might foster growth among students who have seen little scholastic success.

I did not want to teach a standard or universal script to these students who are labeled as “slow” or “at-risk” readers. Upsetting the status quo, I wanted to level the playing “field” for these students (field being the school culture they must operate in every day). My goal was to shift the field of practices for these students so that they might have academic successes that are valued amongst peers and teachers. Hoping to align the practices and goals of the classroom to reflect an even playing field and to produce academic gains within each student may have been a lofty goal, but the bigger the challenge, the greater the opportunity.

Writing about student success is appropriate, but I will weave an argument into this paper, some thoughts on creating meaningful opportunities in the classroom. Perhaps the goal of the teacher is to be concerned with children’s educational attainment: “to empower children educational attainment: “to empower children to give active shape to their life’s contingencies” (van Manen, 1991, p. 3). Authenticating and polishing teachers’ aptitude for clever, innovative, and caring responses to students, helps us to realize student potential (Garrison, 1997)

while striving to become a master teacher.

Literacy Activities Applied to Title I Classes

Careful not to make the oppressed become the oppressor, I wanted to use privileges normally extended to gifted classes in a Title I reading class. These strategies are not new; however, they are often reserved for students who are not struggling in school-based literacies. Oftentimes, schools are set up in such a way that many students fall through the cracks simply because of their or their parents' educational or social status; students are labeled early in their school career, and the label adheres permanently, leaving major learning deficits (Lareau, 2003), perhaps when expectations are lowered. I stole many of the strategies I will discuss in this paper from colleagues who teach advanced level students and adapted the support structures around these opportunities to make them work in an "at-risk" reading class. A few of these successful strategies include reading buddies, writing Santa Elf letters, reading Shakespeare, Preview Reading Club, and choice independent reading.

Reading Buddies

Oftentimes, students in a reading lab setting are relegated to programs such as Read 180 or Read Naturally, which undermines the philosophy of encouraging students to make meaning and actively engage with all texts they encounter. Timed readings and counting or graphing miscues is an unauthentic and unmotivating way for reading and understanding to occur. If the students were to have educational successes to share with their peers and other teachers, we needed more than these traditional reading programs offer. Moreover, the fact that these traditional options are used with struggling readers is an idea that I wanted to shift. I wanted the students to see the classroom as an opportunity where they were free to explore and engage with texts as independent learners.

While not a new strategy for more advanced and on grade level readers, reading buddies was a stimulating strategy for struggling readers. When we began discussions about partnering with a first grade classroom, the eighth graders' excitement was evident with the hum of questions that flut-

tered around the room: questions such as, "When do we get to go?" or "How many buddies do we get?" Each week the eighth graders selected picture books that are meant for adults to read to small children, practiced their fluency, and prepared predicting, clarifying, and real world questions. They were engaged and motivated to learn about larger concepts of fluency, role modeling, and purposeful learning. Each older reading buddy was assigned two younger reading buddies. They shared books, laughs, candy canes, hot chocolate, movies, and much more. This practice of reading aloud every week was a motivating way to practice fluency versus the meaningless, misunderstood reading passages where miscues were counted. They now had some educational or academic status.

Students were now able to share their important work with their peers and other teachers. They had a purpose for being at school; an appointment calendar that afforded them some success because they were positively influencing others. In a school where there are no field trips, these students left the middle school every week to walk to the neighboring school, they had the opportunity to make an impact on younger students, and, best yet, they were improving their reading skills through a real life, real world plan. These "struggling" or "at-risk" students are often relegated to reading labs full of unauthentic learning where students drag their feet down the hall and do not tell others where they are going. Reading buddies was my subversive way to build confidence and excitement because these students were doing something different; something special. The field was shifted; students ran and skipped down the hall into class. Every teachers' dream, right? Smart, capable willing students who want to be present.

Santa Elf Letters

Reading buddies grew into the first grade students writing letters to Santa Claus with the eighth graders responding as elves. In other middle schools in nearby counties, gifted and advanced students write letters to younger students as if they were Santa's elves. We adapted this practice and built support structures to enhance several writing standards found in the state performance standards.

We had lessons on perspective, voice, tone, and mood, as well as letter writing (and spelling and grammar) to be able to assume the role of Santa's elves. In late November the younger students wrote letters that were mailed to Santa's workshop at the North Pole. We then watched parts of the movie, *The Polar Express*, where we discussed the magic of Christmas. We also focused on descriptions of what the North Pole, Santa, and his workshop looked like. We ate candy canes, drank hot cocoa, and ate cookies trying to recreate the warm feelings of the workshop in the North Pole as we wrote letters. Below is an example of a final copy of a letter written by a struggling reader and writer:

"Dear Aaron,

Hi, I'm Cliff. I help out in the elf shop where we make all the toys in the world. I'm one of Santa's head elves. So I have to keep an eye on the other elves to make sure they don't sneak outside to try out all of the new toys we have been making this year. I was so happy to see your letter. When I read it so many thoughts were going through my head of what toys to make.

I can't believe that it is almost Christmas. We have been preparing Santa's sleigh for the big night. He delivers all the presents. Santa's list says you have been a good boy this year. Keep it up!

So, what's the weather like in Jefferson? Weather up here in the North Pole is very cold, but a hot cup of hot chocolate will warm me right up. That and Mrs. Claus's hot cookies.

Oh no! I think I hear Sparkles, our new reindeer. He's been running all over the place since he heard he was going to fly with Santa. Well, let me go calm him down, and remember Santa sees everything. Be Good,

Cliff

"Cliff," who is often seen as a non-participating, uncaring student by many teachers and students, worked for days getting his ideas down on paper, editing, proofreading, and writing it in legible handwriting. He was engaged, motivated, and excited to be part of this real writing experience, and he had an academic success to share.

Preview Reading Club

Remediation programs for the "garden-variety poor reader" (Wolf, 1991) frequently focus on skill development rather than response to literature and construction of meaning (Ivey, 1999). This skill-and-drill reading practice is decontextualized and rudimentary leaving disenfranchised students unengaged and unmotivated (Hoffman, 1991; Zigo, 1998). The complexity of each student's needs place a strain on intervention attempts (Alfassi, 1998) when skills in some Title I classes are checked off as mastered, but reading for meaning is still lacking. Moreover, in more traditional reading classes, students maintain their poor comprehension levels, even if they are accurate decoders. (Alfassi, 1998). Students call words beautifully but are not able to understand or think critically about the material and, therefore, cannot make connections, evaluations or inferences.

In an effort to counteract the above scenario and to provide supplementary and support reading materials, I borrowed the Preview Reading Club from a colleague who teaches advanced and gifted language arts classes. As with many of the Extended Learning Time (ELT) activities, these preview readers had to fill out an application and receive guardian permission to be in this club, which reviewed new acquisitions and possible purchases for our school's media center. This club was open to all students in the school; however, I purposefully selected struggling readers that would normally be placed in a remedial group. The club met during ELT three or four days a week for forty-five minutes. All of the books were highly appropriate for young adults, but as a caution (and an engagement tool), I announced that some of these novels contain adult language and mature situations. In addition to maintaining their nightly reading assignment and responding in their Independent Reading Logs, these select students also were responsible for a critical review upon the completion of their preview book. The media center specialist used these reviews to purchase materials for the library and passed on some reviews to the high school media specialists.

This is a privilege not normally extended to struggling students, since many times struggling readers are served through remedial or reading lab classes (Early, 1969; Hoffman, 1991; McGill-Franzen, 1987). My hope was to not only inspire these students to be better readers, but to advance their individual reading levels. It is commonly accepted that the more a person reads the better reader they become (Allington, 1977; Denton, 2004; Kuhn, et al., 2006). These “struggling students” read for pleasure in this club, but also enjoyed the responsibility and privilege this experience gave them.

Closing Remarks

One of the major benefits and successes involved with these attempts to shift the field is the concrete evidence of improvement. I cannot show direct correlation between these attempts and the improvements that were made, but such progress was made on several accounts that it makes one wonder. Natalie, a Asian girl who was repeating the 8th grade after a year in alternative school for drug possession, spent the first ten of fourteen days of our class in ISS. We started our reading buddies and talked of the importance of being a role model for our younger students. Natalie did not spend another day in ISS and never missed a reading buddy day, which greatly improved her attendance. These activities changed others’ views of her. I took pictures of her huddling in the floor with first graders sharing a book and laughing; I shared these pictures with the administration and her team teachers in the hopes of affording her some positive gains that would free her from the constraints of her previous mistakes.

Is there room for creative activities in the current remedial literacy classroom? Yes, teachers must continue to reach students through each student’s individual interests. Guthrie and Wigfield (1997) defined motivation as unique to individuals based upon “beliefs, values, needs and goals” (p. 5). Hence, the closer teachers can align literacy activities with these beliefs and values, “the greater the likelihood that students will expend effort and sustain interest in them” (Pitcher et al., 2007, p. 378).

If they apply energy to the activities they are interested in and we use innovative ways to reach struggling readers, then scholastic and cultural growth will occur. Using activities normally reserved for “elite” students enables teachers to bring similar themes and activities into the classroom without actually succumbing to programs that require the student to read a boring, meaningless passages and answer multiple choice or formulaic questions in the hopes of raising literacy levels. In engaging reluctant or “at-risk” readers with enjoyable “privileges,” I have found that they are more willing to trust me, the teacher, when it is necessary for us to read a required, “higher literacy” text; in addition, they have a more level playing field with their peers.

However, we, as teachers, feel about these and similar opportunities, if they are important for advanced students, they are as important for students who have been labeled as struggling. Let us not provide less education for poor students, but raise our expectations to build their successes and confidence. We want students to understand concepts and think critically. So, why not blend these privileges into strategies that help all levels of readers produce and use scholastic achievements? We can utilize the students’ interests in conjunction with authentic activities to motivate and build academic growth that will improve their literacy skills, build authenticity and autonomy, and capitalize on intrinsic motivation, all of which allows more successes in the classroom and culminates in higher confidence levels.



My argument here has been for changing the way we view readers like Kay, Natalie, or Cliff. Regardless of reading level or social class, teachers must design curricular occasions for all students to be productive and reconstitute students and teachers' positions in educational fields.

References

- Alfassi, M. (1998). Reading for meaning: The efficacy of reciprocal teaching in fostering reading comprehension in high school students in remedial reading classes. *American Educational Research Journal*, 35, 309-332.
- Allen, J.P., Porter, M.R., McFarland, C. Penny Marsh, & Boykin-McElhaney, K. (2005). The two faces of adolescents' success with peers: Adolescent popularity, social adaptation, and deviant behavior. *Child Development*, 76, 747-760.
- Bandura, A. & Barbaranelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development*, 67, 1206-1222.
- Brantlinger, E. A. (1993). The politics of social class in secondary schools: Views of affluent and impoverished youth. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Early, M. J. (1969). What does research in reading reveal--about successful reading programs? *The English Journal*, 58, 534-547.
- Finders, M. (1997). *Just girls*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hoffman, J. V. (1991). Teacher and school effects in learning to read. In R. Barr, M.L. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, & P.D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. II, pp. 911-950). White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Ivey, G. (1999). A multicase study in the middle school: Complexities among young adolescent readers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 34, 172-192.
- Kennedy, E. (1995). Correlates of perceived popularity among peers: A study of race and gender differences among middle school students. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 64, 186-195.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Lease, A. M., Musgrove, K., & Axelrod J. (2002). Dimensions of Social Status in Preadolescent Peer Groups: Likability, Perceived Popularity, and Social Dominance. *Social Development*, 11, 508-533.
- Luke, A. (2006). Editorial introduction: Why pedagogies? *Pedagogies an International Journal*, 1(1), 1-6.
- McGill-Franzen, A. (1987). Failure to learn to read: Formulating a policy problem. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 22, 475-490.
- Mills, C.W. (1959). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Noblit, G. (2007). Class – déclassé. In J. A. Van Galen & G. Noblit (Eds). *Late to class*. (pp. 313-346). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Savin-Williams, R. (1979). Dominance hierarchies in groups of early adolescents. *Child Development*, 30, 923-935.
- van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. Ontario: The Althouse Press.
- Wentzel, K. (1997). Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal*
- Wolf, M. (1991). Naming speed and reading: The contribution of the cognitive neurosciences. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26, 123-141.
- Zigo, D. (1998). Narrative thinking as a strategy of Educational Psychology, 89, 411-419. among struggling early adolescent readers and writers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 13(1), 56-7



Teaching Tips In The Middle School Classroom: A Schema-Based Method of Teaching Reading Comprehension By: Mohammed Y. Darabie

Reading comprehension has been defined in a variety of ways. Most definitions, however, have encompassed the major elements of reading comprehension as an interactive process, a socio-cognitive behavior, and a product. Pardo (2004) defined reading comprehension as the process of readers interacting and constructing meaning from a text. The mystery of reading comprehension stems from the bigger picture of literacy that includes how people learn to read, write, speak, do things and think. In addition, a majority of reading teachers would agree on the assumption that such learning phenomena do not just occur by coincidence. In many instances in my reading classroom, I remind my teacher candidates of the decisions that they will be making every day about their students' learning and comprehension performance in the classroom correlate with how they interpret their reading behavior: The more randomness we eliminate from our decision making process as individuals and teachers, the more likely we will up with making the right decision. Every behavior that students exhibit in the classroom, including their reading behavior must be interpreted by an accurate measure supported by outcome-based evidence, rather than assuming that it just happened that the student just could not read or spell it correctly.

The act of reading is not completely understood nor easily described. In the most general terms it could be said that reading process involves the reader, the text, and the interaction between reader and text (Rumelhart, 1977). Since philosophies of learning begin with the individual as a focus of the learning process, reading and learning to read should also focus on the individual as. First of all readers should become aware of themselves as readers, their reading skills and strategies, their assumptions about a text, their participation in the interaction between the text and themselves, and other things they may have

never considered carefully before. Readers' self-reflection is central to learning. It is the first step to becoming more conscious and aware of themselves as readers and comprehension seekers.

In schema theory, all kinds of background knowledge play an important role in achieving reading comprehension. Both psycholinguist reading theory and schema theory put a great emphasis on the reader variables contributing to reading comprehension. As a result of this influence, language learning and reading comprehension in first and second language began to be viewed as a complex mental process instead of a pure decoding process. Reading was seen as an active and transactive process between the second language reader and the text (Carrell, 1987). Since then, increasing interest has been directed to the study of nonlinguistic-based factors in second language reading, such as readers' background knowledge and processing strategies (Coady, 1993; Hudson, 1982; Carrell, 1987). The role of readers' background knowledge has been widely studied (Anderson and Pearson, 1984; Carrell, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988; Anderson and Urquhart, 1988). Most reading scholars have acknowledged the functions of schema in reading and applied its principles to reading instruction and comprehension process. For instance, in 1981, Wilson devised the direct reading activity (DRA) which suggested that teachers help students to relate their past experiences to new concepts encountered in their reading, and this is still the model for most Basal reader lessons.

Schema was an extremely important term and major learning component in Piaget's theory. A schema can be thought of as an element in the organism's cognitive structure. When we interpret information, we do so, according to the schema theory, against a background, or map, of experience and we tend to fit incoming information against this background (Rumelhart, 1980). The schema available to an organism will determine how it can

Middle School Reading

respond to the physical environment and stimuli. Schemata can manifest themselves in overt behavior, as in the case of the grasping reflex, or they can manifest themselves covertly. Overtly exhibited behavior can be observed by students' reaction when they retell or write about what they read. However, covertly cognitive behavior and information processing strategies can only be referenced by readers' comprehension gain resembled by their product. Neisser (1976) has described schema as an innate part of perception, which grows and develops from the general to specific as the individual encounters a variety of experiences. More specifically, schemata are interacting knowledge structures, that represent general concepts. The scheme is seen as a hierarchical structure moving from general to specific. One schema can be embedded in another, and each can possess a number of variables. Due to this hierarchical structure, there are two types of processing: bottom-up or top-down. If incoming data activate schemata, which correspond to them at a higher level, there is a bottom-up processing. On the other hand, if incoming data activate their constituent schemata, there is top-down processing.

When applying schema theory to reading instruction and comprehension, reading should be viewed as a constructive process, in which the reader uses the knowledge he or she already has and expands it with what the writer provides. Consequently, it is crucial that the reader be able to relate the textual material to his or her own knowledge and experiences, because reading comprehension involves not only the information in the text but also knowledge the reader already possesses. This means that comprehending words, sentences, and discourse involves much more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge or competence, it relies on one's knowledge of the world as well. In this regard it should be taken into account that a good reader is the one who successfully activates schemata through both bottom-up and top-down processing.



Reading Comprehension Teaching Method Implementation

This method is specifically designed to teach reading as a process and comprehension as a product. It presents a pedagogical reading framework for integrating principles of theory and practice. While also suggesting that six structures that should be part of reading lessons. In addition, this method combines elements from learning theory, instruction theory and reading research into a set of pathways for application in the classroom. The integration of theory and practice is framed within the following components:

- A. Activating prior knowledge
 - The teacher guides a pre-reading discussion about content and text structure.
 - Students set purposes for reading and make predictions about content.
- B. Cultivating vocabulary
 - The teacher provides key vocabulary, discusses unfamiliar vocabulary through contextual and structural analysis strategies, and teaches students how to use rate repetition and mnemonics techniques.
 - Students apply contextual and structural analysis strategies and practice rate repetition and mnemonics techniques.
- C. Teaching for comprehension
 - The teacher asks students a post-reading literal, inferential and open-ended comprehension questions. Then, she/he asks students to formulate their own questions about text content.
 - Students discuss text content and provide spoken and written summarization.
- D. Increasing reading rate
 - The teacher helps students to use reading rate activities to achieve a level of automatic processing of the text.
 - Students apply reading rate activities.
- E. Verifying reading strategies
 - The teacher explains the reading

strategies, how and when to use them, and how students can evaluate them. Then she/he encourages students to add any of their thoughts regarding the use of strategies during reading.

- Students practice and apply reading strategies such as reading and thinking aloud.

Evaluating progress

- The teacher should use both quantitative and qualitative activities to assist readers keeping track of their progress.

- Students provide responses to placement tests, in-class reading quizzes, examinations and questionnaires about reading strategies; and they use verbal reports, portfolios, reading log records, and reading comprehension graphs to evaluate their progress and monitor their improvement.

Several classroom activities can be prepared to facilitate the activation of students' prior knowledge. First, pre-reading discussions provide an opportunity for readers to see what they know about a topic and what others may know. Teachers should attempt to activate as much prior knowledge as possible prior to reading the text, allowing students to apply their prior knowledge use while reading (Pardo, 2004). The teacher can best direct this discussion by asking questions about the topic. An idea for managing a pre-reading discussion is suggested by Dubin and Bycina (1991). They recommend the use of "anticipated guides" which contain "a series of statements, often provocative in nature, which are intended to challenge students' knowledge and beliefs about the content of the passage" (p. 202). This is a particularly useful classroom activity because sometimes students may not realize that they have prior knowledge on a particular subject, but as they listen to other students share information, they come to realize that they indeed know something about the reading topic. Second, a pre-reading discussion on the type of text structure and what expectations a reader may have about the organization of the material is very valuable for ESL readers. This discussion could include a conversation of the kinds of transition or linking words that the reader can expect to find. Activation of prior knowledge of text organi-

zation can facilitate reading comprehension.

Next, if readers make predictions about what they think the text content will be, they can then read to support or reject their hypotheses. This particular prior knowledge activation activity would need to be tied into activities that are used during later phases of the reading lesson, particularly an activity to verify whether the predictions that students made prior to reading were actually realized in the reading passage.

Cultivating Vocabulary

Student's comprehension gain relates to a number of interrelated variables that include: their extent of deploying cognitive processing strategies, content interpretation and examination skills, and the scope of interaction with text and how it can be linked to their prior knowledge. All these variables can be strongly enhanced and facilitated by the level of their vocabulary learning, practice and immersion. Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension have a strong relationship (Ekwall, 1992). Students' vocabulary knowledge and skills can be enhanced by their reading teachers in the classroom in multiple ways. Cultivating students' vocabulary and development can be demonstrated by a three-stage vocabulary learning framework that can be parallel to their reading engagement activity. These stages include: Pre-classroom reading, during classroom reading and post-classroom reading. Vocabulary instruction and learning strategies can be tailored to concurrently fit the lesson objectives and students' vocabulary enhancement goals set by the teacher and students. Pre-classroom reading vocabulary instruction includes students' at home reading where they are asked to identify new vocabularies that appear in their reading and develop a list on new vocabularies. This list includes the meaning of the vocabulary in the text, other possible meanings of the same vocabulary, and the type of vocabulary. The classroom reading stage includes the teachers' role in compiling lists of new vocabulary as it becomes generated from the students. During classroom discussion of the text, teacher can facilitate a student lead discussion of the new vocabularies and how they were used in the text in order to assist their overall comprehension of 10

the text content. During class, students are asked to join their vocabulary groups and create new applications for the same vocabulary that emerged from the text and provide new contexts with a new meaning of the same vocabulary. Post classroom reading activity includes asking students to write a reflective paragraph on their understanding and comprehension of the lesson content where they are requested to use a high number of new vocabularies in their written reflections.

This vocabulary instruction framework also serves the function of enhancement to the reader's prior knowledge activation and deployment in the new reading experience. Actual classroom activities that typically fall into this transitional framework of vocabulary instruction include: knowing spelling rules, analyzing word structure, mnemonic techniques, paraphrase activities and vocabulary puzzles.

Teach for Comprehension

This method presents several classroom activities that can be implemented to teach comprehension. First, the teacher can get readers to formulate questions of their own about text content. This can be implemented in several ways. Readers can ask questions about material that they do not understand and would like to seek clarification from the teacher and/or classmates. This allows each reader to identify what is not understood and thus increases comprehension by obtaining an answer. The first step in teaching for comprehension is to ask readers to identify what is not comprehended. Next, the teacher asks students a post-reading literal, inferential and open-ended comprehension questions. A third classroom activity to teach for comprehension is to have students discuss a reading passage and summarize it. The value of this teaching tool is that, in providing the summarization, the reader needs to be able to distinguish between different levels of importance in the text: main ideas, supporting ideas, and details. An effective summary would demonstrate that a reader sees the difference among these different levels and can place emphasis at the proper level. Moreover, the teacher can have students discuss text content and retell it in their own words.

The value of teaching for comprehension activities in a reading classroom cannot be underestimated. Multiple choice tests can be developed to test comprehension, but a classroom teacher should focus on teaching activities that teach rather than test comprehension.

Increasing Reading Rate

The following four reading rate activities can be used in the second language reading class to increase students' reading rate:

1. **Rate building reading.** Students are given 60 seconds to read as much material as they can. They then begin reading again from the beginning of the text and are given an additional 60 seconds. They are to read more material during the second 60 seconds period than in the first. The drill is repeated a third and a fourth time. The purpose of this activity is to reread "old" material quickly, gliding into the new. As the eyes move quickly over the "old" material the students actually learn how to get their eyes moving at a faster reading rate. The exercise involves more than simply moving the eyes quickly; the material should be processed and comprehended. As students participate in this rate building activity, they learn to increase reading rate.

2. **Repeated Reading.** Students read a short passage over and over again until they achieve criterion levels of reading rate and comprehension. For example, they may try to read a short 100-word paragraph four times in two minutes. The criterion levels may vary from class to class, but reasonable goals to work towards are criterion levels of 200 words per minute at comprehension.

3. **Class-paced reading.** This activity requires a discussion regarding a class goal for minimal reading rate. Once that goal is established, the average number of words per page of the material being read is calculated. It is then determined how much material needs to be read in one minute

in order to meet the class goal. For example, if the class goal is to read 250 words per minute and the material being read has an average of 125 words per page, the class would be expected to read one page every 30 seconds. As each 30 seconds elapse, the teacher indicates to the class to move to the next page. Students are encouraged to keep up with the established class goal. Of course, those who read faster than 250 words per minute are not expected to slow down their reading rate. As long as they are ahead of the designated page they continue reading.

4. Self-paced reading. The procedures for this activity are similar to the class paced reading activity outlined above. During this reading rate activity the students determine their own goal for reading rate. They then determine how much material needs to be read in a 60 seconds period to meet their objective rate. For example, suppose a student's objective rate is 180 words per minute and that the material being read has an average number of ten words per line. The student would need to read 18 lines of text in one minute to meet the goal. The activity proceeds nicely by having each student mark off several chunks of lines and silently read for a period of five to seven minutes with the teacher calling out minute times. Students can then determine if they are keeping up with their individual reading rate goal. These rate-building activities seek to get the readers to a level of automatic processing of the text.

Verifying Reading Strategies:

Based on this theoretical input, second language reading teachers can approach the instruction of reading strategies by addressing the following six questions. These six strategy instruction questions can be applied to a specific reading skill such as "main idea comprehension":

1. What is the strategy? Being able to identify the main idea is one of the most

important reading skills a teacher can develop. It is a skill that a teacher needs to apply to the majority of reading contexts.

2. Why should the strategy be learned? If the main idea can be identified, comprehension is facilitated by being able to organize the information presented and by being able to distinguish main ideas from supporting ideas and details.

3. How can the strategy be used? Students read to locate the thesis statement of the passage and the topic sentence of each paragraph. They should read quickly and do not worry about the details.

4. When should the strategy be used? Main idea comprehension should be used when reading expository passages that contain an abundance of new information.

5. Where should the reader look? The reader should read the first and last paragraphs of a passage and read the first sentence of each paragraph. Readers should be reminded to ask themselves the following questions: What idea is common to most of the text? What is the idea that relates the parts to the whole? What opinion do all of the parts support? What idea do they all explain or describe?

6. How can a reader evaluate the use of the strategy? In the early stages of reading comprehension, open discussions with reader will be the best method to verify whether the strategy is being used appropriately. The use of verbal think-aloud protocols can facilitate the evaluation of the strategy. Grabe (1991) provides a caution: "effective strategy training is not a simple or easy matter" (p. 393). He points out that the duration of training, clarity of training procedures, student responsibility, and strategy transfer are variables which

influence strategy training results. In addition to these six steps outlined above, allowing readers to become more aware of what they actually do while reading is extremely beneficial. The application of verbal reports to the L2 classroom provides an opportunity for teaching of metacognitive awareness strategies in all language skills. In practicing verbal reports in class, a continual focus should be on getting students to "aim for transfer" (Davey, 1983). The objective should be to get students to use this in all of their reading activities. The demonstration and practice provides not only a discussion of how to read, but also why and when a reader would use certain strategies.

Evaluate Progress

Five classroom record keeping procedures can be used by classroom teacher for qualitative and quantitative evaluation. First, a reading log provides readers with a mechanism of accountability to record what they are reading each day. Students can be encouraged to read for at least 30 minutes outside of class each day and record what they are reading. Another way that this reading log has proved useful is to have students record everything they read during the day and how much time they spent reading. Students are often surprised at how much of their day is spent in reading activities. The log does not require a reader to provide a detailed description of their comprehension of what has been read.

Some teachers implement a reading log in which the readers must summarize what they have read and/or ask questions to the teacher. Used in this fashion, the reading log can become a tool for teaching comprehension. Second, reading rate graphs are kept to mark improvement in reading rate. Likewise, a graph of reading comprehension scores can be kept. These graphs become useful tools for the students to use in setting individual goals.

Next, a reading rate record is a tool for readers to calculate reading rate during extended reading periods. This record allows the teacher, as well as the students, to monitor reading rate. For this record, the reader multiplies the number of pages read by the average number of words per page. This gives the total number of words read,

which is divided by the number of minutes spent reading to result in the approximate number of words read per minute. A simple formula for calculating the average number of words per page is to use the following four steps:

1. Count every word on the first five lines of text.

2. Divide the sum in number one above by five. This gives the average number of words per line of text.

3. Count every line on the page.

4. Multiply the total number of lines per page (number three above) by the average number of words per line (number two above). This results in the average number of words per page. Finally, a record of repeated reading practice is a tool in helping individual readers set goals for reading rate improvement and is also a tool for helping readers see their progress. This particular record is used in conjunction with repeated readings.

References

- Anderson, R. C., & Pearson, P. D. (1984). A Schemas-theoretic view of basic processes in reading comprehension. In Pearson, P. D. *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255-292). New York: Longman.
- Anderson, C., & Urquhart, A. (1988). This test is unfair. I'm not an economist. In *Interactive approaches to second language reading*, (ed). Carrell, P. L. (1984). Schema theory and ESL reading: Classroom implications and applications. *Modern language journal*, 68, 332-43.
- Carrell, P. L. (1985). Facilitating ESL reading by teaching text structure. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19, 727-752.
- Carrell, P. L. (1987). Content and formal schemata in ESL reading. *TESOL quarterly*, 21(3), 461-482.



- Carrell, P. L., Devine, J. & Eskey, D. (1988) Interactive approaches to second language reading. New York. Cambridge University Press.
- Coady, J., Magoto, J., Hubbard, P., Graney, J., & Mokhtari, K. (1993). High frequency vocabulary and reading proficiency in ESL reading. In Huckin, T., Hynes, M., & Coady, J. Second language reading and vocabulary learning. (pp. 217-228). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Davey, E. (1983). Think aloud-modeling the cognitive processes of comprehension fostering and comprehension activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1, 117-175.
- Dubin, F., & Bycina, D. (1991). Academic reading and the ESL/EFL teacher. In Celce-Murcia, M. Teaching English as a second or foreign language, (pp. 195-215). New York: Newbury House.
- Ekwall, Eldon E. & James L. Shanker. Locating and correcting reading difficulties. New York, New York: Merrill, 1992.
- Grabe, W. (1991). Current developments in second language reading research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(3), 375-406.

- Hudson, T. 1982. The effects of induced schemata on the "Short Circuit" in L2 reading performance. *Language learning*, 32(1), 1-31.
- Neisser, U. (1976). *Cognition and reality: Principles and implications of cognitive psychology*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Pardo, L. S. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*. November 2004, 272-281.
- Rumelhart, D. E. (1977). Toward an interactive model of reading. In S. Dornic (Ed.). *Attention and performance VI*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Rumelhart, D. E. 1980. Schemata: The building blocks of cognition. In: R.J. Spiro, B.C. Bruce & W.F. Brewer. (Eds.), *Theoretical issues in reading comprehension*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wilson, R. M. (1981). *Diagnostic and remedial reading for classroom and clinic*. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Co.



Book List: The Latest and Greatest to Enjoy

By Dr. Nance Wilson

Up and down the Scratchy Mountains by Laurel Snyder, Random House, 2008

Lucy and Wynston have been best friends for as long as they can remember. Wynston, the prince, is searching for the perfect princess. Lucy is searching for her long lost mother. The best friends' separate searches come together when Wynston follows Lucy to the town of Torrent where the rain comes on schedule and the people live in alphabetical order. A quest for family and love that reminds the reader about what is important in life.

Any Which Wall by Laurel Snyder, Random House, 2010

During a hot summer, four bored kids from Iowa begin their journey to exotic places from Camelot to New York guided by the infamous Merlin. Their adventures take them from the terrors of a medieval dungeon to confrontations with outlaws and pirates. Throughout their journey, the children learn that magic has consequences and adventure is not always what it seems.

Something Like Hope by Shawn Goodman, Delacorte, 2010

17 year-old Shavonne's self-destructive behaviors have kept her in juvenile detention since seventh grade. The story is framed around the conversations that Shavonne has with Mr. Delpopolo sharing her secrets and testing her faith on her path to the possibility of freedom.



Invisible Girl by Mary Hanlon Stone Philomel, 2010

Stephanie is abandoned by her abusive mother and pushed aside by her emotionally absent father. She is left to discover who she is while visiting with Annie's Beverly Hills family. As Stephanie struggles to understand who she is and her place in the world, she is both insider and outsider of the "cool" clique. Her observations of how the clique works are amazing while her naivety about the world seems contradictory. A good read for girls, although the beginning is quite shocking.

Restoring Harmony by Joelle Anthony, Putnam, 2010

The year is 2041 and Molly McClure is on a journey to bring her family together. Molly is asked to travel from her quiet and isolated Canadian farm to her grandparents home in a Portland, OR, suburb learning that the outside world is full of rampant crime, abandoned cities, destroyed infrastructure, and oil shortages. Yet, her travel to her grandparents is nothing compared to discoveries she makes about the world in which she lives.

The Fat Boy Chronicles by Diane Lang and Michael Buchanan, Gale, 2010

Jimmy, a high school freshman, experiences pain and isolation as an overweight teenager. When his English teacher assigns a journal, Jimmy uses it to chronicle the abuse he receives at the hands of his classmates as well as his aspirations to lose weight. Frustrated by his predicament, Jimmy begins to diet and exercise finding a new outlook on life.

The Red Umbrella by Christina Gonzalez, Knopf, 2010

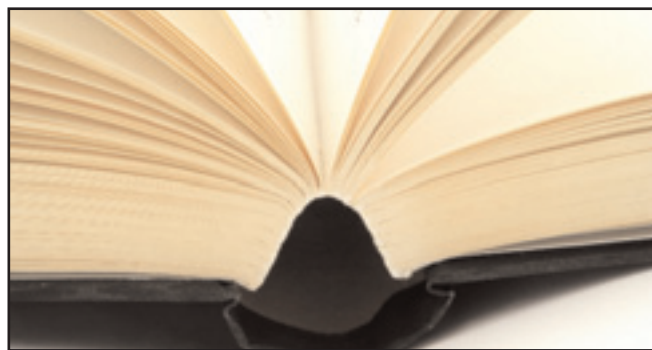
Fourteen-year-old Lucia Alvarez is worried about boys and parties when Fidel Castro comes to power. Suddenly her family is constantly afraid and her friends feel like strangers. Before she can begin to understand the issues of the Communist, revolution, Lucia is sent to the United States as part of the Operation Pedro Pan. Travel with Lucia as she learns about freedom, family, and love.

Cry of the Giraffe by Judie Oron, Annick Press, 2010

Wuditu is an outsider in her homeland. She is a Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jew, hoping to go to Yerusalem where she can be free. She and her family risk their lives on this journey, only to be separated. Waditu's story was encaptivating. The story was well written with details allowing the young reader to get a sense of the history and geography of the time and the situation of the Beta Isreal people. There were times during the book when I yelled at Waditu for the decisions she made. But at the end I cried tears of joy and relief.

The Red Pyramid by Rick Riordan, Hyperion, 2010

Carter and his sister Sadie think they are just going to a museum with their famous Egyptologist father only to learn that the magic world of Ancient Egypt is not only real; but still in existence. They must work together to save their family as they discover magic secrets that have existed since the time of the pharaohs. This book has lots of action and uses multiple perspectives to tell a fast paced and exciting story.



Join Us!

Membership Application
Middle School Special Interest Group of the
International Reading Association

Your Name: _____

School: _____

Home
Address: _____

Home
Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Please complete the attached survey and
enclose a check for \$10 payable to:

Billie Jo Dunaway
4640 Secret River Trail
Port Orange, FL 32129

(We are a non-profit organization.)

Are you a member of the International
Reading Association? _____
If so, Membership #: _____

Would you be interested in active participation
in the planning and development of the
following projects/activities?

- Annual Convention Program
- Professional Development
- Teacher of the Year Award
- Chapter Membership
- Chapter Officer
- Membership Committee
- Publicity Committee
- Web site development
- Newsletter