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ABSTRACT
                Prepared as part of the Extended School Services Program in
Kentucky, this paper provides information on how to help students become more
proficient readers. The paper begins with a discussion of what reading is,
the characteristics of a "good" reader (strategic, motivated, and
independent), and beginning readers. It then discusses a few basic principles
of teaching that should run through all instruction: modeling, scaffolded
instruction, discussing the what, how, why, and when of each strategy, and
caring. The next 4 sections of the paper addresses specific instructional
strategies for beginning reading, vocabulary, comprehension of narrative
texts (stories), and comprehension of informational texts and study skills.
In each of these four sections, the paper discusses the purposes and
procedures for each strategy or activity described. The paper concludes with
a discussion of evaluating student progress. (Contains 26 references.) (RS)

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Occasional Papers

Developing
Proficient Readers

UKERA #0001

Institute on
Education Reform
University of Kentucky

Developing
Proficient Readers

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PREFACE

This paper, "Developing Proficient Readers", is the first publication of the UKERA Occasional Paper Series. The purpose of this series is to disseminate research and practical information related to KERA to stakeholders in Kentucky (e.g., legislators, administrators, and teachers) as quickly as possible. This particular paper was written in the spring of 1992 as a technical manual for the Extended School Services program developed as part of KERA, but, for the purposes of this series, the text has undergone some revisions and has been significantly abbreviated.

Though this paper is primarily oriented toward practitioners, it should prove interesting and informative for all interested in KERA and the topic of reading education in particular. The theory of education that undergirds the strategies and methods presented here reflect the same theory that is at the heart of KERA. In addition, this paper provides ideas related to the issue of developmentally appropriate practices as they relate to the area of reading.

We hope you enjoy this paper and we welcome you to the UKERA Occasional Paper Series.

Connie Bridge
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INTRODUCTION

In today's society, we are inundated with print - in the community, in the work place; print is everywhere. In many occupations, the ability to communicate through print is a prerequisite to advancement. The importance of communication through print is also reflected in our education system. Reading and writing constitute two-thirds of the traditional foundation of education.

Even with such emphasis placed on reading and writing, and despite teachers' best instructional efforts, there are still far too many students who fail to become proficient readers. Without assistance, these student will have fewer opportunities available to them than students who can read well. Therefore, it is essential that these students receive additional instruction in reading. In Kentucky, the Extended School Services Program was initiated to address the needs of students such as these. As part of this program, this document was created, and in what follows, we provide information on how to help students become more proficient readers.

WHAT IS READING?

In order to help students become better readers it is necessary to clarify what is meant by "reading" and what it is that characterizes "good" readers. This is important because one's understanding of these topics will shape the way in which students are taught to read and the objectives that are set for these students. Stated simply, **reading is the act of making meaning from print**. It is important to understand that while this act involves deciphering alphabetic symbols and putting them together to make words and phrases, letter/sound knowledge and word recognition **are only means to the end of creating meaning** from text and should always be considered within this context. Thus, while it is essential that students learn to recognize words, the most important question to ask your students is, "Does that make sense?" If students learn to identify words but don't know what the text means, then they are missing the essence of reading.

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A "GOOD" READER?

In accordance with the definition of reading, those who are considered to be "good" readers, are people who effectively create meaning from text. "Good" readers are characterized as **strategic,**

motivated, and **independent**, and, ultimately, our goal, as educators is to have all of our students characterized this way (Winograd, Paris, and Bridge, 1991). "Good" readers are considered to be **strategic** because they are aware of important strategies for making meaning from text and they know how to apply them. The most essential strategies for making meaning from text are summarized below (based on Gaskins and Elliot, 1991; Marzano, et al., 1988; Weinstein and Mayer, 1986):

1. Activating pertinent background knowledge before reading. This usually involves some type of survey of the text (e.g., looking at pictures, studying the title of the text or section, using section headings, attending to bold-faced type, reading introductions or summaries, studying charts, tables, or figures). The background knowledge that is activated might include:

   a. Knowledge related to the content

   b. Knowledge related to the type of story structure (e.g., folktales, fables, types of informational text structures such as compare/contrast, descriptive story structure, cause/effect, basic narrative story structure, etc.)

   c. Knowledge about the author

   d. Knowledge about the socio-historical context in which the text was written.

2. Making predictions about what might happen or be discussed in the text, setting purposes or goals for reading (e.g., "I want to read to find out..."), or setting goals for reading. Again, this is done before starting a text or a section of text.

3. Monitoring progress toward goals. This involves reviewing one's goals and the degree to which they are being met, recognizing gaps in understanding, and creating new goals either to remedy a problem that has arisen or to consider new ideas that will be introduced in the coming section of text. This also involves asking for clarification when something doesn't make sense.

4. Elaborating on text information. Good readers are able to use text information together with their prior knowledge to do things like create mental images and/or draw inferences about what is occurring in the text, draw analogies between what is happening in the text and other situations or ideas outside of the text, consider

examples and nonexamples of what is being discussed in the text, etc.

5. Organizing and analyzing text information. This could involve comparing, classifying, ordering, and/or representing (e.g., through a graph, table, or figure) the ideas presented in the text in some way. It could also involve identifying relationships, patterns, and/or main ideas in the text.

6. Evaluating text information. Good readers consider the author's purpose for writing (e.g., entertainment, persuasion) and point of view, and consider the degree to which the author's statements are supported by evidence.

This list represents a broad overview of the most important strategies for making meaning. The instructional strategies section which follows will explore in greater detail ways to **teach** students these strategies.

Another aspect of being a **strategic** reader is being strategic in the area of word recognition. As was mentioned earlier, word recognition should be recognized as a means of making meaning and <u>not</u> as an end in itself. Even so, good readers are strategic in this area too. Good readers are aware that there are more cues to decoding unknown words than letter-sound (phonic) cues. Good readers know that in addition to letter-sound cues (e.g., "This unknown word starts with 't' and also has an 'a' and an 'n' in it.") there are grammatical cues (e.g., "Judging by the context, this unknown word must be a noun."), and meaning cues (e.g., "What word would make sense in this sentence, given what the sentence and the story are about?") to figure out unknown words (e.g., Clay, 1985). Though all of these cue systems are helpful, good readers do not rely on any one cue system. They learn to use them in conjunction with one another to discover unknown words. Eventually, as readers become increasingly proficient, they become automatic in the area of decoding - they can decode words as quickly as they see them, but when readers are developing, they should be encouraged to use these cue systems as strategies.

Good readers are also characterized as **motivated**. These students enjoy reading and look forward to engaging in reading activities. In addition, they have a positive image of themselves as readers. The importance of motivation in creating a successful reader cannot be overstated. The most essential means of improving one's ability to read is to read. Therefore, if we wish to create successful readers, we not only need to provide them with an understanding of the strategies that facilitate reading, but we

need to spark their interest in reading - help them recognize the joy of reading, as well as its practical importance, so that they will begin to read on their own. Relative to this idea, it is important to provide students with materials in which they will be successful, and an environment in which they will feel comfortable taking risks. This will also help develop positive images of themselves as readers.

Finally, good readers are **independent**. They are not only aware of strategies that help them create meaning and how to use them, they also know **why** these strategies are important and they are able to flexibly apply these strategies **when** appropriate. They also actively monitor progress toward goals and can apply fix-up strategies when they run into problems.

BEGINNING READERS

Though few would argue that our ultimate goal is to create strategic, motivated, and independent readers, some might ask if there are different goals for beginning readers. The answer is that while our end goal remains the same, there are some more immediate goals for beginning readers. One of the most basic, yet essential, goals is that students recognize that print is meaningful and serves a function. Related to this is the notion that print and speech are related. It is important that students learn that oral language can be represented through a set of written symbols (the alphabet) and that these symbols are configured in fixed ways (written words) that look the same and have the same meaning over time. Beginning readers also need to develop an understanding of the conventions of print. For example, where the front of the book is, where the beginning of the page is, the concept of the direction in which we read words on a page, the notion that the print (not the pictures) conveys the message, etc.

Additional goals which may apply, depending on the specific developmental level of the child, are the development of: the concept of a word (clusters of letters surrounded by spaces), phonemic awareness (the ability to distinguish individual sounds in a word), letter-sound relationships (which symbols represent which sounds), sight words (words which are recognized on sight -without the need for letter by letter decoding), word identification strategies, and fluency (the ability to read text smoothly and with expression).

It is important to note that the most basic objective for beginning readers is the understanding that print conveys a message and is a purposeful activity. The other objectives listed are important too,

and are necessary in order to develop the ability to make meaning of print, but again, an understanding that meaning is the essence of reading is the foundation upon which a love and understanding of reading is formed.

Student objectives

As has been stated, the ultimate goal of reading instruction is to help students become strategic, motivated, and independent readers. While it is important to have this goal clearly in mind and to understand what this means, it is equally important to consider where to begin in order to help students attain this goal. In what follows, we will outline a general progression of objectives - from those most appropriate for beginning readers, to more advanced readers. We will present some guidelines as to which grade levels these correspond to, but it is important to understand that there are a wide range of abilities at each grade level. It is also imperative that you understand that if you have a middle or high school student who is a non-reader or a beginning reader, you need to work on the beginning reader objectives while also providing assistance on more advanced, grade-level appropriate objectives. The key here is to find high interest materials written at an appropriate level of difficulty so that they are motivated to learn.

Beginning readers need to develop an understanding of the functions of print, the conventions of print, the concept of a word, phonemic awareness, letter sound knowledge, some basic sight words, word recognition abilities, a basic concept of story structure, the ability to activate background knowledge before reading, the ability to make predictions and set purposes for reading, and the ability to monitor their reading to be sure they are making sense of the text. These objectives are most often associated with the early elementary grades, but again, these objectives will also apply to beginning readers at any grade level.

As readers become more proficient, the basic meaning making strategies developed for beginning readers will continue to be developed while elaborating on text information, organizing and analyzing text information, and evaluating text information will become increasingly important. In addition, students will continue to develop the ability to match their strategy use to the purpose for which they are reading as well as the text demands. These objectives are usually associated with intermediate grades and above. All of the strategies for making meaning from text can be, and are often, introduced before

students leave elementary school. As students move to higher grades, these strategies are simply reinforced and developed in greater depth with texts that are more conceptually complex.

Once students reach the intermediate grades, it is also important to note that informational texts (non-fiction - such as, social studies texts, science texts, biographies, autobiographies, newspapers, and magazines) become a more prominent part of the reading students complete for school. This is significant because informational texts are structured differently than narrative texts (fiction). Thus, when students get to the intermediate grades they have an increased need for instruction on how to make meaning of these types of texts.

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

Before discussing specific teaching strategies that will help students become more strategic, motivated, and independent readers, we would like to first discuss a few basic principles of teaching that should run through all instruction.

Modeling - If we wish students to engage in particular behaviors, it is important to model that behavior. When providing strategy instruction, it is important to do more than simply model the product or desired outcome you are looking for (e.g., **telling them what** you predict will happen in the story). It is better to model the process, or how you reached that desired outcome (e.g., think out loud about the mental processes you used to make a particular prediction). Stated briefly, **show them how** to do what you want them to do, rather than providing them with an example that **tells them what** you want them to do (Duffy, Roehler, and Hermann, 1988). This helps students to see how to do the strategy for themselves.

Also related to modeling, we should show students through our actions that literate behaviors are purposeful and enjoyable. We can do this by: reading aloud to students from our favorite pieces of literature and visibly displaying our enjoyment, reading a book ourselves while the students are reading, writing while they are writing, sharing examples of writing that we have received (e.g., personal letters, business letters), sharing interesting articles we have read in the newspaper lately, etc.

Scaffolded Instruction - In the end, we want students to be independent readers. But, students often need to be given guidance in how to carry out particular strategies. Therefore, it is important to

model for students when necessary, but, as students become more proficient, it is important to gradually withdraw that support, thereby helping them to become increasingly independent. Such a method of teaching can be described as **scaffolded instruction** (Beed, Hawkins, and Roller, 1991) - providing students with the least amount of support necessary for them to succeed. For example, if they need you to model the procedure in order for them to do it successfully (even if you have modeled it before), then you model the procedure. If you feel they are ready to assume some of the responsibility for carrying out the strategy, then you might provide them with cues to use specific elements of the strategy. If you feel they only need a general cue to try a specific strategy, then that is what you do. Perhaps you will only need to give them a general cue to think about what strategies they could use. The principle is to provide the support necessary for them to succeed, but no **more** than is necessary. This will help them to continue to grow and learn by keeping them working in the area between where they can function independently and where they can function with teacher assistance - the optimal range within which learning occurs.

Discussing the what, how, why, and when of each strategy - When teaching students a strategy, it is important that students learn **what** strategy they are using, **how** the strategy is done, **why** it is a useful or important strategy, and **when** it can be used. While most teachers provide the **what** and **how**, many fail to provide the **why** and **when**, and research suggests that an understanding of the latter pieces of information can determine whether or not students learn to apply strategies independently (Baumann and Schmitt, 1986).

Caring - Providing students with the strategies they need to be successful readers is not enough to ensure success. As has been mentioned previously, self-confidence and motivation are essential to students' success too. In order for students to be able to take the risks necessary for learning to occur, and in order for them to give their fullest effort, students must know that they have a trusted advocate behind them - someone who will support and guide them and come to their assistance when it is necessary - someone who cares about them and is committed to helping them succeed (e.g., Bowlby, 1979; Gaskins, 1992; Mann, 1986). Belief in and commitment to children is as important to their success as all the strategies you can teach them.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

At this point, we have established a set of student objectives and we have discussed some general principles of effective teaching. The next section will discuss some specific ways to help students attain the objectives that were discussed earlier. In doing so, we need to remember that there is no single formula for success - no fixed combination of strategies that will lead to proficient readers. Each student has different strengths and weaknesses, and each student will need a program tailored to fit his/her particular strengths and weaknesses. It will be necessary to select the strategies and activities discussed in this section that build on these students' strengths and address their areas of greatest need. In order to assist in this task, we have created four sections so that it will be easier to find the strategies you need. These sections are: (1) beginning reading, (2) vocabulary, (3) comprehension of narrative texts (stories), and (4) comprehension of informational texts and study skills. In each section, we will discuss the purposes and procedures for each strategy or activity described, as well as notes about each strategy that might prove helpful in effectively implementing the strategy. The strategies discussed here are but a few of those that exist to meet the goals discussed in this paper. If you are interested in investigating additional strategies, Tierney, Readence, and Dishner (1990) is a helpful resource, as are a number of recent textbooks (e.g., Barr and Johnson, 1991). (The version of this paper available through the Kentucky Department of Education provides additional strategies as well.) Further, it is our hope that these instructional strategies will provide you with ideas about your own methods that can address the goals suggested in this paper.

I. BEGINNING READING

Reading aloud -

Purpose - Reading aloud helps students develop motivation to read, an understanding of the conventions of print, the concept of a word, letter sound relationships, sight words, word recognition skills, an understanding of sentence structure, and an understanding of story structure, vocabulary, and comprehension skills (Michener, 1988).

Procedure - Teachers should read aloud on a regular basis -preferably every day. The materials

selected should always be pieces that the teacher enjoys and believes will interest the students. Selections might include picture books, informational books, poetry, riddle books, or other types of print. Selecting a variety of types of text from a variety of authors on a variety of themes will help to expose your students to the range of literature that is available to them. Ideally the books should have an equal representation of females and minority groups in central or leadership roles. When making selections, teacher would also do well to provide a wide variety of multicultural books. By providing students with the opportunity to read about people from different racial, religious, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds, they may go beyond their own lives and gain insight into the lives of others. Such books allow students to experience vicariously and understand the many dimensions of our society and our world.

Notes - Even if a book is your personal favorite, it is wise to prepare for the read aloud session by reading the book to yourself shortly before you read it to your students. This is important because it will help you to read the text smoothly and with expression, and you may even want to create a different voice for each character, which will not only serve as an excellent model to your students as to how an expert readers reads, but it will make the reading more enjoyable and meaningful for the students. In addition, it is important to allow the children to ask questions, make predictions, and generally become involved in the text. This will help them develop comprehension skills. Also, it is important to note that reading aloud to students is appropriate for students of **all** ages - not just beginning readers!

Language Experience Approach

Purpose - The Language Experience Approach (LEA) helps students see the connection between spoken and written language as well as develop a concept of a word, phonemic awareness, knowledge of letter sound relationships, and an understanding of the function and conventions of print. In addition, LEA stories help students develop motivation toward reading.

Procedure -

1. Provide a stimulus experience (e.g., an event such as a field trip, a concept that all can relate to such as having a bad day, an object such as a fish tank).

2. Discuss the stimulus experience (e.g., think of things you associate with the stimulus, words that describe it, words that describe how you feel about it, things you can compare to it).

3. Brainstorm ideas for a piece of writing about this topic.

4. Record the story that students tell you in the exact words that they use. (Keep the story to a moderate to short length so that students will be able to remember the content of the text.)

5. Read the story aloud to the students, pointing to each word as you read.

6. Reread the story, asking the students to participate in the reading. (Again, point to the words as you read.)

7. At this point, the use of the text will vary depending on the needs of the students. Students might take turns reading the text while pointing to the words as say them, they might locate selected words in the text, they might develop a word bank of words that interest them or key words in the text that can be used while students compose stories, in categorization activities, or as flash cards, or they could be presented with a version of the text that has certain key words deleted which they need to complete.

8. After these activities are completed, the text might be displayed prominently in the room to be read and reread at the students' leisure or it could be added to a big book collection of the group's LEA stories (Barr and Johnson, 1991; Cecil, 1987; Tierney, Readence, and Dishner, 1990).

Notes - The Language Experience Approach is ideal for beginning readers, second language learners, and less able readers of all ages because it builds on their present level of language development; the text that is produced captures their interest because they produced it; and it allows them to interact with more complex language than they would be presented with in texts that, at the time, they could read independently (Barr and Johnson, 1991). One caution related to this strategy: Undue emphasis on the recognition of isolated words may lead students to believe the essence of reading is decoding print rather than making meaning.

Shared Book Experience

Purpose - Shared Book Experience is modeled after the bedtime story situation and thus serves the same basic purpose as reading aloud while providing a context within which various skills can be taught.

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Procedure -

1. Read a favorite story (in "big book" format) aloud to the class, pausing while reading to ask questions, entertain comments and reactions to the text, and in general, to encourage active involvement. Point to the text as you read so that students are encouraged to recognize words and letter sound relationships. (Use a pointer as opposed to your finger, so that all of the text is visible.) Upon completion of the text, have the students retell the story in their own words or focus on a repeated element of the text (e.g., a repeated phrase or a refrain).

2. Reread the text. If students chime in, do not discourage this, but do not request it yet either.

3. When you believe the children have developed sufficient familiarity with the text, reread it once again, asking the children to participate in the reading where they can. (Through all of these readings, continue to point to the words as you read.)

4. As children become increasingly proficient with the text, you may focus on developing skills and strategies. For example, ask students to look for words on a page that start with a particular letter or sound, ask them to find particular words, ask them to pronounce a particular word, ask them to identify words that rhyme, ask for volunteers who would like to try to read the whole text (providing assistance when they need it)!

5. Complete extension activities such as having students read one of multiple copies of the big book which are in regular-sized versions, make their own copy of the big book, create their own big book which follows the pattern of the big book, match sentence strips to the text, create a word bank for each student, write in response to the text, or act out the text (e.g., Butler and Turbill, 1987; Tierney, et al., 1990).

Notes - It is important to use "big books" (large copies of favorite books or poems - either commercially distributed texts, teacher-made versions of children's literature, or LEA stories) so that all students can see the print. It is also essential that the stories are patterned or predictable books (books that have some type of a pattern, be it a cumulative format, a repeated phrase, a predictable story line, or rhyme) so that students can anticipate what will occur next in the story (both the plot and repeated phrases and words) (e.g., Bridge, 1989). This helps students develop both word recognition strategies as well as comprehension skills. Finally, it is imperative that the texts are interesting and enjoyable so

that students will develop a love for reading.

It should be pointed out that one of the benefits of Shared Book Experience is that children who are shy or weak readers can build confidence in their reading as they practice reading as a group. Reading with others makes the task much less threatening.

Word Banks

Purpose - The primary benefit of Word Banks is that they help develop students' sight vocabularies. Depending on how these words are used, Word Banks can also help develop phonemic awareness, concept of word, letter sound relationships, and word recognition skills.

Procedure -

1. **Eliciting words** - There are a number of ways to elicit words for words banks:

   a. Each day, have students tell you one special word that they want to learn how to read and continue to add these to their word bank.

   b. After reading a story or completing an interesting activity, ask students to name their favorite words associated with that story or activity.

   c. Write a simple sentence such as "I play with my ____." or "I like to eat ____." on the board or a piece of chart paper. Have the students complete the sentence.

   The teacher then writes each student's word(s) on an index card. Each student's set of cards are later stored in a file box, coffee can, or on a loose-leaf notebook ring.

2. **Using the words** - There are many ways to use the words in the Word Bank to help reinforce them so they become an established part of students' sight vocabularies:

   a. The students' words can all be dumped on the floor, then the students must find their own words,

   b. Students can read their words to their friends,

   c. Students can place the words into categories based on meaning, some type of phonic pattern, etc., and,

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d. Students can use these words when writing sentences or stories (though they should not be limited to using only these words).

(e.g., Ashton-Warner, 1963; Barr and Johnson, 1991; Morrow, 1989)

Notes - Word banks can be used effectively in conjunction with Read Aloud, LEA, or Shared Book Experience activities.

II. VOCABULARY

Possible Sentence

Purpose - The Possible Sentence strategy helps students increase their vocabularies, identify relationships between words, and set purposes for reading.

Procedure -

1. List the key vocabulary on the board and then pronounce all of the words for the students. These words should be central to the main concepts discussed in the text. Select 6-8 words that might be difficult for the students and 4-6 words that are more likely to be familiar to the students.

2. Ask the students to use at least two of the vocabulary words in a sentence that they think might possibly appear in the text. Record the sentence on the board, underlining the vocabulary words. Have the students create sentences until all of the words have been used at least once. The students may use words already used in previous sentences. Do not correct inaccurate sentences, this will occur later.

3. Have the students read the text for the purpose of verifying the accuracy of the possible sentences.

4. After reading the text, evaluate each sentence as a group. Sentences that are inaccurate are either omitted or revised, depending on whether or not they are salvageable.

5. Create new sentences using two or more of the vocabulary words. This provides students with an opportunity to further explore their understanding of the meaning of the words and their relationships (e.g., Stahl and Kapinus, 1991; Tierney, et al., 1990).

<u>Notes</u> - This strategy should be used with informational texts, and is particularly appropriate for content area texts. The strategy was designed for middle and secondary students, but could be used with students of any age level. One important note regarding materials: the texts chosen must be ones in which the vocabulary words can be defined from context. If they are not, then another strategy should be selected or another text located.

III. COMPREHENSION OF NARRATIVE TEXTS

Directed Reading/Thinking Activity (DRTA)

<u>Purpose</u> - The DRTA helps students improve their comprehension of narrative texts (fiction). Students learn how to become actively involved in texts by making and revising predictions throughout the text.

<u>Procedure</u> -

1. Read the title of the book to the students.

2. Ask the students what they think the story will be about (or what will happen in the story) given the title. Ask them to explain why they predict as they do.

3. Have the students look at the cover art and perhaps the first picture (if applicable) and see if that provides them with any more ideas about what might happen. Again, ask the students to explain their reasoning.

4. Turn their predictions into a purpose for reading (e.g., "Let's read to find out..."). Initially, you as the teacher may set the purpose, but after you have modeled how to set purposes, turn this responsibility over to the students.

5. Have the students read a section of the text.

6. Discuss their predictions and what transpired in this section. Ask them if their predictions were confirmed or rejected. If they were confirmed, ask them to identify the evidence in the story that proves this. If their predictions were rejected, have them revise their predictions and **explain the reasoning** behind their revised predictions.

7. Read the remainder of the text in a similar fashion - stopping at logical points and continuing

the prediction/confirmation/revision process throughout the story.

8. After completing the story, discuss early predictions and the degree to which they were probable or improbable. Also discuss what key evidence led them to revise predictions as they read.

9. Possible follow-up activities to reinforce comprehension include: writing an alternative ending, making puppets to use in retelling the story, engaging in role playing, acting out the events in the story, creating a mobile, reading other books by the same author, or reading books with a similar theme (e.g., Tierney, et al., 1990).

Notes - In addition to having the students make predictions, discuss how to make predictions (use prior knowledge in conjunction with text information), why they are important (they keep you actively involved in text and make reading fun), and when they can be used (in any narrative text). Do not break the text up too much or interest will wane. For the same reason, keep your discussions as brief as possible. This same strategy can be used as you read a book aloud to the students too.

Story Structure

Purpose - Teaching students about Story Structure helps improve their comprehension by providing them with a framework for interpreting narrative texts.

Procedure -

1. Discuss the fact that most stories follow a pattern; they have a beginning, middle, and end. For older students, these can be identified as introduction, development, and resolution.

2. Describe the information found in each story part:

   a. **Beginning** - The characters are introduced, the setting is described, and a problem develops.

   b. **Middle** - The conflict increases as the characters face roadblocks that do not allow the characters to solve their problems.

   c. **End** - The problem is solved, or conflict resolved.

3. Provide the students with examples of stories and how they fit into this story structure.

4. Introduce a new story and ask the students questions which relate to the story structure.

5. Review the information found in each story part, why it is important to be aware of story structure, and when they can use their understanding of story structure.

6. Have the students complete follow-up activities which require them to apply their knowledge of story structure, such as writing a story that follows the story structure (e.g., Tompkins and Hoskisson, 1991).

Notes - This strategy is appropriate for students of all ages.

IV. COMPREHENSION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXTS AND STUDY SKILLS

The Know, Want to know, Learn Strategy (K-W-L)

Purpose - This strategy helps students become more actively involved in informational texts by helping them activate relevant background knowledge, set purposes for reading, and connect new and known information during and after reading.

Procedure -

1. Create three sections on the board: **K** - What we Know, **W** - What we Want to know, and **L** - What we Learned.

2. Before reading, ask the students to brainstorm what they already know about the topic in question. Record their ideas in the K column on the board. If differences of opinion arise, that is fine, because you can turn such disagreements into questions to be answered by the text.

3. Ask the students to consider how to categorize the ideas they have generated, which helps the students see how the topic can be organized. Write the category names the students generate at the bottom of the board.

4. Guide the students to generate questions about what they wish to find out from their reading. Record these questions in the W column on the board. These questions become the students' purpose for reading.

5. Have the students read the text in order to find the answer to their questions.

6. After reading, have the students consider what they have learned. Record this information

in the L column. Also, ask the students to check to see if they have received answers to all of the questions in the W column (e.g., Ogle, 1986; Tierney, et al., 1990).

Notes - K-W-L can be used in conjunction with semantic mapping (see Johnson, Pittelman, and Heimlich, 1986) as a means of graphically representing what they knew, what they learned, and how the new information fits in with what they knew. In order to do this, the class would simply create a semantic map after brainstorming what they knew before reading, and then they would add the learned information to that map after first listing what was learned.

Reciprocal Teaching

Purpose - Reciprocal Teaching is a teaching strategy that helps students learn how to learn from texts. This is done through teacher modeling of how to make predictions, generate questions, summarize, and clarify confusing information, which is followed by students having an opportunity to assume the teacher's role.

Procedure -

1. Provide students with an overview of the strategy, emphasizing that it takes the form of a dialogue or discussion about the text and that everyone will take a turn assuming the role of the teacher.

2. Have the group make predictions based on the title and cover art. Have the students explain the reasoning behind their predictions. Then, summarize the group's predictions and add your own, if appropriate.

3. Read a section of text either silently or orally.

4. After reading the section, ask the students a question (or questions) based on the content of the section. Invite students to add any questions they might have generated. Explain how your question(s) reflect the main emphasis of the section. Discuss the question words - who, what, when, where, why, how - and how these questions call for different information. Explain further that different questions are asked depending on the content read and what information the questioner is seeking.

5. Summarize the section you just read and explain how you arrived at that summary (explain

how you identified the main idea). Have the students comment on the summary and add to it if they feel it is necessary.

6. Ask the students if there are any words or information that they feel were unclear or confusing, or simply ask about a word or concept that you feel has given them trouble (based on any comments that suggest that they may have misunderstood something).

7. Look over the next section of text and elicit predictions about what it will cover. Also, discuss the reasoning behind these predictions.

8. Select a new "teacher" for each subsequent section of text. With each section of text, have the "teacher" go through steps 3-7 (e.g., Hermann, 1988; Palincsar and Brown, 1986).

Notes - This is a complex strategy, and it will take time for students to settle into the role of teacher. Therefore, it is important that the teacher provides an ample amount of support and guidance until they are ready to assume more of the responsibility for carrying the dialogue. In its present form, this strategy is most appropriate with intermediate level students and above with content area texts. It can be adapted for younger and disabled readers though. This is done by reading the text to the children rather than having them read it themselves.

** The strategies discussed in this section can not only improve students' comprehension of informational texts, but can help students study for tests. A few other effective study skill strategies that might be introduced include notetaking, writing and answering potential essay questions, creating an outline of the information to be covered (this could take the form of a web to help visualize the relationship between ideas), and developing mnemonics (Gaskins and Elliot, 1991).

EVALUATING STUDENT PROGRESS

Now that we have discussed some instructional strategies, it is necessary to consider how we will know if these strategies are helping students become better readers. Perhaps the most basic method of evaluating student progress is informal observation. To be an effective observer, the most important characteristic is to know what you are looking for. In this case you are looking for evidence that relates to the student objectives discussed earlier in this document.

For example, if you were working with beginning readers, you would want to listen for student

comments and behaviors related to conventions of print, concept of word, letter sound relationships, and so forth. Then, you would attempt to identify patterns in student behavior, and look to see if those patterns changed over time. For example, are the students beginning to relate sounds with their corresponding letters? Are they beginning to recognize certain words? Are they able to make logical predictions based on the information they have? The examples of student behavior that you have observed will begin to answer such questions.

One way of keeping a record of your observations is to record them in a notebook. Some teachers keep a spiral notebook with a section for each student. They keep this notebook with them, or have it close at hand, and jot down observations as soon as they get an opportunity. Others have a set of file cards - one for each student - which include the child's name, the main objective(s) being focused on, followed by dated entries. It is a good idea to write the date next to your observations so that you have a record of when important events occurred. A third way to keep records is by using a set of mailing labels. When you observe a student doing something you wish to note, write the child's name and the observation on one of the labels. Then, when you have an opportunity, the labels can be peeled off and stuck to a piece of paper in a folder that has been prepared for each child.

In addition to informal observation, there are a number of other ways of learning about your students' progress. These involve collecting samples of student work or records of their work. For example, records of oral reading behaviors, notes from interviews or conferences, tape recordings of a student reading, a list of books each student has read, a short piece of writing discussing the best book they have read recently and why they felt it was best, written retellings of texts, and other writing assignments related to texts. These pieces of information, if collected regularly, will present a profile of the student over time (e.g., Winograd, Paris, and Bridge, 1991).

One way to use evaluations to help increase your students' independence is to have them evaluate their own collections of work. Reflecting on the quality of their own work and setting goals for themselves helps students take ownership of their learning, and can increase their motivation to become a successful learner (e.g., Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer, 1991).

SUMMARY

Being able to communicate through print is an important skill in today's society. People who do not learn to read drastically reduce their career options and their opportunities to advance in their professions. Furthermore, reading presents people with the chance to explore new worlds through print. Undoubtedly, reading adds a great deal to the quality of one's life. Unfortunately, many students do not learn to become proficient readers. Fortunately, programs such as the Extended School Services Program represents an attempt to address this issue. In this document we have considered how to create proficient readers. Our hope is that with your assistance, together we can create better readers, and improve the quality of some children's lives.

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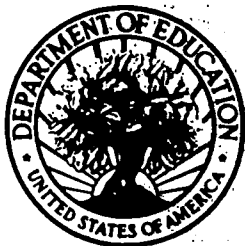
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