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Enhancing Literacy Skills with an Emphasis
on Comprehension in the 21st Century

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements of the
Master of Science in Education – Professional Development

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Abstract

This project explored the effectiveness and importance of teaching comprehension strategies through a workshop format. Classroom teachers (n = 6) were surveyed before and after the workshop sessions to assess knowledge and application of comprehension strategies. The pre-survey (survey one) drove the curriculum for each of the five workshop sessions along with State Common Core Standards and district target skills in reading. The teachers and students included in this project were from first (n = 41), second (n = 42), and third (n = 43) grades. Students were assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Common Based Assessment (CBA). Participating teachers were also given a post survey (survey two) to assess the effectiveness of the workshop. Overall, student test scores on the DRA increased after the workshop. Students did not show as much growth on the CBA as with the DRA. Teachers shared their increase in knowledge and ability to teach comprehension strategies through survey two at the end of the workshop. This project emphasized the importance of teaching students research based comprehension strategies and how effective use of these strategies can lead to increased knowledge of a text and stronger performance on formal assessments.
Chapter One

Introduction

My obligation as a reflective educator is to constantly seek out effective strategies to enhance the knowledge of my students especially in the area of literacy. It is my responsibility to share my knowledge to assist my colleagues in becoming more successful in the profession of teaching. In the school setting, it takes a village to teach a child and each teacher relies on the expertise of colleagues to enhance their own effectiveness. The idea of a village working together inspired my decision to consult with my colleagues and design a workshop focusing on comprehension. The purpose of this project was to inform elementary teachers on how to effectively teach reading comprehension through the use of a variety of research based strategies and methodologies in the context of a hands-on workshop. As Pressley states (2002), “good comprehenders are extremely active when they read, using a variety of comprehension strategies in an articulated fashion as they read challenging texts” (p. 291). There is a great amount of excellent research that supports how important comprehension skills are in the process of reading and examining this research can assist teachers in becoming more effective educators.

Research is valuable because it offers more in-depth thoughts and suggests strategies which have proven to be effective. A major strength of research is its reliance on real world data and its open approach to sharing how the information came to be (Shanahan, 2002). According to a study conducted by the Public Agenda Organization (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Aulicino, & McHugh, 1999) out of ten teachers believe children struggle with reading due to one or more of these three factors: parents lack time for their children, parents lack interest in their child’s education, or parents lack knowledge about how to support their child academically. Therefore, it is the job of the teacher to not only help children but the parents as well. The lines of
communication must be clear and open in order for both children and parents to be successful with literacy skills. The type of material sent home will greatly influence the script that parents follow. This will assist parents in helping their child apply skills taught at school on a daily basis (Paratore, 2002). The ultimate goal is for readers to become independent, self-regulated, and thought provoking. This can be achieved through effective comprehension instruction (Kamil et al., 2000).

After reviewing research conducted by professionals, it is clear that while teachers assess comprehension, they do not necessarily teach all children how to become successful readers. Many educators rely on their teachers’ manuals to do the job and clearly, that is not an effective method (Allington, 2006). After all, comprehension is the most important thing about reading and is the reason readers engage in the process of reading. The school district that I currently teach in, which is located in southeastern Wisconsin, has been conducting professional development seminars on effectively teaching comprehension, yet formal and informal local data from schools reveal that students perform poorly with comprehension, creating an area of concern for educators, students, and parents. Personally, I have had many parents approach me with questions on how to support their child in learning how to become a better reader. Up until a few months ago I did not have a clear cut answer or process for parents to follow. After reading and studying the work of many researchers I have found effective comprehension strategies that I can share with parents. Some strategies found in Allington’s (2006) work include activating prior knowledge, summarizing, imagery, question generating, and thinking aloud.

State mandated Common Core Standards (Department of Public Instruction) have assisted with the process of narrowing down literacy skills and have provided a clear focus for
educators at every grade level. The motto of the Common Core Standards “less is more”, has allowed educators to hone in on more specific skills and require mastery from every student. The workshop created for this project was based upon these Common Core Standards and district target skills in the area of literacy. To accompany Allington’s (2006) list of effective comprehension strategies, a variety of research based strategies were incorporated into the workshop and include making connections, visualizing, determining main ideas, inferring (Richardson, 2009), synthesizing (Richardson, 2009), predicting, and monitoring understanding (Duke & Pearson, 2002). The district target skills in literacy focused upon identifying story elements, main ideas, supporting details, making inferences, recognizing and distinguishing among genres, and evaluating author’s word choice and use of language. Also incorporated into the workshops were technological tools to engage students and encourage creativity. Such tools were I pads, netbooks, smart board lessons and activities, and internet based sites such as Blabberize, and Wordle.

For this project, I surveyed a group of six elementary teachers in my building, including two teachers from first, second, and third grade, to assess their current knowledge base on teaching comprehension. This survey is referenced as survey one and was administered in February 2012. I chose veteran teachers of ten years or more who I knew would not only be willing to participate, but also are dedicated educators who consistently search for best practices and strategies to assist students in being high performers. The results of survey one helped me determine what methodologies teachers currently use (Direct Explanation, Transactional Strategy Instruction, Reciprocal Teaching, etc.). In addition, I asked how often teachers model, scaffold, and allow students to practice comprehension skills within the classroom. I also asked if
teachers felt confident teaching comprehension. I reflected and shared a quote from Pressley (2002),

The metacognitively sophisticated teacher also should know that comprehension skill does not develop very well on its own, but that the comprehension strategies used by good comprehenders can be taught, beginning with teacher explanations and modeling of the strategies followed by scaffolded student practice of comprehension strategies during reading. (p. 306)

Based on the results of the survey questions, I designed a workshop to assist teachers in becoming more effective with teaching comprehension. I started the project with survey one in February 2012 which was followed by five workshop sessions. These sessions took place March through May with the final session being held in September. Survey two, which served as an evaluation for the workshop, was administered in September as well. My goal after reviewing the survey one responses was to focus on state and district Common Core Standards, while also remaining cognizant of the district-wide elementary target skills in reading. These target skills were areas of concern on the previous year’s Wisconsin Knowledge and Concept Exam (WKCE) and the Measure of Academic Progress exam (MAP). The goals as mentioned earlier, were the central focus, as students are expected to be proficient in each of the areas of literacy.

Students were given two assessments as a pre and post measure. Students were assessed one-on-one with the teacher using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). This assessment requires students to read a short text aloud followed by answering four to five comprehension questions. One or two of the questions are right there types of questions and the rest are higher level critical thinking questions. The DRA is accurate due to the fact the teacher can adjust the level of the text according to a student’s performance. The other assessment given
Comprehension

was a standardized assessment created by the district. This assessment is known as a Common Based Assessment (CBA) and requires students to read several passages and answer comprehension questions accordingly.

Interestingly enough, both the district goals and the Common Core Standards hit comprehension pretty intensely, which emphasizes the need for educators to effectively teach and then assess comprehension. I also accentuated the importance of Reciprocal Teaching with the ultimate goal, for the teacher to gradually release responsibility to the students. I created easy to use hand-outs, whiteboard activities, computer activities, etc. so that teachers could easily adopt or implement a variety of comprehension strategies.

In designing these workshops, my intention was to provide opportunities for teachers to participate in a professional development opportunity and take away some simple and easy to implement strategies from the workshop. I also wanted participating teachers to ask questions and bounce ideas off other professionals, be more metacognitive on their current practices and revise components if necessary, and be reminded as to how important comprehension is to the reading process.

Overall, I wanted teachers to feel more confident in teaching younger students how to comprehend. Effective comprehension strategies and methodologies were shared so that teachers could have references for these strategies. I was able to answer any questions teachers had and excellent ideas were shared amongst colleagues. Every effective educator knows that not all children learn the same and differentiation is crucial. The more tools a teacher can put into the box of knowledge, the more successful the teacher and students will become in the classroom and eventually outside the classroom as well!
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter includes a historical overview of how the process of comprehension has been viewed throughout the past two hundred years. Also discussed are theoretical frameworks of teaching comprehension which include Automatic Information Processing, Direct Explanation, Transactional Strategy Instruction, Reciprocal Teaching, Students and Teachers Actively Reading Texts (START), and balanced comprehension instruction. This chapter goes more in-depth with effective comprehension strategies which include read alouds, expanding prior knowledge through print exposure, comprehension monitoring and metacognition, cooperative learning, think alouds, graphic and semantic organizers, questions, and summarization, to support students in becoming stronger readers. Educators had “believed that comprehension would occur naturally as the automatic by-product of accurate word-recognition. In other words, the idea was to teach children to decode and recognize words-and comprehension would take care of itself” (Lipson & Wixson, 2009, p. 643). Research supports that this notion is inaccurate and that students need specific instruction on how to effectively comprehend a text.

Researchers such as Markman (1977, 1981) began to study how metacognitive readers were of the comprehension process while reading. The main concern was if the reader could determine the meaning of the text and what steps were taken to assist the reader if there was confusion (as cited in Kamil, Ferguson, Garza, Trabasso, & Williams, 2000). According to Guthrie, 2008, comprehension develops through purposeful, motivated reading activities, which are engaging to the student (as cited in Scharlach, 2008). Along with this, there are also scientific methods to assist educators in teaching students the strategies needed to be thought
provoking readers. The following section provides a historical overview as to how the ideas of comprehension in the reading process have evolved over the years.

**Historical Overview**

From 1880 to 1910, educators believed the sole purpose for reading was to develop an appreciation for literature and to determine interests in which to delve into deeper (Sears, n.d.). There was little connection between reading and comprehending what was read. Then in 1917, Francis Parker emphasized that the meaning of a text was more important and influential than simply reiterating the text. Along with Parker, Edward Thorndike stressed the importance of understanding what was being read. Thorndike claimed that reading is reasoning (as cited in, Kamil et al., 2000). Thorndike (1917, p. 323) stated,

> Reading is a very elaborate procedure, involving a weighing of each of many elements in a sentence, their organization in the proper relations one to another, the selection of certain of their connotations and the rejection of others, and the cooperation of many forces to determine final responses. (as cited in Sears, n.d., p.5)

In 1919, researchers reported that students must be trained to effectively process the information as students were reading the text. All of these researchers facilitated the change of the definition of reading and reading instruction.

The period between 1924 and 1935 proved to change the views on literacy and literacy instruction tremendously. Schools were now concerned with students who appeared to have some form of reading disability. These disabilities were thought to be caused by a variety of culture and economic factors (Sears, n.d.). In the 1940’s remedial reading was a hot topic and many believed it was imperative in assisting struggling readers in sharpening skills in both decoding and comprehending. With this research, McKee (1941) stated, “eye movement,
increasing speed, or using exercises are not going to help anyone with comprehension. The reading ability of our pupils and students is much lower than deficiencies in the mere mechanics of reading indicate” (as cited in Sears, n.d., p. 17).

Researchers and educators began to realize that teachers needed more effective training to assist students in becoming more active and engaged readers. Teachers also needed to be able to teach students how to understand and apply what was being read. In the 1950’s, Traxler looked at standardized tests and quickly realized these did not measure comprehension, but rather overall intelligence. This caused many students to guess instead of read, as the tests were challenging (Sears, n.d., p.20).

In 1957, the launching of Soviet satellite Sputnik forced Americans to re-examine educational practices and became known as the period of “expanding knowledge and technological revolution” (Sears, n.d., p.21). It became clear to Americans that they must expand their knowledge and be capable readers. During this “Era of Conditioned Learning”, which was 1950-1965 (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 34) investigators, authors, and publishers worked anxiously to produce new methods and create best practices for teachers in hopes of seeking improved results in teaching children how to read. The bottom up perspective was evident during this time and emphasized the importance of context in comprehension and word identification, whole-word recognition, and the thought of reading as a complex activity that needed to be supported by developing basic skills. This bottom up way of learning and teaching emphasized the importance of foundational skills through drill and practice. Competing theories of learning at the time (Gestalt Theory) viewed the complex activity (e.g. reading) as a whole phenomenon that was greater than the sum of its parts (skills). From this view, there was a focus on comprehension and word identification, whole-word recognition, and the thought of reading
“as a unique human activity with its own definitive characteristics” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.37). Instructional strategies such as the SQ3R (Scan, Question, Read, Recite, and Remember), advanced organizers, and Direct Reading Activity became popular. The SQ3R focused on how to utilize a text for study purposes. Advanced organizers provided the reader with prior knowledge to enhance comprehension, and the Direct Reading Activity provided the teacher with a detailed description of implementation of a reading lesson (Singer, 1983, as cited in Sears, n.d., p. 25). Researchers during this period worked endlessly to make sense of the way children were learning and thinking. They had to find a way to separate each skill into smaller components in order to help students make better sense of how each skill connects to the process of reading (Alexander & Fox, 2004).

The “Era of Natural Learning,” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 37) which was from 1966-1975, was a very influential time for the topic of comprehension. Researchers believed not much light was shed on this crucial topic until this era. In 1977, Van Dijk and Kintsch’s study revealed that readers could process and comprehend more easily if texts were organized into paragraphs starting with a topic sentence with details to follow (Sears, n.d.). Researchers found several comprehension strategies, which were validated as positively affecting comprehension and memory of text. These comprehension strategies included relating text to prior knowledge, forming mental images, generating questions, and summarizing text (Pressley, 2002). During this time, teachers were managers who arranged the classroom so learning could occur, but if a student wanted to learn anything, they had to take ownership and be independent. This concept is still true today and challenges critical thinking and work ethic.

The 1980’s, also known as the “Era of Information Processing” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 41), brought about innovative and additional studies in the field of literacy. Professionals in
the areas of linguistics, cognitive psychology, sociolinguistics, and reader response took an interest in the importance of literacy. Pearson (1985) urged that,

A teacher can no longer regard the text as the ultimate criterion for defining what good comprehension is; s/he must view the text, along with students’ prior knowledge, students’ strategies, the task, and the classroom situation, as one facet in the complex array we call comprehension. (as cited in Sears, n.d. p. 33)

The emphasis on prior knowledge became stronger during this era as researchers believed this was the key for students to be able to make connections to a text. This prior knowledge framed the student as powerful, individualistic, and flexible while reading and comprehending a text. Researchers also believed that a child’s knowledge could be impacted through direct instruction, training, or explicit instruction (Alexander & Fox, 2004). These theoretical frameworks assist students by modeling how to pull prior knowledge to the forefront when reading a text and using this prior knowledge to make connections to the text and beyond the text to enhance critical thinking skills.

The “Era of Sociocultural Learning” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 41) occurred during the years of 1986 and 1995, in which a one-size-fits-all approach was still occurring in classrooms despite the negative effects this single-minded approach had on students. The International Reading Association (IRA) created diverse instructional approaches in 2000, which caused teachers to rethink the one-size-fits-all theory in order to meet the diverse learning needs of each student. During this era researchers focused on the schooled and unschooled knowledge students possessed. The schooled knowledge was that which a student obtained while in the school setting. The unschooled knowledge, conceptual knowledge, was that which the student brought to the classroom and was referred to as informal knowledge. Researchers believed the
unschooled knowledge was more beneficial to a student as this knowledge was considered more interesting and valuable to the student. Researchers also contradicted this thought and felt that unschooled knowledge could get in the way of schooled knowledge and be detrimental to a student’s growth. As stated in Alexander & Fox, 2004, “with these varied social cultural perspectives on literacy came a radical shift from the prior era’s location of knowledge in the mind and emphasis on individuality of knowledge and the process of knowing” (p. 50).

The concept of comprehension was still loosely defined, as many educators could not agree on a true definition. This in turn continues to create a challenge for educators and a frustration for many readers (Sears, n.d.). Decoding and comprehension skills were taught during this period of time, during small group instruction and throughout the day. Comprehension strategies were taught as interpretive vehicles, which could be used to get beyond the literal meaning of a text. Students were taught to coordinate strategies with the intention that the comprehension strategies would assist students in becoming self-regulated strategy users (Pressley, 2002).

The “Era of Engaged Learning” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 50) which started in 1996 and still occurs today focuses on the perception of texts. Reader motivation is also still being considered along with the stages of “learning to read” and “reading to learn”. Researchers are shifting to a more integrated and developmental perspective versus a single strategy or approach. One change in theory that is still being considered today is that these ideas not only pertain to struggling young readers but to readers of all abilities and ages. Research also states that readers are more active and willful participants in the construction of knowledge.

From the late 1800’s to the present, many researchers have delved into the significant discrepancies of the theories among the government and administrators regarding comprehension
Comprehension in the reading process. Numerous changes in theories and strategies occurred to improve literacy instruction on the part of the educator and develop more in-depth knowledge of texts for the reader. Key components of comprehension such as background knowledge and making connections were brought to the forefront. Along with that, six theoretical frameworks have been created to provide background for educators and researchers.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Automatic Information Processing.** The LaBerge-Samuels (1974) “Automatic Information Processing” model, or automaticity, is a widely quoted reading theory for the area of literacy for the simple fact the concept of automaticity has provided answers to why fluent readers have more success with reading versus beginning readers (Samuels, 1994). Automaticity refers to a task that previously required attention and can now be performed without attention. The LaBerge-Samuels (1974) model focused specifically on “summarizing the past, explaining the present, and predicting the future” (p. 1128). Researches have come to realize any skill in reading can relate back to the concept of automaticity. Comprehension is a constructive process, which requires tearing apart and rebuilding words to assist with understanding. A reader must be able to integrate, relate, and combine words in a sentence in order to make a connection and in turn comprehend the meaning of a text. A beginning reader struggles with this, as they are unable to decode and comprehend simultaneously. The attention is most likely on decoding which does not allow the brain to concentrate on meaning. This causes frustration on the reader’s part. Whereas with a fluent reader, decoding has been mastered and becomes automatic, so attention can be devoted to meaning (Samuels, 1994).

As researchers know, learning occurs very differently from reader to reader. The LaBerge-Samuels model demonstrates the varied ways readers process information. The
components which make up the information-processing model include: visual memory (VM), phonological memory (PM), episodic memory (EM), and semantic memory (SM). Visual memory is processing the text, phonological memory is the processing of auditory representations of the visual codes, episodic memory records information relating to time and place, and semantic memory is where all kinds of knowledge is stored (Samuels, 1994). The episodic memory is where individual word meaning is produced and categorized into “wh” words such as when, where, and who. These “wh” words are often used to help phrase comprehension questions to gain a better understanding of what has just been read. It is in the semantic memory where individual word meanings are produced and the comprehension of written messages occurs. Researchers know that under most conditions comprehension does not occur automatically and therefore requires attention (Samuels, 1994).

**Reader’s attention.** Attention plays a major role in comprehension for in order for a reader to gain understanding of a sentence, the reader must be able to group individual words into units such as a noun phrase and verb phrase. This step requires attention and allows the reader to determine the agent, action, and victim. The reader must also be able to put the meanings of each word together to understand the complete connotation of the sentence. This is why the process of comprehending is complicated (Samuels, 1994). When this model centered on attention was first published, the thought of automaticity was minimal until researchers realized, that the concept would be extended to include virtually every aspect of reading comprehension—from the metacognitive self-monitoring of comprehension to the actual process of comprehension itself. While the comprehension process usually is costly in terms of demands on attention, there are sub elements within the process that can become automatic. (Samuels, 1994, p. 1141)
Schema theory. The schema theory is presently one of the most dominant theories of text comprehension. It is the bridge between the known and the new for a reader. In order to comprehend quickly and accurately, the reader must have some prior knowledge to relate to the schemata in the reader’s head (Samuels, 1994). A schema is personal knowledge base about specific categories such as school, transportation, sports, etc. This may help to explain why beginning readers often struggle, for they are not able to easily access the schemata that relate to what the text is inferring, for the reader may not have knowledge or experiences related to the topic of the text. Due to this lack of automaticity, beginning readers require direct instruction and explicit modeling to demonstrate how to create these schemata and make new connections while reading. Skilled readers have been observed and found that they can efficiently process texts of familiar and unfamiliar material easier than less skilled readers (Samuels, 1994).

Automaticity theory. The automaticity theory can assist in the diagnosis of common reading problems. This theory suggests that students spend much time decoding and this interferes with comprehension. Another struggle is that students complain they cannot remember what they have just read even though the text was read with care. The automaticity theory suggests that skilled readers are able to easily decode, so attention is given elsewhere and may not even be on the text that is being read. To assist students who struggle with decoding, easier texts should be given to them and the text should be read several times to work through the decoding so comprehension can occur. Students must realize at this stage that more than accuracy is required for students to become skilled readers (Samuels, 1994). Students must also be taught how to self-test to ensure meaning and understanding is occurring when reading a text.

Anderson (1982, as cited in Samuels) suggested an alternate view of automaticity which is a model of memory and learning involving ideas about putting a lot of effort in the early stages
of learning and becoming careless as the learner becomes more skilled. Anderson suggested three phases, which include declarative knowledge, compilation, and procedural knowledge. In the declarative knowledge phase, the knowledge is broken down into small pieces and given much consideration and thought, whereas in the compilation phase, the knowledge is put back together to create the “big picture”. In the procedural knowledge phase, the knowledge is effort. As stated in Samuel’s article, “these alternate views of automaticity are a useful addition to work in the field because they explain the mechanism by which attention can be withdrawn from a problem” (Samuels, 1994, p. 1148).

**Transactional theory.** There are numerous theories regarding comprehension, with another one being the Transactional Theory (Rosenblatt, 1938) which states that due to the fact readers bring different experiences to the table, each reader will walk away with a different meaning as well (Gill, 2008). With this theory, readers will adopt either an efferent or an aesthetic stance. Reading from an efferent stance assists the reader in gaining information for a specific purpose, like looking up a number in the phone book. Reading from an aesthetic stance means reading for experience. A student’s stance can greatly alter comprehension.

**Constructivist theory.** A constructivist theory of learning advocates readers to construct their own knowledge. Connections can be made between the text and the reader’s prior knowledge. Comprehension improves when the reader is able to construct representations or interpretations of the material being read (Gill, 2008).

**Instructional Approaches**

The process of comprehension can be taught utilizing a variety of instructional approaches which are elaborated upon in this next section. These approaches include Direct Explanation, Transactional Strategy Instruction, Reciprocal Teaching, Students and Teachers
Actively Reading Text (START), and balanced comprehension instruction. A teacher must determine the most effective instructional approaches after distinguishing students’ needs and their own personal philosophy on reading instruction. The process of reading is complex and one instructional approach may not be the answer, so teachers may need to incorporate several approaches in delivering the curriculum.

**Direct Explanation.** With the Direct Explanation (DE) approach, teachers do not teach individual comprehension strategies but instead focus on helping students review reading as a problem-solving task that requires use of strategic thinking. This approach is centered solely on explanation. Implementation of the DE approach requires specific and intensive teacher training on how to teach traditional reading comprehension skills utilizing basal readers. In a study conducted by Duffy and Roehler (1986), it was determined that students with trained teachers had greater awareness of specific reading strategies as well as greater awareness of the need to be strategic (as cited in Williams, 2002). Teachers instill in their students the reasoning behind utilizing each comprehension strategy and the appropriate time to use each strategy. The effects on actual reading comprehension ability are less clear-cut with this approach.

**Transactional Strategy Instruction.** The Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI) approach encompasses and focuses on a teacher’s ability to provide explicit explanation as in the Direct Explanation approach, but also includes the ability to facilitate discussions. Such discussions encourage students to collaborate to form joint interpretations of texts and to explicitly discuss mental processes and cognitive strategies involved in comprehension. Students learn primarily through the interactive transactions during classroom discussions (Williams, 2002). One teacher shared,
She never understood comprehension until she started to teach comprehension strategies using the transactional strategies approach. Once she started teaching students comprehension strategies, she found herself being more cognitively active during reading and much more aware of what she did to understand demanding texts (Pressley, 2002, p. 306).

Discussion of texts is critical in the reading process and allows the reader to utilize other senses such as hearing to enhance comprehension abilities. In doing so, the reader is required to think critically. As a teacher, modeling is important but gradual release of responsibility is as well, which captures the essence of Reciprocal Teaching.

**Reciprocal Teaching.** Reciprocal Teaching was originally developed by Annemarie Palinscar (as cited in Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 225) with the philosophy that students are cognizant of what comprehension strategies are appropriate for the text being read. This approach encompasses four main comprehension strategies and they are predicting, questioning, seeking clarification, and summarizing. The goal for Reciprocal Teaching is for the teacher to gradually release responsibility to the students. Reciprocal teaching sessions are intended to last approximately thirty minutes and are typically conducted in small groups but can also be conducted one-on-one or whole-group. This approach has been effective with both skilled and struggling readers. The most important role for the teacher is to routinely remind students of why these strategies are important (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Reciprocal Teaching is unique in the fact that the four strategies are taught, modeled, and practiced interchangeably. Lubliner (2001) stated that Reciprocal Teaching takes on the constructivism approach and includes four stages in effectively teaching readers how to utilize the strategies. The four stages include Teacher-Led Stage, Collaborative Stage, Reciprocal
Stage, and Metacognition Stage. These stages allow sequential steps to be taken which easily breaks down a complex task and makes it more manageable for the reader (DeCleene et al., 2010). Research suggests that discussion during the collaborative stage can be the most powerful instructional approach a reader can engage in after reading a text. Both comprehension and engagement drastically improve when readers are forced to think about the text and share these thoughts and ideas with peers (Lipson & Wixson, 2009).

**Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text (START).** Students and Teachers Actively Reading Text (START) is an innovative instructional framework, which incorporates eight comprehension strategies through the instructional approaches of modeling and scaffolding. The eight strategies include predicting and inferring, visualizing, making connections, questioning, determining main ideas, summarizing, checking predictions, and making judgments (Scharlach, 2008). It is incorporated into teacher read-alouds and ultimately assists students in becoming strategic independent readers. START is targeted at all learners and research proves that students need to be immersed in reading while incorporating different comprehension strategies versus learning each skill individually.

At the beginning of each session, teachers model one of the eight comprehension strategies in a read-aloud and walk students through how to use the strategy effectively. Then teachers scaffold each strategy to increase students’ metacognitive ability to transfer the strategy into their own independent reading (Scharlach, 2008). Before reading, the teacher may begin with a prediction of what the chapter or book may be about by previewing the text and viewing the illustrations. During reading, the teacher may focus on the strategy of visualizing by starting a statement such as “in my mind I see”. The teacher may also focus on making connections during reading by starting a discussion of what the story reminds the reader of, or concentrate on
questioning with “I wonder” statements. After reading, the teacher may focus on a main idea and pick out the most important thoughts, or the teacher may choose to work on summarizing by asking the reader to restate what was just read in ten words or less. It is important to check predictions after reading and see if the reader’s original prediction was correct and by making judgments through determining the reader’s favorite part of the story (Scharlach, 2008).

Results from a study on the START framework showed that the above grade level students made an average gain of one year and four months compared to students who were not exposed to this instruction, which resulted in the loss of one year of reading comprehension (Scharlach, 2008). Students in this study expressed more positive feelings about reading and viewed themselves as better readers after participating in the START program. Teachers who implemented the START motto reported that students were more excited and engaged during independent reading. Parents commented that their children were sharing comprehension strategies at home (Scharlach, 2008). The only way to truly understand the thought process while reading and assist children in becoming better readers, is to consult research and experiment with a variety of effective strategies. This instructional approach integrates strategies which are discussed more at-length in the following sections.

**Balanced comprehension instruction.** The delivery of effective comprehension instruction is critical for all readers and must include explicit instruction of strategies and a great deal of time actually reading, writing, and participating in discussions. Readers need to experience reading real texts for real reasons while also being exposed to a variety of genres. Environments, which are rich in vocabulary and concept development, are critical for readers. This allows readers substantial facility in accurate and automatic decoding of words. When modeling comprehension strategies, teachers should use an explicit description of the strategy being
focused on and demonstrate when and how the strategy should be used. The teacher and student should model the strategy in action and then monitor comprehension. After students have been introduced to the strategy and have had time to experience and discuss the particular strategy, the teacher must gradually release responsibility and put it on the students (Duke & Pearson, 2002). The most effective teachers act like coaches as they explain, guide, demonstrate, and quiz, etc. the reader. The teacher’s responsibility is to keep an eye on helping the student grasp the academic concept (Fordham, 2006).

It is crucial to choose texts that are well suited for the reader’s ability. Texts should be chosen which specifically set the reader up to practice the particular comprehension strategy being focused on. For example, if students are asked to make predictions, then the text should be one the reader has never read before (Duke & Pearson, 2002). When focusing on decoding instruction, teachers should pay careful attention to the level of the text and the demands that particular text requires of the reader. Such demands include but are not limited to, background knowledge, text structure, and vocabulary. During independent practice, a student’s motivation is key and must remain high in order for the reader to be successful in practicing the comprehension strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Ongoing assessment is critical, as the constant monitoring of strategies should drive a teacher’s instruction. Students must also be taught how to monitor their own progress and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses as developing readers (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Ultimately good readers should be able to read material from beginning to end and be able to jump around to clarify inquiries. Good readers should be able to adjust their reading rate to ensure understanding is occurring. Good readers need to be able to anticipate content of the text building off their own prior knowledge. Good readers must be able to reflect on ideas from text
through summaries. Lastly, good readers need to be able to go back into the text to clarify important details (Morrow, 2009).

**Important Strategies to Support Comprehension**

The key to successfully teaching comprehension strategies and skills is consistent modeling of the specific skill by the teacher. Teachers need to encourage students to ask questions and discuss possible answers amongst themselves. Teachers must also keep students engaged in the reading process by providing tasks that demand active involvement. Teachers need to keep in mind the interests of their students and constantly assess their own instructional methods. Implementation of effective comprehension instruction is not an easy task and requires significant teacher preparation. The need for more effective teacher instruction regarding teaching comprehension is greater now than ever (Williams, 2002).

Qualitative studies suggest the integration of multiple strategies is more effective versus individually teaching strategies due to the fact comprehension strategies build off one another. It is critical that students are able to determine which comprehension strategies to use in which situations. Study after study has shown that the least successful readers benefit from multiple strategy instruction (Allington, 2006). As Duffy (1993) described with strategic readers,

Being strategic is much more than knowing individual strategies…A good strategy user uses sets of strategies, coordinates those strategies, and shifts strategies when appropriate. If one thing does not work, good strategy users try something else…One must also have an overall idea of what it means to be strategic, that is, how to adapt and combine individual strategies within an overall plan. (as cited in Lipson & Wixson, 2009, p. 649)

When preservice and inservice teachers were asked what affected their own comprehension they said they are able to comprehend well when the book is of their own choice
that is of interest to them, when a specific purpose is set for reading, and they are undistracted by outside factors. This group of teachers also shared that texts with illustrations, numerous headings and subheadings, and ample amounts of blank spaces on a page assisted with comprehension. Preservice and inservice teachers stated that when they were asked to read a text assigned by a teacher, read about a topic which they had little interest in, or encounter a dense text which lacked breaks and illustrations, their comprehension was poor. These thoughts clearly point out three major factors, which affect comprehension: the reader, the text, and the situation (Gill, 2008).

According to Kamil et al. (2000), of the sixteen categories of instruction they examined, eight seem to have research to back the effectiveness of the strategies. The eight strategies, which appeared to be the most effective are: expanding prior knowledge through print exposure, comprehension monitoring and metacognition, read alouds, think alouds, questions, graphic and semantic organizers, cooperative learning, and summarization (Kamil et al., 2000). As research suggests, even relatively competent readers engage in monitoring and regulation. Applying these comprehension strategies can provide the necessary support the reader may need (Lipson & Wixson, 2009). In the next section of this literature review the eight strategies identified by Kamil et al. (2000) and additional strategies identified by others in the literature are reviewed.

**Expanding prior knowledge through print exposure.** Prior knowledge plays a critical role with the reader being successful in comprehending. Research states that exposure to a variety of texts greatly enhances the cognitive skills, behavioral habits, and background knowledge of avid readers (Cunningham, Maul, & Stanovich, 2011). Exposure is key, but what the reader does with that knowledge is what creates success or failure. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997 as cited in Cunningham et al., 2011) conducted a study in which they attempted to investigate the
fast start of literacy skills in the early stages of reading and how this enhanced the continued habit of reading. In 1981, Cunningham and Stanovich chose twenty first graders who had been exposed to print, given extensive instruction in the areas of reading comprehension, and were tested. Half of these students were available ten years later at which time they were administered a set of reading comprehension, cognitive ability, vocabulary, and general knowledge tasks as well as several measures of exposure to print. After analysis of the test results, Cunningham and Stanovich found that regardless of the student’s reading level in the eleventh grade, these students were successful readers due to the intense exposure of literacy skills in the early stages of life. These authors argue that an early start leads to a lifetime of successful reading habits (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Researchers in the early 1980’s recognized the importance of prior knowledge and the connection between reading a text and creating a new interpretation and then applying prior knowledge along with the new interpretation to enhance comprehension. This connection is referred to as a mental or situation model and reflects the readers’ interpretation of the meaning of the text (Goldman & Wiley, 2011). Interpretations are created through elaborative, explanatory, and evaluative processes. Readers must be able to go beyond the literal meaning of the text thus proving the criticalness of activating prior knowledge and the importance in the ability to make connections.

**Comprehension monitoring and metacognition.** Often times readers fail to demonstrate awareness of different comprehension strategies and this hinders understanding of a text. Comprehension monitoring is very effective because it teaches students to monitor and reflect upon how well they understand what they are reading. This reflection process is what researchers refer to as metacognition. According to Pressley, (2002) metacognitively skilled
readers know how to get meaning from texts and are cognizant of the need to be meticulous in decoding words. Skilled readers know that it is important to relate what is being read to prior knowledge and are able to predict upcoming events. Effective readers are able to ask questions while reading, construct images being drawn, and are able to summarize what is being read. Metacognitively sophisticated readers know comprehension strategies and are able to use them effectively. These skilled readers know that text structures and materials may be difficult to decode and comprehend, but are able to deal with these difficulties. These readers are able to go back and reread if necessary for comprehension. Skilled readers know that high comprehension requires active reading, predicting, questioning, imaging, clarifying, and summarizing (Pressley, 2002).

Pressley further states that skilled readers are able to actively process information in a text before, during, and after reading. Before reading, a skilled reader sets a clear goal for reading the text and engages in skimming the text. A great deal of “right there” metacognition can be developed through pre-reading and good readers are able to activate prior knowledge easier. During reading, skilled readers generally read texts from front-to-back and re-read important or difficult text to aid in comprehension. Sometimes good readers take notes, make predictions, and attempt to make inferences about the author. While reading, good readers also attempt to integrate ideas in the text to determine main ideas, they monitor as they read, and monitor problems experienced while reading. Skilled readers are very active while they are reading. After reading, skilled readers engage in selective re-reading, they construct a summary of what was previously read, and are able to monitor if what is being read is consistent with the main ideas of the text (Pressley, 2002).
Comprehension monitoring is more effective when incorporated with a multitude of different strategies. It can be a very useful addition to a flexible program of instruction. Comprehension monitoring is intended to help readers resolve problems as they occur. Steps to be taken in order to determine what the difficulties are include restating what was previously read, going back through the text, and looking forward in the text to see if this assists in solving the problem (Kamil et al., 2000).

Comprehension monitoring can be done creatively after reading. Being able to apply prior knowledge and connect it to the knowledge gained from the text is valuable for the reader. Due to the fact that not all readers have the same learning style, the reader should have a choice as to how to demonstrate comprehension of a text. Several creative ways to do so may include creating a timeline, map, television newscast, a newspaper report, a letter or diary, a poem, a blog, etc. The possibilities are endless, and making it more interesting and engaging for the reader is critical in their success (Gill, 2008).

It is critical that teachers have knowledge about reading and how reading occurs. According to Pressley (2002), teachers who are metacognitively sophisticated know that good readers are aware of comprehension strategies and can effectively implement these strategies. Teachers must recognize that both fluency and extensive background knowledge contribute to comprehension skills. An effective reading teacher must also understand that explicit decoding and word recognition instruction is more effective than leaving students to discover decoding skills independently. Metacognitively sophisticated teachers know that comprehension skills do not develop on their own but rather through teacher explanations and modeling followed by scaffolded student practice of comprehension skills during reading (Pressley, 2002).
DeCleene, Juettner, and Marcell (2010) stated very clearly, “our goal is for students to become adept at opening their strategy toolbox, as needed, according to the text structure, the purpose at hand, and the level of print difficulty” (p. 687). Students should be able to implement these comprehension strategies without prompting as well. Skilled readers are like “independent contractors” in that they may refer to the teacher with questions, but should have access to comprehension strategies and be able to apply these strategies (DeCleene et al., 2010). A successful reader should be able to apply information from a text to a new situation, verify inferences beyond the current text, explain or illustrate how something works, and successfully carry out a procedure (Mills, Diehl, Birkmire, & Mou, 1995 as cited in Goldman & Wiley, 2011).

**Read Alouds.** Beck and McKeown (2001) have proved that effectively utilizing the reader’s background knowledge, language, and listening comprehension skills through read-alouds have contributed to students’ development of comprehension (Baker, Chard, Howard, & Santoro, 2008). Expository texts can be taught more effectively with read-alouds, as the majority of the time these types of texts are more complex in nature. Through the use of read-alouds, students are exposed to more vocabulary and can become more metacognitively aware. Read-aloud lessons should include text-to-text and text-to-life connections before, during, and after reading as these connections assist the reader in building upon and making new connections with previous and future texts (Baker et al., 2008).

Some research indicates that read-alouds are the single most effective way to increase comprehension (Morrow & Gambrell, 2000, as cited in Pardo, 2004). Read-alouds create a framework for collaborative discussion before, during, and after reading. Before reading, the reader should be able to identify the purpose for reading, preview the text identifying the title,
author, and illustrator, predict, and define critical vocabulary. During reading, the reader should be able to use a consistent framework to discuss the text, using question-asking strategies, making connections and inferences, self-monitoring, and defining vocabulary. After reading, the reader should be able to retell the story, and introduce, review, and extend vocabulary (Baker et al., 2008).

**Think-alouds.** Think-alouds are proven to greatly affect a student’s comprehension when the student engages themselves and when the teacher routinely models a think-aloud while reading aloud to the students. The teacher actually has a conversation about the text aloud and declares thoughts or “I wonder” statements to give students an example. Silven and Vauras (1992) conducted a study and found that student think-alouds allowed students to become better at summarizing the important information in a text and perform higher than students who did not have knowledge of this strategy (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Scholars have theorized why student think-alouds are so effective and the reasons are: they decrease impulsiveness, lead to more thoughtful and strategic reading, improve student’s ability to monitor their own comprehension while reading, and allow students to become better at detecting errors in a passage (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

**Questions.** Asking questions before, during, and after reading has long been a tradition in assisting with comprehension. Yopp (1988) pointed out that comprehension improves when readers are able to generate questions about what is being read (Duke & Pearson, 2002). When students experience questions that require them to connect information from a text to their own personal knowledge base, they tend to focus on more integrative behavior. In the mid-1980’s Raphael and her colleagues introduced and engaged students in the process of differentiating the types of questions being generated (as cited in Duke & Pearson, 2002). These researchers came
up with three main types of questions known as QAR’s (Question-Answer-Relationships). The first type was Right There QARs in which the question and answer came directly from the text. The second type was Think and Search QARs in which some inferences and connections had to be constructed from the information presented in the text. The third type was On My Own QARs in which the information in the text has to be connected to the reader’s prior knowledge base in order to support comprehension skills (Duke & Pearson, 2002). The On My Own focuses on opinion questions and encourages the reader to reflect upon the possible connections between the author and the reader.

McKenzie (1997) identified a variety of questions, including but not limited to: essential, probing, clarification, hypothetical, and strategic questions (Fordham, 2006). These types of questions focus on how to comprehend versus on what has been comprehended. Strategic questions foster metacognition and should be posed to help students examine topics, processes, and their learning in becoming successful readers. Skilled teachers need to assist readers in focusing on their own personal reading process to help make the most of the reading experience. Valuable teachers must be able to generate effective questions, as well as teach readers how to produce their own questions based on a text (Fordham, 2006).

The types of question words that a reader must use to generate questions in order to be successful at comprehending include why, what, how, when, or where. Through generating and answering these types of questions, the reader is able to process the text more actively (Kamil et al., 2000). Questioning the Author (QtA) is a well-researched instructional technique to support students while reading. This technique helps the reader to have a better understanding of what the author is trying to communicate through the text. The reader may have to use several
comprehension strategies to be able to think beyond the text and in doing so, the reader gains a better understanding of the text (Allington, 2006).

**Graphic and semantic organizers.** Graphic organizers assist the reader in constructing meaning through the organization of ideas and concepts presented in the text. These organizers help the reader focus and make connections within and outside of the text (Kamil et al., 2000). Another component of organization is focusing on the story structure by creating story maps, expository maps, semantic maps, story schema, and graphic metaphors. Categories that may be included on these graphic organizers and assist with comprehension are, identifying the setting, problem, goal, action, outcome, resolution, and theme. Any approach to teaching the structure of a story improves comprehension and recall of key information the text is trying to convey. Attention to underlying organization helps students relate ideas to one another so they are more understandable and memorable.

Research demonstrates that story mapping and webbing strategies help to develop comprehension as well as vocabulary. Both of these strategies have supported struggling readers, minorities, and bilingual children according to research (Morrow, 2009). Story maps offer visual representations of texts and as the old saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words” (Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 218). Visual representations allow the reader to present information over and over again which supports comprehension strategies. If students are able to organize their thoughts with a systematic approach, they have a greater chance of remembering what they have read and hopefully will be able to transfer that knowledge to gain a better understanding of the text (Kamil et al., 2000).

**Cooperative learning.** Cooperative learning is imperative in the comprehension process for readers need to learn how to work in groups, listen and respond to their peers, and assist one
another in using appropriate comprehension strategies depending on the text. This strategy is effective because it allows the reader to focus on and discuss reading materials while learning comprehension strategies. Ultimately, cooperative learning assists in improved performance on comprehension assessments (Kamil et al., 2000). Through cooperative learning, the reader has a chance to evaluate the text and make judgments. The reader is able to personalize reading by forming new ideas, opinions, and perspectives (Lipson & Wixson, 2009).

Effective cooperative groups may include, but are not limited to, literature circles, buddy reading, partner reading, think-pair-share, mental imagery, and think-alouds. Each of these groups allows the reader to interact with peers focusing on the text. Active involvement helps the reader become more connected with the text and peaks interest within the reader (Morrow, 2009).

**Summarization.** Most people with teaching experience agree that children struggle tremendously with the skill of summarizing. Children require explicit instruction and lots of practice with this strategy before they are able to produce sufficient written and oral summaries. It is difficult for children to determine main ideas and concepts in a text. Research suggests that instruction and practice in summarizing not only improves students’ ability to summarize the text, but also promotes overall comprehension of the content presented in the text. Instruction in summarization serves a dual purpose, to improve student’s ability to summarize text and to improve the student’s ability to comprehend text and recall for main ideas and details (Duke & Pearson, 2002). With the strategy of summarization comes a tremendous amount of teacher support followed by lots of guided practice by the reader. The reader must also engage in collaborative activities, which provide opportunities for the reader to verbalize thoughts and ideas with peers. Once the teacher has modeled the strategy of summarization and the reader has
demonstrated mastery, the reader must then take on more responsibility for his or her own learning (Allington, 2006).

An action-research case study was conducted by Furtado, Johnson, Leena, and Lisa (n.d.) which focused on enhancing the summarization skills of first graders who were reading at or above a third grade level. This study focused on teacher-directed explicit instruction in both fiction and non-fiction texts. By using “twin texts”, a fiction and a non-fiction text about the same information, it was proven that these students could improve their summarization skills. The use of “twin texts” help readers focus on a common theme, which helps students identify and understand a variety of text features. Reading both nonfiction and fiction texts on identical topics allows the reader to distinguish between fantasy and reality and assists in obtaining accurate information.

This study was conducted over the course of three weeks with a change in focus each week. During the first week, teachers focused on prior knowledge and started by assessing each student’s knowledge about narrative and expository text structures through conducting a reading session and testing summarization skills. The teacher then required each student to complete a book report and share these reports with the class. The students read their own report aloud to their peers and answered questions posed by their peers. During the second week, the teachers focused on organizer and summary rubrics. The teacher presented a new graphic organizer to be completed with narrative texts, introduced a think-aloud strategy, highlighted vocabulary, and required the students to use the information from the organizer to work in a collaborative group and construct a written narrative paragraph summary. During the third week, the teacher focused on retention and recall. The teacher and students read an expository and narrative text together and then individually completed a different graphic organizer for each text. Once the organizers
were completed, students shared comments and the teacher entertained students’ questions. The results were promising, as each week the percentages increased for each skill demonstrating growth. On average, the students obtained 59% of the total points possible when focusing on prior knowledge using narrative texts. In week two, on average, the students obtained 81% of the total points possible when focusing on twin-text interventions. The average percent increase overall for narrative texts was 38%. For expository texts, the prior knowledge average scores were 74% of the total points possible. The twin-text intervention was 91% of the total points possible and the overall average increase was 96%. The overall narrative summarization skills average for the group increased by 59% and the expository summarization skills average increased by 30%. Both teachers and students greatly benefited from the twin-text approach and felt more confident teaching and utilizing this strategy (Furtado et al. n.d.).

The key to effective comprehension instruction is to take the effective approaches (see Direct Explanation, Transactional Strategy Instruction, etc. above) and knowledge of the individual strategies (see print exposure, monitoring, graphic organizers, etc. above) and provide an overall instructional framework.

**Summary**

History is an amazing phenomenon and a critical component in understanding how a variety of researchers such as Samuels, Sears, Alexander, Fox, Duke, Pearson, etc. have evolved in their philosophies. Along with this, the differences in eras were discussed at length which provided some insight as to how the process of reading is complex. The process of reading is complex due to the prior knowledge students contain and the variety of strategies mentioned, as each individual must experiment with an assortment of strategies in order to choose the most successful ones to utilize when reading and comprehending a text.
The methodologies discussed earlier, which include Automatic Theory Information Processing, Direct Explanation, Transactional Strategy Instruction, Reciprocal Teaching, and Student and Teachers Actively Reading Texts (START) are all excellent methods for teaching and assisting students in understanding the comprehension process. The specific strategies delved upon in this chapter break down the explicit components of comprehension providing a more manageable approach for teachers to grasp and incorporate effective instruction into the classroom. As excellent educators know, each student has a unique learning style and modifications of strategies and skills are necessary.

This chapter demonstrates the complexity of comprehension and provides researchers and educators with the background as to how the idea of comprehension has evolved. It provides controversy on this subject through the years. History proves that literacy skills are evolving throughout the years but one thing remains the same, a key component to being a successful reader is comprehension. Comprehension is a powerful tool in becoming a successful reader and continually develops depending on the efforts put forth by the reader.

The next chapter explains how this historical overview has aided in providing a framework for the comprehension workshop which was developed. Research was an essential component throughout the workshop sessions and gave the participants purpose. The research supports the strategies utilized in the workshop and their effectiveness. As we know views of education by administration and the government are changing, so in order to remain current and effective, educators must consult research and implement ideas and concepts into the classroom.
Chapter Three

Methodologies

Enhancing Literacy Skills with a Focus on Comprehension is an area of increasing concern among educators. Researchers have discovered that educators assess comprehension regularly but rarely teach it. Many educators rely on their teachers’ manuals to do the job and clearly, that is not an effective method (Allington, 2006). As the district I currently teach in is shifting focus and instruction to implement the State Common Core Standards, teachers and administrators are reflecting upon standardized test scores from the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) and the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) test in a more critical way. These assessments suggest that there are many areas in comprehension where students are struggling. Through informal testing, my colleagues and I have recognized that our students are fluent readers but have major difficulties with the comprehension piece. This has forced us, as effective educators, to reflect upon our own individual teaching strategies and the specific strategies implemented into the curriculum. We have recognized the struggles students encounter while reading and comprehending and are on a mission to strengthen our own teaching as well as the skills of our students. The guiding question for this project was what are some effective comprehension strategies that teachers could easily implement into the classroom? Simple implementation is essential as the reading process and comprehension are both a very complex process. As stated very diplomatically by Pardo (2004),

Comprehending is a complicated process and yet is one of the most important skills for students to develop if they are to become successful and productive adults. Comprehension instruction in schools, beginning in kindergarten, is therefore crucial. Teachers use their
knowledge and understanding of how one learns to comprehend to inform classroom
practices so they can most effectively help readers develop the abilities to comprehend text.

(p. 278)

**Context and participants.** The school that I currently teach in is located in southeastern
Wisconsin and services 420 pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students. Of these 420
students, 15% are students in the special education program, 10% are in the English Language
Learners program, and 55% are students whose families are economically disadvantaged and
receive free and reduced lunch. I chose to survey six colleagues, two at each grade level, from
first through third. In doing so, it became clear that teachers are cognizant of the fact that
comprehension is a critical piece in the reading process, but admit more professional
development is essential in effectively teaching students how to become more efficient at
comprehending texts. For up until this time, educators “believed that comprehension would
occur naturally as the automatic by-product of accurate word-recognition. In other words, the
idea was to teach children to decode and recognize words-and comprehension would take care of
itself” (Lipson & Wixson, 2009, 643). Educators and researchers now know that this statement
is far from the truth!

**Rationale for workshop development.** Based upon this eagerness from my colleagues to learn
more about how to effectively teach comprehension strategies and skills, I developed a five
session workshop based upon state and district Common Core Standards as well as the district
target reading skills (see Appendix A). The rationale behind why the workshops focused on
these core standards and target skills was that these standards must be used as a baseline from
which the curriculum and educational approach is built. These skills are assessed and reported
through the standards based report card as well as to the administration three times throughout
the school year. This reporting to parents and the administration emphasizes the importance of adopting the new State Common Core Standards and incorporating these standards into the curriculum. A student’s ability to meet each standard at a proficient or advanced level is essential to the academic success of the student.

**Survey instruments.** In developing the questions included on the pre-survey, survey one, (see Appendix B) I wanted to truly find out the participants’ prior knowledge of their definition of comprehension and how they viewed comprehension in the process of reading. I was also curious about the amount of time spent teaching comprehension strategies on a daily basis and during what chunk of time these skills were being incorporated (i.e. during a literacy block, guided reading, or during a Response to Intervention block). Also included in survey one was integration of technology and the necessity for professional development. I was interested in finding out if teachers felt they had the tools to effectively teach comprehension strategies and how each teacher felt their students were performing in the area of comprehension in regards to grade-level expectations.

In reflecting upon the workshop sessions, I created the questions for the post-survey, survey two (see Appendix H), as an evaluation of the workshop. Many of the questions were similar to those of survey one for ease of comparing. I wanted to compare participants’ definition of comprehension and amount of time spent teaching comprehension strategies on a daily basis. I also wanted to check if responses differed when teachers taught the comprehension strategies and which strategies they were currently utilizing. Another question focused on the use of technology and another on how participation in the workshop has altered the participants’ views on comprehension and the importance in the reading process. I was interested in finding out if the participating teachers felt their students were more equipped to perform at grade level
or above in comprehending texts after they had modified instruction utilizing effective research based strategies. One question on survey two asked teachers to share how the professional development opportunity assisted teachers in learning how to effectively teach comprehension strategies. The pre-survey questions, survey one, and answers were consulted and used as a baseline for development of the workshop session. This process is described below.

**Workshop development.** After reviewing the knowledge and comments shared by colleagues through the pre-survey, survey one, it became clear to me that these teachers were aware of how critical comprehension is, but were in need of more strategies and an organization of tools. This organization and use of specific comprehension tools would be utilized in assisting students in learning how to become more observant readers. These teachers were curious about how to support students in making connections between texts, creating questions, imagery, etc. The design of the workshops was centered on the Workshop Planning Template from: Tufts University, TAMPL (1999, Summer). The workshop was created with the intention of providing teachers the goals outlined by the standards mentioned earlier. The sessions also focused on providing teachers the research to back up the strategies and methodologies incorporated in the workshops, the sessions allowed time for sharing a variety of comprehension tools and strategies, and allotted teachers time to incorporate strategies into their own classrooms while being reflective and supported by fellow colleagues. The opportunity for sharing ideas as well as triumphs and tribulations contributes to the successful teaching of each educator. Educators must be able to learn from their mistakes and be willing to make modifications in order to become more effective. Every teacher who completed survey one commented on the fact that time does not allow for collaboration amongst colleagues, thus in each workshop, I planned a discussion section to address particular questions.
**Timeline of assessments and workshop sessions.** Table 3.1 provides a brief outline of when survey one and two were administered and when each session took place. Also included are the dates when the pre and post workshop assessments were administered including the Common Based Assessment (CBA) and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA). The duration and focus for each particular session is mentioned as well. Below the table is a more in-depth explanation of each workshop session.
Table 3.1

Timeline of Assessments and Workshop Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Session</th>
<th>Focus of Session</th>
<th>Duration of Session</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBA-February 2012</td>
<td>Pre-Workshop Assessment</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRA-February 2012</td>
<td>Pre-Workshop Assessment</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 1-February 2012</td>
<td>Workshop Design and Pedagogy</td>
<td>15-20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 1- March 2012</td>
<td>Research and Common Core Standards</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2- April 2012</td>
<td>Sharing of Research Based Strategies</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 3- April 2012</td>
<td>Participant Sharing and Feedback on Comprehension Strategies</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 4- May 2012</td>
<td>Integration of Technology</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBA- May 2012</td>
<td>Post-Workshop Assessment</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRA- May 2012</td>
<td>Post-Workshop Assessment</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 5- September 2012</td>
<td>Review of Standards, Research Based Strategies, and Technology</td>
<td>One Hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey 2- September 2012</td>
<td>Evaluation of Workshop</td>
<td>15-20 Minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Session One.** Numerous professionals have conducted research to support the importance of comprehension in the reading process, which was the focus for session one. The first session was held in March of 2012 and research in the area of comprehension was briefly shared with
participants (see Appendix C). The ideas researched by Duke and Pearson (2002) that good readers set goals, make predictions, etc. were discussed along with Pressley’s work (2002) that good comprehenders are extremely active, and Allington’s work (2006) that the more thoughtful the teacher can be with the process of teaching, the more thoughtful readers will be produced.

Next, I shared how each teacher defined comprehension which was stated on survey one. Some examples of definitions included *comprehension is making sense or making meaning of what you are reading, comprehension is a student’s ability to summarize the major story elements and determine the main ideas as well as the supporting details, and comprehension is making sense of what is being read and then making connections in order to apply this knowledge to other areas.* From there, the participants in the workshop compared required district skills to the Common Core Standards in the area of comprehension. This comparison was done at each grade level, first through third. It was obvious that the team who created the district goals modeled the Common Core Standards as was required by the Department of Public Instruction.

The participants of the workshop had a stronger understanding of how the district literacy goals were established. They shared their appreciation in learning about the new literacy requirements. There was a discussion at the end of the session where participants were encouraged to share comprehension strategies currently being utilized. Some strategies shared included but were not limited to graphic organizers, read-alouds, and making predictions. As a group, we then linked these strategies back to the research presented at the beginning of the session and to the district and State Common Core Standards.
Session Two. After sharing effective comprehension strategies and how they were being utilized on a daily basis in the classroom, specific research based strategies were shared with participants. This occurred during the second session which took place in April of 2012. The strategies focused on during this session were based upon research conducted by Richardson, Duke, Pearson, Williams, and Allington (see Appendix D). Specific strategies discussed from Richardson (2009) were making connections, asking questions before, during, and after reading, visualizing, determining main ideas, inferring, synthesizing, and monitoring. The research shared from Duke & Pearson (2002) supported the ideas that good readers are active, have a clear goal in mind, preview text prior to reading, make predictions, construct, revise and question the meaning of a text as they are reading, integrate prior knowledge, and monitor understanding. The following quote was shared from the research conducted by Williams (2002), "reading comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically why they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading" (p. 243). Williams focused his research on thinking aloud, guided practice, and gradual reduction of scaffolding.

The last researcher incorporated in this session was Allington (2006). He stresses how critical activating prior knowledge is along with summarizing, grammar, imagery, question generating, and thinking aloud. Next, the district target skills were shared and discussed again. This provided participants the opportunity to connect research-based strategies to the requirements of the district. Again, participants were appreciative of the background knowledge which provided an explanation as to why the specific district goals were established. Participants were then asked to ponder over which strategies are most practical in meeting the district target skills. Along with this discussion, participants were asked which strategies they
have utilized and if they felt success in implementing these particular strategies. To end this session, participants were asked to pick one or two research-based strategies to experiment with in the classroom. They were also asked to be prepared to share the strategies chosen and successes or areas of improvement.

**Session Three.** Session three took place in April of 2012 (see Appendix E). The session began with participants sharing the research-based comprehension strategies they chose to implement into the curriculum and the success or areas of improvement that teachers encountered while experimenting with these strategies. Three teachers, one from each grade level, chose to focus on read alouds and think-alouds, which are part of the “Making Meaning with Comprehension” (2008) curriculum. The books included in the Making Meaning with Comprehension focus on diversity and provide opportunities for students to think about books in a different way. Examples of this include identifying author’s purpose, making personal connections, visualizing, and predicting. Teachers felt honing in on one specific comprehension strategy allowed them to find resources and experiment with the support of colleagues.

The first and third grade teachers felt this was very successful and the second grade teacher felt she needed more direction and could benefit from observing another teacher who utilizes a variety of comprehension strategies on a daily basis. A first and second grade teacher, chose to focus on guided practice by incorporating direct instruction to small groups of students during guided reading time, which is a substantial chunk of the literacy block. The second grade teacher found that focusing on specific comprehension strategies with a small group rather than the whole group was more beneficial for each student in that small group. Each student was able to practice the strategy and ask specific questions with direct support from the teacher. The last teacher, who is a third grade teacher, chose to focus on monitoring individual understanding of a
text by requiring students to have a book buddy with whom they would read and write questions or comments back and forth in a shared journal. This teacher found this strategy to be very successful as the book buddies could answer each other’s questions, assisting both readers in the comprehension process. The next presentation in this session centered on read alouds, which are a high priority throughout the district. The team of administration, heading up literacy improvement in the district, supports research suggesting that students need opportunities to hear fluent readers read, as fluent reading assists with comprehension (Richardson, 2009).

Another discussion centered on issues regarding Making Meaning. Making Meaning is a program currently in use within the district which allows students to hear the teacher read a story multiple times and respond to the story through whole group discussion, think-pair-share, or written response. The last topic included in this session was a brief tutorial on how technology can enhance comprehension skills while encouraging creativity. This is explained in greater detail below, as technology was the focus for session four as well.

**Session Four.** Session four took place in May of 2012 (see Appendix F) and built on the education technology examples presented in session three. Technology is a simple way to spark student interest in reading and allows students a unique way to express themselves! Through the creation of technology based projects, students can be assessed on their knowledge of a text. For example, in utilizing a classroom website and individual student e-mail addresses, students can be part of a whole group or small group discussion. Other resources which can be accessed through a computer, netbook, or I pad include websites that can enhance student interest and improve comprehension. The Wordle website allows students to create a collage of words that were included in the text or that the reader found interesting. The more times the student types a specific word in, the larger the word becomes on the collage thus making the word stick out and
emphasizing its importance. The collage could then be shared amongst peers and could be used as an assessment tool to demonstrate student knowledge on main ideas (bigger printed words) and details (smaller printed words). Another website is Blabberize and this provides students the opportunity to choose or create a cartoon character which depicts a character in a text and adds voice to the character. This is a creative way to teach students about author’s purpose, elements in a story, etc. through the creation of characters and what the students chose to include in the dialogue between characters.

During the previous session, participating teachers were asked to choose two new tools to experiment with and be ready to share during session four. The two first grade teachers worked together and created a Wordle using the stories *The Three Little Pigs* by Patricia Seibert and *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka. These two teachers were working on comparing and contrasting two stories and created a Venn diagram prior to using Wordle. The two second grade teachers created a grade level website which included a substantial amount of important information but also included a link to a Google Document where students could safely and productively have a discussion with classmates under the teachers’ supervision. The two third grade teachers utilized Blabberize and created characters who shared information about texts students were reading for projects about their city. All six teachers thoroughly enjoyed this component of the workshop and were excited to experiment with educational technology. Each one of them shared, through survey two, how excited their students were to use technology to complete these projects. The only two pieces of constructive criticism participating teachers had were they wished there was more time for instructional classes on technology and more adult assistance in the classrooms to support students in creating special projects.
Session Five. In the final session, which took place in September 2012, (see Appendix G), the purpose of each of the workshops was revisited to emphasize the importance of research-based strategies to determine effectiveness. Also reviewed were the State Common Core Standards and the district target skills in reading as these provide a framework for instruction. A review of the technology tools was shared and discussed along with how these tools can enhance student learning in the area of comprehension and assist students in strengthening skills which is a central focus for the district.

Workshop Evaluation

Although time does not always permit, collaboration is a critical piece in all subject areas. Collaboration is particularly important for developing literacy, as the compilation of these skills is the foundation a child needs to comprehend text. We reviewed some of the important strategies for comprehending text, such as activating prior knowledge, summarizing, incorporating story grammar lessons, creating images, question generating, thinking aloud, and examining text structure. I also reminded participants of the importance of teacher modeling and monitoring students’ use of these comprehension strategies. We also discussed how tools such as the Making Meaning program, computer based projects, and classroom management techniques assist in improving comprehension and increasing student interest and involvement.

Workshop evaluation survey. Upon completion of survey two, I compared answers with survey one for several questions. I examined responses to determine if the participants modified their definition of comprehension. I also paid special attention to see if teachers increased the amount of time they spent teaching comprehension strategies and what specific strategies they taught throughout the day. I was hoping to find that through heightened awareness as to the
importance of comprehension in the reading process, teachers would modify current instruction and increase time spent on comprehension. Through participation in the workshop, I suspected teachers would feel their students were more equipped to perform at grade level or above in comprehending texts. In the next two sections, I describe the student assessments that were used as a measurement tool to assess effective teacher instruction and student performance.

**Developmental Reading Assessment.** The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered one-on-one in February 2012 as a pre-assessment to students in first through third grade. This assessment monitors fluency but more importantly comprehension. The student reads a passage and then is asked five to seven comprehension questions. The child is moved up or down a level depending on the answers produced to the comprehension questions. The DRA was administered one-on-one again in May 2012 to determine growth. In the first grade class one, 21 students were assessed and in class two, 20 students were assessed. In the second grade class one, 23 students were assessed and in class two, 19 students were assessed. In the third grade class one, 21 students were assessed, and in class two, 23 students were assessed. When reporting scores, the number of students at each level was divided by the total number of students in the particular class and that number was computed to a percentage for each category which include significantly above grade level, above grade level, at grade level, below grade level, and significantly below grade level. For the analysis the percentages at each level in the pre-assessment were compared to the percentage at each level in the post-assessment.

**Common Based Assessment.** The Common Based Assessment (CBA) was administered to the second and third grade students in the area of literacy. First grade students are not required by the district to complete this assessment as administration understands this assessment is rigorous and foundational skills are being laid and built upon at this level. The CBA was created by a
team of teachers in the district and includes passages followed by comprehension questions. Students are also required to complete a Venn diagram where they must compare and contrast the two passages read. The CBA was administered as an individual assessment in February 2012 as a pre-assessment and again in May 2012 as a post-assessment. As with the DRAs when reporting scores, the number of students at each level was divided by the total number of students in the particular class and that number was computed to a percentage for each category which included advanced, proficient, basic, and minimal. For the analysis the percentages at each level in the pre-assessment were compared to the percentage at each level in the post-assessment.

**Summary.** At the end of session five, teachers (n=6) were given another survey, survey two which was an evaluation of the workshop (see Appendix H), and were asked to openly answer the questions comprised in the survey. This information along with the test results from the DRA and the CBA were analyzed and are discussed in future chapters. Overall, I wanted each participant to walk away with some easy to implement comprehension strategies and a heightened awareness of the importance of comprehension in the reading process. I also wanted teachers to realize how complex comprehension is and the importance of teacher modeling and scaffolding.
Chapter 4

Curriculum Implementation

Literacy is a key component to the success of each and every student. Many students can read fluently but have difficulties with comprehension and application. These factors were the inspiration in the creation of this workshop focusing on comprehension strategies. The participating teachers and I are metacognitive practitioners and are continually seeking opportunities to strengthen our instruction and the learning opportunities for our students. In creating the workshop sessions, I wanted the participating teachers to gain a better understanding of how important comprehension is in the reading process. With this in mind, I shared a substantial amount of research to support the importance of all the comprehension strategies included and tied this research in with the district target skills and the State Common Core standards. The focus on the standards provided teachers an explanation as to why the focus on comprehension is critical as many of the standards are centered on comprehension and the application of knowledge. I wanted teachers to be able to easily implement these comprehension strategies into the classroom on a daily basis. I also provided a safe environment to experiment with the strategies and a variety of technological tools which can enhance comprehension and increase student motivation.

A variety of comprehension strategies were shared throughout the five sessions in the workshop and teachers were asked to reflect upon their current practices. Participating teachers were encouraged to openly share and discuss current practices in relation to research-based practices. Teachers were given a task to complete before the next workshop which allowed them time to process the information and experiment with a variety of strategies. Teachers were also given time during each session to collaborate with colleagues as this was a concern among the
group. From results of survey two, teachers feel there is never enough time in the day to collaborate and seek advice for modifications when necessary. Participating teachers shared through the final survey that this workshop was very beneficial and hope more professional development opportunities, focusing on literacy and more specifically comprehension, will be offered through the school district. The teachers also enjoyed the integration of technology and were excited to experiment with this component. All six of the teachers know that technology is an awesome tool and are constantly seeking opportunities to learn more and integrate it into their own classrooms.

The overall results of the workshop were determined by teacher feedback, February and May Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores, and February and May Common Based Assessment (CBA) scores in reading. The DRA scores are broken down into five categories including significantly above grade level, which is two or more years above current grade, above grade level, which is less than two years above current grade, at grade level, below grade level, which is less than two years below current level, and significantly below grade level which is more than two years behind or for the first graders, below a kindergarten level. These scores are shared with families through progress reports and to the school board by grade level. The CBA scores are reported to the school board and families as a grade level and are broken down into the following categories: advanced, proficient, basic, and minimal.

Academic growth is the goal for each student but ultimately it is our job as educators to support our students and get them to be at grade level or above by the end of the school year. For our students who are in the special education program, the Individual Education Plan (IEP) outlines the reading goal for the specific child and is strictly followed.
**Developmental Reading Assessment scores.** First through third graders were assessed using the Developmental Reading Assessment to determine each student’s instructional reading level. This assessment was administered by the teacher one-on-one. Each student read a passage and was asked five to seven comprehension questions. Based upon fluency and answers given to the comprehension questions, the student was moved up or down a level until the instructional level was determined. This assessment was complete in February and then again in May. The results are provided below with percentages of students at each level for each class. The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of students at each level by the total number of students in the class.

Table 4.1

Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for First Grade: Class One (N=21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level- DRA 3.
Table 4.2

Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for First Grade: Class Two (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level- DRA 3

**First grade data.** Upon reviewing the data, Table 4.1 reveals 62% of first grade students in class one and Table 4.2 reveals 70% of students in class two were at or above grade level by the end of May. Class one, as displayed in Table 4.1, showed growth as the percentage of students in the below grade level category (43%) decreased which caused more students to fall in the above (24%) and significantly above (19%) grade level by May. For class two, displayed in Table 4.2, in first grade, the amount of students in the significantly below grade level category decreased dramatically from 20% to 5% and the largest increase was at the above grade level category. Overall, there was some excellent growth in comprehension skills in the three months between assessments.
Table 4.3

Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for Second Grade Class One (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level- DRA 3

Table 4.4

Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for Second Grade Class Two (N=19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level- DRA 3
**Second grade data.** For the second grade classrooms, as revealed in Table 4.3, class one had 78% and Table 4.4 revealed class two had 89% of students who were at or above grade level by the end of May. In class one, there was a large decrease from 30% to 13% in the below grade level category while there was an increase from 35% to 52% in the above grade level category. For class two, the results suggest that the students did not grow much in the area of reading as the percentages were fairly similar from February to May. However, it is important to note that compared to class one, there were fewer students in class two that were performing in below grade level categories in February. There was a slight decrease from 5% to 0% in the at grade level category and a slight increase from 42% to 47% in the significantly above grade level category. Overall, the most growth occurred in the above grade level and decreased the most in the below grade level categories.

Table 4.5

Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for Third Grade Class One (N=21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level- DRA 3
Table 4.6
Developmental Reading Assessment Scores for Third Grade Class Two (N=22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Above Grade Level*</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Grade Level</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Grade Level</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Grade Level</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly Below Grade Level**</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Two or more years above grade level; **Below a kindergarten level - DRA 3

Third grade data. For the third grade classrooms, on the May assessment, class one as displayed in Table 4.5 had 76% and class two as displayed in Table 4.6 had 82% of students who were at or above grade level. Class one, Table 4.5, had some interesting results as the percentage of students in the below grade level category increased from 9.5% to 24%. This suggests that several of the students who were at or above grade level dropped to below grade level. Students in the above grade level category also increased by 14.5% and the significantly above grade level decreased by 9%. In class two, Table 4.6, in the at grade level category, there was a decrease in the number of students from February to May (23% to 5%) but an increase in the above grade level category (23% to 41%). Overall, the greatest increase was in the above grade level category from February to May. The data reveals that the number of students who were significantly below grade level decreased in third grade. Putting both first grade classes together, 66% of students were at or above grade level by May. For second grade, 83% of students were at or above grade level and for third grade, 82% of students were at or above grade level.
Common Based Assessment (CBA). This assessment is administered as a whole group and students complete it individually. Students are expected to read two passages and answer questions based on the information in the passages. Also included in this assessment is a Venn diagram where students are challenged by comparing and contrasting the two stories. Below is the data collected to represent growth between the February and May CBA’s. Only the second and third grade students completed this assessment as first graders are not considered developmentally ready to do so at this point. The results are provided below with percentages of students at each level for each grade (both classes in each grade level combined). The percentage was calculated by dividing the number of students at each level by the total number of students in each grade.

Table 4.7

Common Based Assessment Scores for Second Grade (N = 42)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.8

Common Based Assessment Scores for Third Grade (N = 43)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>February 2012</th>
<th>May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of CBA data. The data for second and third graders is interesting as students did not test consistently from February to May. For the second graders, 80% of students were at proficient or advanced in February and 71% in May. The decrease in higher achievement from February to May is disappointing. While the DRA and the CBA were administered within the same months, the DRA is at each individual student’s level while the level of the text for the CBA is at a second grade level. It makes sense that students who are reading well below a second grade level would struggle on the CBA. The skills on the May CBA are higher level questions posing more of a challenge to students compared to the February CBA. Students may not have given their best effort as this assessment was given at the end of May which can be a difficult time to focus for some students. For the third graders, 80% of students were at proficient or advanced in February and 82% in May. A variety of factors may have influenced both the second and third graders on the CBA but overall the results were average with percentages of students in the proficient and advanced categories across the district.
Conclusion of data. After analyzing the data, it appears that teachers did effectively integrate a variety of the comprehension strategies presented during the workshop. Teachers are more cognizant of skills assessed and are incorporating practice opportunities on a daily basis. Students have a better understanding of how important comprehension is in the reading process and this is evident in their independent reading as well as their efforts on the DRA and CBA. Teachers continue to provide a welcoming environment that encourages students to take risks and learn from their mistakes. Teachers instill in their students that practice makes perfect! In the next chapter, limitations, recommendations, and modifications are discussed to enhance the effectiveness of the workshop for future use.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Overall this professional development opportunity was extremely beneficial to participating teachers as it provided time to collaborate and experiment with a variety of comprehension strategies in a supportive environment. Teachers now have research to back up curriculum and have a deeper understanding of comprehension and its complexity. The participants are knowledgeable about the Common Core Standards and the district target skills in reading. These standards and target skills serve as a guide for instruction. They paint the “big picture” for teachers and provide direction. The strategies and skills shared in the workshop are the small pieces of the puzzle that fit together to create the “big picture”. Teachers and students are now more cognizant readers thus enhancing comprehension and the understanding of texts. This also allows readers to become more creative and have fun when breaking apart a text. The comparisons between survey one and two are discussed below.

Survey Two

This final survey was an evaluation of the workshop completed by the six participants. Most of the questions were similar to survey one so comparisons could be easily made and I could assess the effectiveness of the workshop. All six participants appreciated the variety of differentiated ways to assess students on comprehension while also utilizing technology tools as teaching tools as well. As technology is becoming more available in schools, teachers are seeking opportunities to integrate these powerful tools into the classroom. Some simple ideas were shared and teachers appreciated the opportunities to experiment and investigate with these tools. The teachers experienced how the tools can enhance teacher instruction and student learning. As mentioned above, the participating teachers enjoyed this opportunity to enhance
their personal knowledge on comprehension and saw firsthand how easily the strategies can be incorporated into the classroom. Every one of the teachers did share in survey two that they felt more confident in teaching children how to become better at comprehension and were excited to experiment more with the strategies and technology tools. The participants provided a more in-depth definition of comprehension which reflects the complex process of comprehending a text. For example, in survey one a teacher shared her definition of comprehension as, “making sense or making meaning out of what you are reading”. In survey two, this same teacher shared her definition of comprehension as, “a complex process of reading a text while critically analyzing, synthesizing, and connecting to prior knowledge in attempt to create more meaningful understanding”. Teachers admitted they spent more time after the workshop modeling and scaffolding comprehension strategies with their students. Teachers agreed and assessment results from the DRA showed students growth. For first grade in class one, there was growth in the following categories significantly above, above, and below grade level and the at grade level and significantly below grade level remained the same. For class two in first grade, there was growth in the following categories significantly above, above, and significantly below and the below grade level remained the same. For second grade in class one, there was growth in the following categories above and below grade level, the significantly above, at grade level, and significantly below remained the same. For class two in second grade, there was growth in the significantly above grade level, the following categories remained the same above, below, and significantly below. For third grade class one, there was growth in the above grade level category. For third grade class two, there was growth in the above and significantly below categories and the significantly above remained the same. These results confirmed that students were more equipped to perform at or above grade level after more intense exposure to effective
research-based comprehension strategies. Discussed below are the overall results for the Developmental Reading Assessment.

DRA Scores

Students in five of the six participating classrooms showed growth or remained at the same level from February to May. Class one in third grade however, went from 90.5% of students at or above grade level in February to 76% in May. Students in the significantly below grade level category decreased or remained the same in all six participating classrooms. Students in the below grade level category decreased or remained the same in both the first and second grade classrooms but increased in both third grade classrooms. The reason for the decrease in student achievement in third grade needs some additional focus and analysis. Along with analysis of the DRA scores, I also analyzed the CBA scores which are expanded upon in the next section.

CBA Scores

Only the second and third grade students took the reading CBA in February and then again in May. For second grade, 80% of students were in the proficient and advanced categories in February and 71% in May. For third grade, 80% of students were in the proficient and advanced categories in February and 82% in May. The students at the advanced level decreased by 18% in second grade and increased by 6% in third grade from February to May. Students at the proficient level increased by 9% in second grade and decreased by 4% in third grade. These results did not demonstrate as much growth as the DRA scores. I attribute this to the fact that the CBA is created by the district and is standardized therefore the passages are at a second and third grade level. The results of the DRA demonstrate that not all students are reading at grade level so the CBA is very challenging for these students.
Limitations

These five one hour sessions were productive but very packed with information. The teachers wished they would have had more time to experiment with the individual strategies and work together to combine multiple strategies into daily lessons. Effective educators are cognizant that students utilize a variety of comprehension strategies multiple times while working through a text. If time and resources had allowed, it would have been beneficial to invite all staff to this workshop and create a school wide effort in increasing comprehension strategies. Participating teachers commented on the fact that there was not enough time to observe other teachers in the district utilizing a variety of comprehension strategies within one literacy lesson. I would also have liked to invite professionals and researchers in literacy to the workshop to tap their expertise and expand upon the strategies and tools incorporated into this workshop.

Technology is an essential piece of the classroom, and can pose a challenge to districts in providing the most up-to-date devices with the tightening of budgets. Technological tools such as I pads, netbooks, and computers can be challenging to disperse amongst grade levels as our school does not have enough of any of these devices to support multiple projects occurring simultaneously.

As mentioned previously, due to time constraints, teachers did not have adequate time and resources to experiment and implement all of the research-based comprehension strategies. Student achievement may have increased over a longer period of time and after several years of expanding upon a multitude of comprehension strategies. Teachers were able to model and implement some of the comprehension strategies, but time did not allow for teachers to model metacognitive behaviors. As argued by Pressley, (2002) metacognitively skilled readers know
how to get meaning from texts and are cognizant of the need to be meticulous in decoding words. Gill, (2008) states that the possibilities for understanding a text are endless, and making it more interesting and engaging for the reader is critical in their success. Students must be taught how to monitor their individual progress and be aware of their strengths and weaknesses as developing readers. This reflective and instinctive behavior is essential in the reading process as teacher and parent monitoring is not always available.

Another limitation was the lack of time for teachers to experiment with reciprocal teaching. The goal for Reciprocal Teaching is for the teacher to gradually release responsibility to the students. As argued by Duke and Pearson, (2002) this approach has been effective with both skilled and struggling readers. The most important role for the teacher is to routinely remind students of why these strategies are important (Duke & Pearson, 2002). There are stages in reciprocal teaching that allow sequential steps to be taken which easily breaks down a complex task and makes it more manageable for the reader (DeCleene et al., 2010). Exposure to this framework may have positively affected student performance on assessments.

**Modifications**

The workshop development and sessions were beneficial to all participants which was shared through survey two. With all workshops and lesson plans, modifications are necessary to enhance effectiveness. If I were to duplicate this project again I would invite teachers from all grade levels kindergarten through fifth to attend the workshops for the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. If teachers were unable to participate I would create a hand-out summarizing the objectives of each session and video tape the sessions for teachers to view at their convenience. I would also incorporate more technology strategies and invite our innovation specialists to the workshop sessions to demonstrate these strategies.
Recommendations

Participating teachers were given the opportunity to reflect upon the workshop sessions and their own teaching and then share comments and concerns regarding the contents of the workshop. Several teachers shared they would be interested in more professional development opportunities, such as this one, especially in the area of literacy. A couple wished they could have observed another experienced teacher who effectively utilizes a variety of comprehension strategies incorporated into the workshop. Teachers must be given opportunities to observe other professionals both in and out of the district to strengthen personal knowledge and to provide creative ways to enhance comprehension. All of the participating teachers would have liked me to model a comprehension lesson incorporating several of the comprehension strategies into one lesson. Another concern that all participants shared was incorporating technology into the classroom. As technology progresses, teachers must be educated and provided with the most up-to-date devices and programs to increase student motivation and performance as well as simplify the job of the educator.

I recommend that teachers continue to experiment with these strategies and extend it further by challenging teachers to seek out additional research-based strategies focusing on comprehension and incorporating these into their classrooms as well. Theories and strategies are constantly changing and as effective educators we must follow suit. In the future I feel it is imperative that teachers are given opportunities to collaborate with fellow colleagues and experiment with research-based literacy strategies and tools. Educators must continue to be reflective practitioners and analyze data to inform instruction. To continue to be successful educators, it is imperative that teachers think outside the box and utilize the tools given to
enhance instruction. Educators must insist upon the most effective tools, even when the budget is tight, as the students’ best interests must be in the forefront of each educator’s mind.

In the area of education, research is the guiding factor in all programs and although effective educators do not have ample time to conduct or investigate research conducted by other professionals, this research must still be shared and utilized to assist in making each school the very best. Additionally, administrators need to take the initiative and assist teachers in the process of continually building knowledge by providing professional development opportunities. This knowledge may be shared through conferences led by leaders in education outside the district, by sharing knowledge of administration within the district, by leading research-based book studies, etc. In this ever changing world, it is critical that teachers are knowledgeable and capable of assisting students in becoming critical thinkers in the area of comprehension. For reading is the key to success that can and will open many doors for all!

**Summary**

As referenced throughout chapter two, history has provided educators with trends in the area of literacy and differences in pedagogy. This research continues to stress the importance of literacy skills both in and out of the classroom. Educators must be able to read research and incorporate concepts into the classroom. Many professionals in the area of literacy including Richardson, Duke, Pearson, and Allington emphasize comprehension factors such as fluency, vocabulary, background knowledge, etc. and how effective use and knowledge of these factors influence a child’s ability to accurately comprehend a text. Researchers know the brain is extremely complicated and researchers know the comprehension process is complex, so the most successful attempt educators can make is to study the research, collaborate with colleagues, and implement the most effective methods of teaching. With this in mind came the creation of a
series of workshops in which I consulted the research of Richard Allington, Jan Richardson, Nell Duke, Pearson, and Williams to demonstrate the importance of teaching children how to comprehend and not just assess comprehension. I also incorporated the state and district Common Core Standards as these are relevant to our district and guide instruction and assessment. As with all research, professionals are continually evaluating, analyzing, and modifying data to enhance adeptness. In the field of education, reflection and collaboration are essential. This project provided participating teachers the opportunity to learn more research-based strategies in the area of comprehension and how to teach students to become stronger comprehenders while reflecting upon current teaching practices. The participating teachers are more equipped to assist teachers in obtaining the tools necessary to be successful and competent readers for life!
References


Making Meaning Comprehension. (2008). Developmental Studies Center. CA (2nd ed.).


Silven, M., & Vauras, M. (1992). Effective practice for developing reading comprehension. In Farstrup, A.E. & Samuels, S.J. (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading*
Comprehension


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Appendix A: District Target Reading Skills

**District-wide Elementary Target Skills in Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cumulative points below</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Other problematic question language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Determines Meaning (of Vocabulary)</th>
<th>-32</th>
<th>Use context clues to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. 1.1.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-20</td>
<td>Use context clues to determine the meaning of multiple-meaning words. 1.1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>Use an entry from a word reference to determine word meaning. 1.3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands Text</td>
<td>-44</td>
<td>Identify stated information about story elements. 2.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-29</td>
<td>Identify stated information about main ideas and supporting details. 2.2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzes Text</td>
<td>-28</td>
<td>Make inferences about story elements. 3.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-13</td>
<td>Identify implied main ideas and supporting details. 3.2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-18</td>
<td>Recognize and distinguish among genres. 3.3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates and Extends Text</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>Evaluate the author’s word choice and use of language. 4.3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>state average over 2 years in grades 3, 4, &amp; 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>across skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- “Which of the following . . .”
- “If _________, which of these will happen?”
- Questions with “when” clauses
- Questions beginning with “According to the passage,”

Appendix B: Survey One (Pre-survey) Questions

**Pre-Comprehension Survey**
1) How do you define comprehension?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) How much time do you spend teaching comprehension strategies in a school day?

________________________________________________________________________

3) When do you teach comprehension strategies (i.e. during a literacy block, during an RtI block)?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4) What strategies are you using to teach comprehension?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5) Do you use technology to enhance the teaching and/or learning of comprehension skills? If so, what do you use and how?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6) Do you feel you have all the necessary tools for you to effectively teach comprehension strategies? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
7) Do you feel your students perform at grade level or above in comprehending texts?

Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8) Do you feel professional development is essential in assisting teachers in learning how to effectively teach comprehension strategies? Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9) Do you feel there is another component to teaching comprehension strategies that you would like more information on or would like to experiment with? If so, what?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10) How do you distinguish between teaching reading comprehension and testing reading comprehension?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking this pre-survey!

Appendix C: Workshop Session 1
COMPREHENSION

What does research have to say?

What is it?

How can comprehension be taught to meet state and district standards?

PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH

- What good readers do (Duke & Pearson)
  - Set goals, make predictions, question, integrate prior knowledge, etc.
- "Good comprehenders are extremely active when they read, using a variety of comprehension strategies in an articulated fashion as they read challenging texts." (Pressley, 2002, p. 291)
DEFINITION BY TEACHERS IN THE FIELD

- Comprehension is making sense or making meaning out of what you are reading.
- The ability to understand the written text.
- The difference between being able to read words and actually understand text.
- Comprehension is a student's ability to summarize the major story elements (characters, setting, events, problem, solution, etc.) of fiction text. Comprehension is also a student's ability to determine the main ideas and supporting details in non-fiction texts. Students who comprehend texts can answer questions about the text.
- Comprehension is making sense of what is being read and then making connections in order to apply this knowledge to other areas.
- Comprehension is putting it all together in an attempt to understand what is being read.

STANDARDS-GRADE 1

Distinct Skills

“I can...”
- Recall facts
- Sequence events
- Ask “on-topic” questions
- Make predictions and support predictions with text
- Draw conclusions
- Make inferences

Common Core

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
STANDARDS- GRADE 1 CONTINUED

**District Skills**

"I can..."
- Summarize text
- Retell story
- Use story maps to retell, draw and/or write the setting, characters, problem, and solution
- Sequence events
- Identify main idea & author’s message (i.e., inform, persuade, instruct)
- Set a purpose for reading

**Common Core**

Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

STANDARDS- GRADE 1 CONTINUED

**District Skills**

"I can..."
- Describe the main character(s)
- Describe the setting
- Describe events
- Describe the problem
- Describe the solution

**Common Core**

Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.
STANDARDS- GRADE 2

District Skills
“I can…”
- Ask who, what, where, when, why, and how questions about a text.
- Answer who, what, where, when, why, and how questions that assess comprehension of a text.

Common Core
Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

STANDARDS- GRADE 2 CONTINUED

District Skills
“I can…”
- Recall the central message from a piece of text, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures.
- Recall the moral or lesson from a piece of text, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures.

Common Core
Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
STANDARDS - GRADE 2 CONTINUED

District Skills

“I can…”

- Identify how the character responded to events in the story.
- Identify how the character responded to challenges in the story.

Common Core

Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

STANDARDS - GRADE 3

District Skills

“I can…”

- Show comprehension of text, looking back to find answers to questions, asking questions to guide reading, and use information from the text to support answers.

Common Core

Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
District Skills

"I can..."

- Infer what a character's personality is like by what he says or does. I can describe the character's actions and explain how that affected the plot of the story.
  - Inferring
  - Characterization
  - Sequencing

Common Core

- Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

STANDARDS - GRADE 3 CONTINUED

District Skills

"I can..."

Common Core

- Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
DISCUSSION

WHAT STRATEGIES ARE WE CURRENTLY USING TO TEACH COMPREHENSION?

HOW DO THESE STRATEGIES ALIGN WITH STANDARDS?

QUESTIONS
Appendix D: Workshop Session 2

COMPREHENSION SESSION 2

What strategies do researchers suggest to utilize in the classroom?
What research-based strategies align with state and district standards for each grade level?
How can teachers effectively incorporate a variety of comprehension strategies?

RESEARCH BASED STRATEGIES

- Make connections: text-to-self, text-to-text, text-to-world
- Ask questions before, during, and after reading
- Visualize as you read
- Determine important (main) ideas
- Inferences as you read
- Synthesize and retell
- Monitor and fix up as you read

Jan Richardson's The Next Step in Guided Reading
**RESEARCH BY DUKE & PEARSON**

“Comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both satisfying and productive.” (p. 206)

**Good Readers**
- Have clear goals in mind for their reading before they begin.
- Typically look over the text before they read.
- Frequently make predictions.
- Construct, refine, and question the meanings they make as they read.
- Integrate prior knowledge.
- Monitor their understanding of the text.
- When reading narrative, sound closely to the setting and characters.

**RESEARCH BY WILLIAMS**

“Reading comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading.” (p. 243)

- Thinking aloud
- Guided practice
- Gradual reduction of scaffolding

“Successful teachers of reading comprehension must respond flexibly and opportunistically to students’ needs for instructive feedback as they read.” (p. 244)
RESEARCH BY ALLINGTON

Useful Research-Based Comprehension Strategies:
- Activating prior knowledge
- Summarizing
- Story grammar lessons (goal is to help students develop adequate summaries of narrative text)
- Imagery
- Question generating
- Thinking aloud

Richard Allington’s What Really Matters for Struggling Readers

DISTRICT TARGET SKILLS IN READING

- Identify stated information about story elements
- Identify stated information about main ideas and supporting details
- Make inferences about story elements
- Identify implied main ideas and supporting details
- Recognize and distinguish among genres
- Evaluate the author’s word choice and use of language
DISCUSSION

- Which strategies are most practical in meeting district target skills?
- Which strategies have teachers utilized in the past that were successful?
- Homework: Choose one or two research-based strategies to experiment with in your classroom. Please be prepared to share the strategies chosen and successes and/or areas of improvement.

Questions
Appendix E: Workshop Session 3

COMPREHENSION SESSION 3

What strategies did teachers choose to try-out and what were the results?

What technology-based tools can teachers use to enhance instruction of reading comprehension?

TEACHER SHARING

- Share and evaluate effective comprehension strategies implemented by teachers
- Share read aloud books teachers use
- Problem solve any issues with Making Meaning series
TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE COMPREHENSION

- Computers/Netbooks/I-pads (websites)
- Wordle
- Smart Board Lessons
- Blabberize
- Book talks
- Electronic notebooks

HANDS-ON & DISCUSSION

- Brief tutorial of tools & experiment
- Ask questions
- Homework: Choose two new tools to experiment with in the classroom. Please be prepared to share the tools chosen and successes and/or areas of improvement.
Appendix F: Workshop Session 4

**COMPREHENSION SESSION 4**

What technology tools did teachers utilize in the classroom to enhance comprehension?

How can teachers incorporate several effective comprehension strategies into one lesson?

**TEACHER SHARING**

- Share technology tools utilized in the classroom & discuss effectiveness, student interest, and ways to use for assessment.
- Demonstrate how teachers can use e-mail and a classroom website to encourage interaction among classmates throughout the reading process.
HANDS-ON & DISCUSSION

- Experiment with creating a website for book discussions
- Ask questions
Appendix G: Workshop Session 5

COMPREHENSION SESSION 5

Overview of tools & strategies to enhance comprehension
Review of state and district standards
(including district target reading skills)
Answer remaining questions
Administer & complete survey

REVIEW OF STRATEGIES

- Activating prior knowledge
- Summarizing
- Story grammar lessons (goal is to help students develop adequate summaries of narrative text)
- Imagery
- Question generating
- Thinking aloud
- Text structure
REVIEW OF TOOLS

- Computers/Netbooks/I-pads (websites)
- Wordle
- Smart Board Lessons
- Blabberize
- Book talks
- Electronic notebooks

DISTRICT TARGET SKILLS IN READING

- Identify stated information about story elements
- Identify stated information about main ideas and supporting details
- Make inferences about story elements
- Identify implied main ideas and supporting details
- Recognize and distinguish among genres
- Evaluate the author's word choice and use of language
QUESTIONS & SURVEY

- Any remaining questions
- Administer & complete survey
- Thank you!
Appendix H: Survey Two (Post Survey) Questions

Post Comprehension Survey

1) How do you define comprehension?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2) How much time do you spend teaching comprehension strategies in a school day?

________________________________________________________________________

3) When do you teach comprehension strategies (i.e. during a literacy block, during an RtI block)?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4) What strategies are you using to teach comprehension?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5) Do you use technology to enhance the teaching and/or learning of comprehension skills? If so, what do you use and how?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
6) How has participation in the workshop altered your views on comprehension and the importance of this piece in the reading process?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

7) After participating in the workshop, do you feel your students are more equipped to perform at grade level or above in comprehending texts? Why or why not?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8) How has this professional development opportunity assisted you in learning how to effectively teach comprehension strategies?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9) Do you feel there is another component to teaching comprehension strategies that you would like more information on or would like to experiment with? If so, what?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

10) How do you distinguish between teaching reading comprehension and testing reading comprehension?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Thank you for taking this post-survey!