



## Features

- Reading Strategies for Struggling Readers
- Digital Corner
- Book Corner

## Important Dates

- **January 20:**  
SPED 448  
4:00 - 4:50
- **February 10:**  
SPED 488  
4:00 - 4:50
- **March 10:**  
SPED 448  
4:00 - 4:50
- **April 14:**  
SPED 448  
4:00 - 4:50

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## Reading Comprehension Strategies for Struggling Readers

One of the biggest challenges for teachers teaching literacy to students with disabilities at the middle and high school levels is to find ways to facilitate comprehension for non-readers and poor readers. This becomes even more imperative considering that students in middle and high school have to make sense of complex content area text for success in schools. What can teachers do and what strategies have teachers used that have worked? Some goals to improve reading comprehension include teaching vocabulary, building fluency, scaffolding new ideas on prior knowledge and experiences, and motivating students.

Gersten et al (2001) reviewed the research literature assessing the impact of instructional approaches for improving reading comprehension of narrative and expository text and conclude that strategy instruction consistently improves performance in these areas. Strategy instruction is aimed at helping students become active users of a strategy. Such instruction focuses on improving how readers engage with narrative and expository material, and the objective is for them to become more deliberate and active in processing text instead of circumventing, modifying, or supplementing text. The hope is that readers can then have multiple ways to cope with a broad range of texts with different text structures.

Gersten et al (2001) also concluded that to increase the effectiveness of strategy instruction teachers should incorporate careful modeling and provide extensive feedback to students. The purpose is to ensure that students truly learn and incorporate particular strategies into their reading. Teachers should also model how their students can use these strategies as they read across a variety of materials.

Richards & Gipe (1992) describe two strategies Yes/No...Why? and It Reminds Me Of... that they use with young or poor readers to activate prerequisite background knowledge for interpreting a passage. The Yes/No...Why? strategy requires students to identify ideas in the reading that they know about, appreciate or understand (Yes) and ones that they dislike, dispute or do not understand (No). For each Yes/No statement students also give a reason (Why) for their choice. The "It Reminds Me Of..." strategy is a variation where students connect information in the paragraph to their own experiences.

When students share their responses using these strategies they recognize that their background knowledge influences their responses and, therefore, there is a difference in their responses within the same class. Richards & Gipe (1992) argue that since there are no right answers for these strategies, it fosters active participation and success in reading. Teachers can read the text aloud and get students to respond orally as well.

Alex Horn-Lichtenfeld, a Chicago Public School teacher working with students having mild/moderate learning disabilities, uses another strategy to foster active reading. She co-creates a chart of "active reading symbols" with her students. The chart contains symbols such as '+' to indicate something important, '!' to indicate interesting, '-' to show disagreement and '?' to mark a question related to material that students are reading. Students identify ideas from the text and use post-it notes to categorize them under these symbols and collate them all on a single chart. The entire class can then discuss and compare the ideas on the post-in notes under each category to build a strong understanding and comprehension of the text.

Ms. Lichtenfeld also helps her students learn the skills of prediction and sequencing with respect to science content. She copies titles and sentences from the books to create tags and her students use these tags to sequence sentences to make paragraphs. She also asks the students to predict what sort of information will be available under these tags. This helps students understand how information is organized and categorized under various topics as well as which sections students can refer to for further information related to a certain idea.

At Foreman High School, Donn Simon and Kelly Guenther draw on different ways to help students organize their reading comprehension while reading *Beowulf*. A complex narrative with sophisticated themes, such a novel could be considered very challenging to relate to for kids in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Chicago. Simon and Guenther build their lessons by first making associations to accomplish several things—to draw on students' knowledge of the story, reinforce comprehension, and allow students to see

common themes across literature. Just recently they talked about “heroes and villains” and compared the main characters to modern-day characters. Students talked about Spiderman and considered how his super-human powers compared and contrasted with those of Grendel. Connecting the story with present day allowed humor to be brought into the lesson and provided students with a framework to understand written works and real-life situations they may encounter in future.

#### References:

Gersten, R., Fuchs, L., Williams, J.P., & Baker, S. (2001). Teaching Reading Comprehension Strategies to Students With Learning Disabilities: Review of Research. *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 71, No. 2, pp. 279–320.

Richards, J.C., Gipe, J.P. (1992) Activating Background Knowledge: Strategies for Beginning and Poor Readers (In the Classroom). *Reading Teacher*, v45 n6 pp. 474-476.

### Digital Corner

#### Reading Lady

<http://www.readinglady.com/mosaic/> Readinglady.com was created by Laura Kump of New York City to provide several resources for teachers specifically related to reading and literacy. One of the featured resources is a discussion group called Mosaic Group where teachers reflect about their teaching, challenges, strategies and instruction plans and receive suggestions and feedback from others on the list. The list is specifically intended to help teachers help students become strategic, thoughtful readers.

#### The Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication

<http://reading.indiana.edu/> is an information repository of the Indiana University School of Education. It offers educational materials, services and

coursework to everyone interested in the language arts. The website includes latest news, research and resources about reading, information on books and videos, lesson plans, online education, and a compilation of useful web resources. There is also a section related to supporting struggling readers.

#### TeachersFirst

<http://www.teachersfirst.com/> is a web resource for K-12 classroom teachers. It is a collection of original content, Internet resources, lesson plans, and tools drawn from around the world relevant to classroom instruction and teaching issues. The content is written and edited by experienced educators, and reviewed by teaching professionals. Reviewed resources are grouped by subject and grade level and are searchable by keyword or phrase for easy access.

### Book Corner

Balajthy, Ernest and Lippa-Wade, Sally. *Struggling Readers: Assessment and Instruction K-6*. New York: Guilford Press. 2003.

This book combines theory, research and ideas for teaching struggling readers. The authors have taken a social constructivist approach to think about struggling readers and supporting them. They begin by categorizing struggling readers into three different groups, the catch-on reader, the catch-up reader and the stalled reader. The authors suggest using these categories as a way to think of groups with common strengths and weaknesses instead of placing permanent labels on students.

They go on to share research that shows common characteristics within each group and possible strategies for each group. The rest of the book is separated into three sections (the three categories of struggling readers). Within each section they share case studies, to help make the characteristics of each category memorable. Chapters are dedicated to explaining common characteristics, providing possible explanations for the problems, stating instructional goals and supplying assessments and activities for teachers to use in order to help meet students' needs. Each section also allows the reader to reflect on case studies and to think about issues, interventions and the needs of each student. At the end of every section is a list of additional resources (research and materials) and a thorough summary of the previous pages.