COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES
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DETERMINING IMPORTANCE IN TEXT

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Proficient readers make purposeful and spontaneous decisions about what is important in text at the:

        word level   words that carry the meaning are contentives -- words that connect are functors -- contentives tend to be more important to the overall meaning of passage than functors;

        sentence level   there are usually key sentences that carry the weight of meaning for a paragraph, passage or section -- often, especially in non-fiction, they may contain bold print, begin or end the passage, or refer to a table or graph;

        text level   there are key ideas, concepts, themes in the text -- our opinions about which ideas are most important change as we read the passage -- final conclusions about the most important themes are typically made after reading the passage, perhaps several times and/or after conversing or writing about the passage – clues, such as repetition for emphasis, illustrations or diagrams, symbolism, foreshadowing, character and setting prominence and conflict all point to importance at the text level.

Ø   Decisions about importance in text are made based on:
*   the reader's purpose;
*   the reader's schema for the text content -- ideas most closely connected to the reader's prior knowledge will be considered most important;
*   the reader's beliefs, opinions, and experiences related to the text;
*   the reader's schema for text format -- text that stands out visually and/or ideas that are repeated are often considered most important;
*   concepts another reader mentions prior to, during or after reading.

Ø   Frequently, pointing out non-examples (what is unimportant) help children to distinguish importance more clearly.

Ø   Students should be able to articulate how they make decisions about what is important in a given context and how those decisions enhance their overall comprehension of the piece.

Ø   Interesting discussion emanates from dispute about what is most important -- children need to work toward defending their positions, but there is rarely a true set of most important ideas.

EVOKING IMAGES

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully create mental images while and after they read. The images emerge from all five senses and the emotions and are anchored in a reader's prior knowledge.

Ø   Proficient readers use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read. The detail gives depth and dimension to the reading, engaging the reader more deeply, making the text more memorable.

Ø   Proficient readers use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read. Images from reading frequently become part of the reader's writing. Images from a reader's personal experience frequently become part of their comprehension.

Ø   Proficient readers adapt their images as they continue to read. Images are revised to incorporate new information revealed through the text and new interpretations as they are developed by the reader.

Ø   Proficient readers understand and articulate how creating images enhances their comprehension.

Ø   Proficient readers adapt their images in response to the shared images of other readers.

A SAMPLE COMPREHENSION STUDY

EVOKING IMAGES

The teacher begins by modeling -- thinking aloud about his/her own process of evoking images during reading.

Modeling should occur frequently using short selections. The teacher should focus not only visual images, but on images that emanate from the other senses and on how he/she created those images.

It is important to think aloud about how thinking about images enhances comprehension.

Gradually students are invited to share their own images inspired by a variety of text.

Students may meet in small groups or pairs to compare images and to discuss components of the text that inspired those images. They discuss ways in which their comprehension is enhanced by mental images.

Book clubs focus on images from their shared reading in their conversations during the strategy study.

In reading conferences with students, conversation can focus on children's images in a variety of text. Records from conferences are an effective way to assess the student's use of the strategy.

Invitational (needs based) groups are created for children who need more

modeling and explicit instruction.

Text sets can be used to invite children to reflect on their images and compare images evoked from different books within the text set.

Sharing time should focus on images individual children discovered in their independent reading for the day, how those images were evoked, and how thinking about important ideas enhanced their comprehension.

Connections between this strategy and other strategies the children have learned should be made throughout the study.

Modeling in a variety of texts -- genre and difficulty -- is critical --
Modeling is most concentrated at the beginning of a strategy study, but does continue throughout.

The Major Point Interview for Readers can be used before and after the study to measure student growth in use of the strategy.

<u>INFERRING</u>

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Inferring is the process of creating a personal meaning from text. It involves a mental process of combining what is read with relevant prior knowledge (schema). The reader's unique interpretation of text is the product of this blending.

Ø   When proficient readers infer, they create a meaning that is not stated explicitly in the text. The process implies that readers actively search for or are aware of implicit meaning.

Ø   Inferring may cause the reader to slow his/her reading, reread sections, converse, write or draw to better understand the content – Inferences may be more thoroughly developed if the reader does pause to reflect and consider multiple interpretations and perspectives.

Ø   When they infer, proficient readers:
*   draw conclusions from text;
*   make reasonable predictions as they read, test and revise those predictions as they read further;
*   create dynamic interpretations of text that are adapted as they continue to read and after they read;
*   use the combination of background knowledge and explicitly stated information from the text to answer questions they have as they read;
*   make connections between conclusions they draw and other beliefs or knowledge --- use the inferences to extend and adapt existing knowledge;
*   arrive at insight after struggling to understand complex concepts;
*   make critical or analytical judgments about what they read.

Ø   When proficient readers infer, they are more able to: remember and reapply what they have read; create new and revise existing background knowledge for themselves; discriminate and critically analyze text and authors; engage in conversation and/or other analytical or reflective responses to what they read.

Ø   Inferences are revised based on the inferences and interpretations of other readers.

*   A wide variety of interpretation is appropriate for fiction and poetry; a narrower range of interpretation is typical for non-fiction text. Teachers should allow great latitude for inferences, provided that the reader can defend his/her inferences with a description of relevant, prior knowledge and specific text they have read.

A SAMPLE COMPREHENSION STRATEGY STUDY

INFERRING

The teacher begins by modeling -- thinking aloud about his/her own process of inferring during reading. Modeling should occur frequently using short selections. The teacher should focus on his/her process of drawing conclusions, creating interpretations, making predictions, and making judgments and/or critical analyses about what he/she read. It is important to focus on how inferring enhances comprehension.

Gradually students are invited to share their own inferences from a variety of text and to defend their conclusions with references to text.

Students may meet in small groups or pairs to compare predictions, conclusions, and interpretations from the text. They discuss ways in which their comprehension is enhanced or impaired by their inferences.

Book clubs focus on inferences from their shared reading in their conversations during the strategy study.

In reading conferences with students, conversation can focus on children's inferences in a variety of text. Records from conferences are an effective way to assess the student's use of the strategy.

Invitational (needs based) groups are created for children who need more modeling and explicit instruction.

Text sets can be used to invite children to reflect on inferences and to compare inferences from different books within the text set.

Sharing time should focus on images individual children discovered in their independent reading for the day, how those images were evoked, and how thinking about important ideas enhanced their comprehension.

Connections between this strategy and other strategies the children have learned should be made throughout the study.

Modeling in a variety of texts -- genre and difficulty -- is critical -- Modeling is most concentrated at the beginning of a strategy study, but does continue throughout.

The Major Point Interview for Readers can be used before and after the study to measure student growth in use of the strategy.

MONITORING MEANING

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Proficient readers monitor their comprehension during reading – they know when the text they are reading or listening to makes sense, when it does not, what does not make sense, and whether the unclear portions are critical to overall understanding of the piece.

Ø   Proficient readers can identify when text is comprehensible and the degree to which they understand it. They can identify ways in which a text becomes gradually more understandable by reading past an unclear portion and/or by rereading parts or the whole text.

Ø   Proficient readers are aware of what they do comprehend and they know what they need to comprehend from a text. They are aware of the purpose for which they read and direct selective attention to the parts of the text they most need to comprehend for that purpose. They are able to assume different "stances" toward a text. For example, the child can read a book from the point of view of different characters within it or a book reviewer or a writer seeking new techniques for his/her work.

Ø   Proficient readers identify difficulties they have in comprehending at the word, sentence, and whole text level. They are flexible in their use of tactics to solve different types of comprehension problems. They monitor, evaluate, and make revisions to their evolving interpretation of the text while reading.

Ø   Proficient readers can "think aloud" about their reading process. They can describe strategies they use to comprehend and can use language to manage their solutions to comprehension problems.

Ø   Proficient readers can identify confusing ideas, themes, and/or surface elements (words, sentence or text structures, graphs, tables, etc.) and can suggest a variety of different means to solve the problems they have.

Ø   Proficient readers use text management strategies. They pause, re-read, skim, scan, consider the meaning in text and reflect on their understanding with other readers.

ASKING QUESTIONS

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully generate questions before, during, and after reading.

Ø   Proficient readers ask questions to:
*   clarify meaning;
*   speculate about text yet to be read;
*   determine an author's intent, style, content, or format;
*   locate a specific answer in text or consider rhetorical questions inspired by the text.

Ø   Proficient readers use questions to focus their attention on important components of the text; they understand that they can pose questions critically.

Ø   Proficient readers understand that many of the most intriguing questions are not answered explicitly in the text but left to the reader's interpretation.

Ø   However, when an answer is needed, proficient readers determine whether it can be answered by the text or whether they will need to infer the answer from the text, their background knowledge and/or other text or whether the answer is explicitly stated in the text.

Ø   Proficient readers understand how the process of questioning is used in other areas of their lives, academic and personal.

Ø   Proficient readers understand how asking questions deepens their comprehension.

Ø   Proficient readers are aware that as they hear others' questions, new ones are inspired in their own minds.

A COMPREHENSION STRATEGY STUDY

QUESTIONING

*   Model with picture books or other short text over several days -- record questions on chart paper that has categories for each of the purposes and times readers ask questions (see above), i.e., questions before reading that relate to author's intent.

*   Make clear the distinction between reading aloud and thinking aloud as you model.

*   Talk to the children about why readers pose questions, how questions help them to comprehend more deeply, and how they use questions in other academic areas and in their lives outside school.

*   Gradually invite the students to share their questions, adding them to appropriate places on the chart in the children's language -- continue to model, gradually diversifying the genre of text you use.

*   Invite children to meet in small groups or pairs to share and compare questions -- encourage them to list new questions generated through these discussions.

*   Continue modeling with invitational groups of children who might benefit from more explicit instruction.

*   Remind book clubs to focus on questioning in their conversations throughout the strategy study.

*   In reading conferences, focus on their questions before, during, and after reading -- ask students to identify places in the text where they had questions and ask them to use the class chart to categorize their questions -- invite them to pose types of questions they haven't tried yet -- use think alouds to assess their use of questioning -- ask the children to identify ways in which posing questions helps deepen their comprehension.

*   Focus sharing sessions on questions children discovered while reading and can add to the class chart -- add new categories to the chart if necessary.

*   Continue large and invitational group modeling in a variety of texts --
modeling is most concentrated at the beginning of a strategy study but
continues throughout.

*   Make frequent connections between questioning and other strategies on
which the children have already focused.

*   Use the Major Point Interview for Readers to assess children's use of
questioning as a tool for deepening comprehension before and after the
strategy study.

*   Use a variety of tools such as coding, highlighting markers on copied
text, post-its, question maps, story maps, and double-entry diaries to help
children become aware of and record their questions.

<u>USING RELEVANT PRIOR KNOWLEDGE</u>
<u>OR SCHEMA</u>

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   Proficient learners spontaneously and purposefully recall their relevant,
prior knowledge (schema) before, during, and after they read and learn (text
to self connections). They use their schema to make sense of new
information they read and learn and to store new information with related
information in memory.

Ø   Proficient learners assimilate information from text and other learning
experiences into their relevant, prior knowledge and make changes in that
schema to accommodate the new information.

Ø   A proficient learner adapts his/her schema as he/she reads, converses with
others and learns; deleting inaccurate information (naive conceptions)
adding to existing schema, and connecting chunks of knowledge to other
related knowledge, opinions, and ideas.

Ø   Proficient learners purposefully use schema to enhance their comprehension
in all forms of text and in all learning situations.

Ø   Proficient learners connect information from text and other learning
experiences to schemata in long term memory.   Information is learned,
remembered and reapplied because it is linked to other learned information.

Ø   Proficient learners capitalize on four types of schema when comprehending
text and learning new material:
*   specific knowledge about the topic; general world knowledge (text to world
connections);
*   specific knowledge about text structure, organization (text to text
connections),
*   potential barriers to comprehension and knowledge about one's own reading
tendencies and styles;
*   specific knowledge about the author/illustrator.

Ø   Each type of schema permits students to monitor for meaning, pose
questions, make predictions, draw conclusions, create mental images,
synthesize, and determine importance as they read and learn.

Ø   Teachers assist readers in activating (giving students the necessary tools

to recall relevant, prior knowledge) and building (actually creating background knowledge on a given topic, author, text structure, etc.) schema.

Ø   Students should articulate ways in which using schema enhances their comprehension.

SYNTHESIS:
THE EVOLUTION OF MEANING

SOME KEY IDEAS:

Ø   The process of synthesizing occurs during reading:

*   Proficient readers are **aware of changes** in their conclusions about text as their thinking about a given piece evolves and/or as the text itself changes;

*   Proficient readers maintain a cognitive synthesis as they read. They monitor the overall meaning and themes in the text as they read and are aware of the ways text elements "fit together" to create that overall meaning and theme;

*   Proficient readers are aware of text elements in fiction and non fiction and understand that text elements provide clues to help them predict and understand the overall meanings or themes;

*   As they read, proficient readers attend more directly to character, setting, conflict, sequence of events, resolution, and theme in fiction and to text patterns such as chronological, cause and effect, and problem/solution in non-fiction. They use their knowledge of these elements to make decisions about the overall meaning of a passage, chapter, or book;

*   Proficient readers actively **revise** their cognitive synthesis as they read. New information is assimilated into the reader's evolving ideas about the text rendering some earlier decisions about the text obsolete.

Ø   The process of synthesizing occurs after reading:

*   Proficient readers are able to express, through a variety means, a synthesis of what they have read. The synthesis includes ideas and themes relevant to the overall meaning from the text and is cogently presented;

*   A synthesis is the sum of information from the text, other relevant texts and the reader's background knowledge, ideas, and opinions produced in an original way;

*   Proficient readers use synthesis to share, recommend, and critically review books they have read;

*   Proficient readers can articulate how using synthesis helps them better understand what they have read.

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