



## “Theoretical Inclinations”: How One Teacher’s Beliefs Influenced Reading Comprehension Instruction

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the year-long experience of one fourth grade teacher, Anne, as she learned about comprehension strategy instruction and attempted to integrate the approach in her reading program. The goal of the study was to extend current understanding of the factors that support or inhibit an individual teacher’s instructional decision making. The project explored how Anne’s academic preparation, beliefs about reading comprehension instruction, and attitudes toward teacher-student interaction influenced her efforts to employ comprehension strategy instruction.

The results of the study suggest that three factors were pivotal in Anne’s successful implementation of reading strategy instruction: pedagogical beliefs, classroom relationships, and professional community. Research on instructional change generally focuses on issues of time, resources, feedback, and follow-through. The research reported here recognizes the importance of these components, but expands contemporary thinking by showing how, in Anne’s case, a teacher’s existing theories, her relationship with her students, and her professional interaction with peers impact instructional decisions.

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*I enjoyed our visit today. I will do a synthesis lesson next Monday at 10:30 a.m. Hope you can be there. Your feedback is always helpful. Reflecting on my work becomes easier when you ask me questions because you ask questions that set me to thinking.*

E-mail message from Anne Barker (a pseudonym), language arts teacher

### Meet Anne Barker

On the first day of the professional development workshop I was facilitating with upper elementary grade teachers, I asked each participant to “tell us something we shouldn’t wait to find out about you.” Anne Barker, a fourth grade teacher, told the group, “In my spare time, I am a glass bead artist. Working with glass is a lot like teaching kids. You handle fragile material in volatile conditions, but when you’re successful, the final product is an original and valuable thing.”

Anne was a teacher at Pinewood Elementary, a school that was partnered with the local university in a professional development network. An essential feature of that partnership was the university’s



commitment to offering on-site workshops designed to address a specific pedagogical need identified by teachers as significant to their professional development. The teachers at Pinewood were intrigued by the concept of teaching cognitive strategies to support students' reading comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). They had been introduced to cognitive strategies such as questioning, predicting, and activating schema at a day-long workshop, but they wanted to know more. Because I was part of the university research team working at Pinewood, and because I was interested in exploring teachers' first experiences using cognitive strategies to teach reading comprehension, I was offered the opportunity to work with Anne and her colleagues.

Anne's facility with metaphor to describe the way she thought about teaching made her an obvious choice when I was selecting teachers to participate in my research. I learned quickly, through her spoken communication and her writing, that Anne had a natural capacity for reflection. In fact, she told me early in our relationship that people often accused her of being "too much in my head". This comment, in particular, led me to believe that Anne would be an excellent candidate for my study of how teachers' beliefs about reading affected the way they thought about cognitive strategy instruction.

As it turned out, my research became a case study of Anne's experience during a six-month period of time when I was the resident researcher in her fourth grade class. This article is organized to begin with a description of the literature that helped frame my research study and then to explain Anne's experience thinking about and planning cognitive strategy instruction.

## **Framing the study**

The literature on reading comprehension instruction is replete with theories and practices recommended to support students' reading achievement (e.g., Barton & Sawyer, 2003; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Pardo, 2004; Pressley, 2000; Tovani, 2004). What it lacks is a description of the way successful reading teachers think and act when they plan and implement comprehension instruction. This article describes one fourth-grade teacher's thinking about comprehension strategies in reading instruction, how her existing beliefs influenced her new learning, and how this combination of new and old information translated to classroom practice.

The question that guided my research was broad. I was interested in building knowledge about the influence of teachers' beliefs on their instructional practice, not testing an existing theory, so I began by asking, "What happens when teachers learn about and experiment with comprehension strategy instruction?" Comprehension strategy instruction is defined as an approach based on research in proficient reader behavior (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Flavell, 1979; Hansen, 1981; Markman, 1977; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pearson & Dole, 1987). Students are taught to think like expert readers by learning to use strategies such as visualization, inference, schema-activation, questioning, and summarization as they read (e.g., Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Wilhelm, Baker, & Dube, 2001). This approach to teaching comprehension has received a lion's share of page space in professional journals and books, and a quick glance at program guides from literacy conferences shows how popular a reading strategies approach is.

Despite the popularity of comprehension strategy teaching, research exploring the impact of this method is puzzling. A review of strategy instruction programs revealed two significant, but inconsistent, patterns. First, studies have documented the benefits to student achievement with the use of strategy instruction in comprehension (Brown, 1992; El-Dinary & Schuder, 1993; Hansen, 1981; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pressley & Wharton, 1998). Second, research has shown that few teachers adopt the approach (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; El-Dinary & Schuder, 1993; Pressley, Schuder, Bergman & El-Dinary, 1992; Pressley & Wharton, 1998). What interested me was that the



research base did not satisfactorily explain this failure to successfully connect recommended reading instruction with many practitioners. Why were teachers resistant to a “best practice” instructional intervention?

Further reading, and classroom-based research with upper-elementary and middle school teachers, helped me begin to answer this question. An important catalyst in initiating my research was a study by Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, and Lloyd (1991) in which they explored the conditions that support teachers’ professional development. They found that, in terms of literacy staff development, “the provision of practices without theory may lead to misimplementation or no implementation at all, unless teachers’ beliefs are congruent with the theoretical assumptions of the practice” (p. 579). Further, Shapiro and Kilbey (1990), in a different study, recommended that if teacher development efforts strive to foster congruence between theory and practice, “then teachers must be led to examine the assumptions underlying their beliefs, as well as the beliefs of others. Teachers must learn to question why they are using specific instructional practices and how these practices relate to current theories of literacy development” (p. 63).

As a former middle school language arts teacher, these conclusions struck a chord. I thought about how many in-service days I had “survived” as well-intentioned staff developers distributed piles of handouts describing the “what, when and how” of a new instructional practice, but never the “why”. When I remembered how often the material from these workshops landed in the back of my file cabinet, I wondered why teachers, the instructional architects of the classroom, were never introduced to the theoretical foundation of a new teaching method, nor were they invited to identify their own “theoretical inclinations” (Schoonmaker, 2002). And I began to question whether the absence of this information might explain why sometimes, as Hoffman (1998) explains, “bad things happen to good ideas” (p. 102).

Armed with these doubts, I re-read some of the milestone research that examined teachers’ introduction to and experimentation with a strategies approach to reading comprehension instruction. None of these studies reported sharing with teachers the theories that shaped the method, nor did the articles suggest that teachers were encouraged to explore and compare their existing beliefs about reading instruction with a strategies approach. Instead, I noticed that the prevailing characteristic of articles and books about cognitive strategy instruction was the focus on how successful *readers* think and act as they read. No research concentrated on how successful reading *teachers* think and act as they plan and deliver instruction.

Recognizing this gap in the literature base, I decided to center my research interests on the way teachers learn about and experiment with comprehension strategy instruction. Because I lacked a database of teachers who were “proven” to be successful strategy instructors, my first job was to spend time with teachers who were experimenting with strategy instruction, make judgments about effectiveness, and document what these capable teachers did to find instructional success.

Anne Barker, the teacher quoted at the beginning of this article, is a teacher at a small, rural elementary school in New England. In this article, I describe the year I spent in Anne’s classroom as a university-based researcher working in a professional development partnership with Anne’s school. During this year, Anne and I worked closely in an inquiry-based model of literacy staff development (Richardson, 1994). Anne had chosen to look more closely at her reading program, and was particularly interested in experimenting with a reading strategies approach. By the end of the school year, Anne had become a proficient teacher of reading strategies. Figure 1 provides an overview of the way Anne thought and the way she taught as she learned about comprehension instruction. Below, I describe how each characteristic of her teaching contributed to her instructional success.

**Figure 1.**

How She Thinks	How She Acts
Learning is socially constructed. (Social-constructivism)	Anne designs her literacy instruction to include talk as frequently as possible. Her kind of talk includes "thinking aloud" and storytelling; she creates time for her students to talk with her and one another in the same ways.
Being a reflective reader is an important prerequisite to understanding and implementing strategy instruction.	Anne is deliberate about identifying her own reading strategies in use and she makes this thinking visible during reading instruction.
A reader is someone who decodes with fluency and who uses cognitive strategies to comprehend a variety of text genres.	Anne defines reading broadly and uses flexible teaching strategies to meet all the reading needs of her students. She understands that matching books and kids at an appropriate reading level is crucial to developing fluency and supporting metacognition.
All teachers are reading teachers, at all grade levels, in all subject areas.	Anne's strategy teaching extends beyond the boundary of fiction and language arts instruction. She teaches her students how to apply reading strategies to different genres and in their content area studies.
Familiarity with children's literature is necessary in making wise book selections for teaching specific strategies.	Anne regularly chooses to read children's literature to help her stay current in the field. When she reads she "reads like a teacher of reading" and makes mental notes about the potential of a book for use in a future strategy lesson.
More experienced readers are mentors, less experienced readers are their apprentices.	During anchor lessons, as the "master reader", Anne uses direct instruction techniques to make her thinking visible while demonstrating the strategy use of experienced readers. She provides opportunities for students to collaborate in the same way.
Successful teaching and learning is grounded in a personal relationship between the teacher and her students. (Relational Theory)	Anne is interested in her students' lives and uses her knowledge of them to guide personal and academic interactions. She also uses personal stories to help her students learn about her as a whole person, not just a teacher.
The accurate assessment of reading progress happens with a variety of evaluation tools.	Anne uses students' talk, their body language, their written responses, and their reading project designs, and standardized test measures to evaluate both attitudes and achievement in reading.
Whole class lessons are valuable for introducing new strategies, but students learn at different rates and require individual instruction, guided practice, and independent practice. (Gradual Release of Responsibility Model)	She regularly observes students during independent reading time, and evaluates their written responses to thoroughly assess comprehension progress. She is responsive to students' individual needs by offering individual assistance & practice time.
Everyone in a classroom, including the teacher, is a learner.	Anne encourages questions and the "puzzling through" of solutions. She models this desirable stance of inquiry by showing that she does not "know it all", and she expects students to understand and be comfortable with her fallibility.
Less is more.	She recognizes the importance of spending long chunks of time with one strategy, varying the level of sophistication to avoid wheel-spinning, and showing the application of strategies across the curriculum



Reading is taught not assigned. To teach reading well teachers need to accept the "messiness" of making thinking visible, the unpredictable discussions, and the required time to be thorough in planning sophisticated strategy lessons.

Anne teaches her students to read by offering predictable anchor lessons. She begins a whole class lesson with a focusing question, defines the featured strategy, reads aloud from a hand-picked book, thinks aloud, and engages students' responses.

## Anne's story

My work with Anne Barker began in the fall of 2001. Anne had been a language arts teacher for five years, although in the last two years her attention shifted from a focus on developing her writing program to an interest in her reading instruction. "I don't think I'm doing a good job," she confessed when we first met. "I really see that my reading program has a long way to go. My reading instruction has pretty much been nonexistent before this year. You know, I tried a bit last year using some professional resources, but I don't think I have the background that I need to teach the strategies."

Two important influences on her interest in comprehension strategy instruction were *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997) and *Strategies That Work* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), books assigned to the Pinewood Elementary teachers participating in a series of monthly on-site reading instruction workshops. Anne consulted these books regularly as she planned instruction. She had frequent opportunities to discuss the ideas in these books during our monthly staff development sessions at her school and in our weekly conversations in her classroom and through e-mail dialogue.

During the 2001-2002 school year, I regularly visited Anne's classroom to observe her strategy teaching lessons and to debrief with her about the way she was thinking about comprehension instruction. We also discussed the decision-making processes that contributed to her instructional planning, and her reflections about the way a lesson progressed.

Based on these observations and conversations, as well as classroom artifacts such as student reading assignments, and numerous course writings that Anne completed in her graduate-level seminars in reading, I developed a list of characteristics that defines her approach to comprehension instruction. By identifying these attributes, I hope to initiate a conversation about what it takes, in theory and in practice, to teach reading comprehension strategies well.

## How she thought and how she taught

1. Anne believes that learning is socially constructed. This philosophy is the axis around which her whole approach to comprehension instruction revolves. Vygotsky (1978) is credited with relating social constructivism to education and his definition of the term is two-fold. First, higher mental functions have their origins in social interaction, and second, language mediates experience (Mariage, 1995). For Anne, these two layers result in distinct classroom practices. She designs her reading instruction to include talk as frequently as possible. These social interactions may take the form of literature circles, drama experiences, reader's theater, one-on-one conferences, or whole class discussions.

Perhaps more importantly, though, is Anne's commitment to acting as a reading mentor for her students. Vygotsky (1978) contributed an important term to the educational lexicon when he introduced *the zone of proximal development*, which he defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). According to Vygotsky's theory, if students apprentice themselves to an adult or more capable peer in performing a new task, eventually s/he will borrow and internalize the more expert person's process allowing independent execution of the task.



Comprehension strategy instruction is heavily dependent on a teacher's ability to create the kind of educational apprenticeship Vygotsky described. Anne is skilled at building such a relationship. During her anchor strategy lessons, when she is introducing a new strategy, Anne uses direct instructional techniques to "make her thinking visible" (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991) while demonstrating the strategy use of experienced readers. In turn, she expects students will eventually collaborate in similar ways as they begin to master a strategy.

Below is an excerpt from my field notes describing Anne's lesson about the way good readers connect to texts when they read. Her choice to use a children's book was deliberate. She wanted a text that was guaranteed to spark connections for her readers.

*December, 2001*

The lesson begins with Anne explaining that schema means connecting. She writes the word *schema* on the board and tells the class, "We're going to learn about this word. It's a word I don't think any of your teachers have ever talked about before." She then holds up a book by Mem Fox (1989) titled *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge* explaining to the class that she has chosen it because it's an all-time favorite of hers. She covers the title of the book, but keeps the cover illustration visible while the class guesses what the book is about. After some discussion, they decide it has something to do with old people and they share what they already know about the elderly.

**Student:** I have a prediction. I think it's about a boy who helps his Grandma with the babysitting because she can't get around as well as she used to.

**Anne:** What you just did was open your mind up and you found out that you have some schema. You have some information already about old people. What I'm going to do is read this book, and then I'm going to re-read it, and I'm going to show you what a good reader does. I'm going to open up my head and I'm going to try to show you how I make connections.

Through her own modeling of the reading process, Anne apprentices her students to a proficient reader's behavior. When she designs discussion activities that require students to make visible the way they make sense of a text, she is helping them transfer guided practice to their independent use of reading strategies. Anne's belief in socially-constructed learning is the linchpin that holds her reading strategy instruction together.

2. Anne believes that, as a reading teacher, being a reflective reader is an important prerequisite to understanding and implementing strategy instruction. Anne is deliberate about identifying her own reading strategies in use, although coming to this conscious awareness took effort. When she first began learning about comprehension strategies, she explained,

I think I learned from [the strategies], and if as an adult I can learn from the lessons that I'm giving my readers, I think anybody can. There's value in it for everybody. Because a lot of it is--there were things that I did intuitively [while I read] without anybody ever telling me, "You should visualize something. You should make a connection." But having the strategies spelled out in black and white made me more aware of the fact that I was using them and I think I started reading better. As I read a textbook now for a class, I think I'm comprehending better. And if I'm not comprehending, then I slow down and say, "Okay. You just read a paragraph, what are some questions that you have about it? If you didn't understand it, what is it that you didn't understand?" So I can back myself up and do a better job at reading myself.

Anne's personal reading habits, and her recognition that the way readers think is the basis for effective comprehension instruction, supported her in becoming a confident, effective strategies teacher.

3. Anne believes that reading is taught, not assigned. To teach reading well, she thinks, teachers need to accept the "messiness" of making thinking visible, the unpredictable discussions, and the required time to



be thorough in planning sophisticated strategy lessons. Anne understands that a good reader is someone who decodes with fluency and who uses cognitive strategies to comprehend a variety of text genres. In practice, this belief means that Anne defines reading broadly and uses flexible teaching strategies to meet the needs of all her students. She understands that matching books to kids at an appropriate reading level is crucial to developing fluency and supporting metacognition.

An example of Anne's reading teaching, versus reading assigning, is seen in the way she designs predictable anchor lessons followed by small group and individual guidance. Anne begins a whole class lesson with a focusing question, defines the featured strategy, reads aloud from a handpicked book, thinks aloud, and engages student responses. Anne values these whole class lessons for introducing new strategies, but she also understands that students learn at different rates, so she implements a gradual release of responsibility model in her approach to reading instruction. This means she provides individual instruction, offers guided practice, and requires independent practice when she judges a student is ready to work on his/her own. Anne regularly observes students during independent reading time, and evaluates their written responses, to thoroughly assess comprehension progress. Her layered approach to assisting students' learning guarantees that a reader's decoding, fluency, and comprehension needs are met.

It is important to note that along with Anne's belief in the hard work of *teaching* reading is the associated belief that less is more. Anne recognizes the importance of spending long chunks of time with one strategy, varying the level of sophistication to avoid tedium, and showing the application of strategies across the curriculum. Anne often spends four weeks developing one strategy with her readers, and she is amazed at the depth and breadth of her students' reading awareness

4. Anne believes that all teachers are reading teachers, at all grade levels, in all subject areas. Anne's strategy teaching extends beyond the boundaries of fiction and language arts instruction. She teaches her students how to apply reading strategies to different genres and in their content area studies.

For example, one morning Anne was reviewing how proficient readers determine what is important in a nonfiction article, and then she planned to talk about synthesis. The class was reading an article from National Geographic for Kids called *Super Croc!* Anne began by asking her class if they knew what the word "inferring" meant. She explained that the day's lesson was not about inferring (it was about synthesis), but she "couldn't let the opportunity pass" to tell them about another proficient reader strategy. One student raised her hand and reminded everyone that they had learned about making inferences when they were studying prediction.

"Remember," she announced to her classmates. "We talked about the difference between inferring and predicting when we read *Bark, George*. An inference is an idea you have about why something happened, but you have to read between the lines to make the inference. With a prediction, you find out the answer for sure when you keep reading."

Anne complimented this student on her explanation, then went on to tell the class that inferring was especially important in nonfiction reading, too. Anne's "piggybacking" of strategies is another notable characteristic of her successful strategy teaching. On several occasions I recorded Anne talking with her class about the nested action of strategy use. In May, 2002, during a particularly rich lesson in which Anne reviewed all the strategies the class had studied, she explained that even though they had studied strategies separately, during "real" reading the strategies readers use are flexible and woven together; no one uses a single discrete strategy step by step as they read. Instead, strategies overlap to support each other throughout a reading episode.

I judged this explanation as evidence that Anne had internalized significant understandings about the research behind proficient reading behavior. She had a firm grasp of the subtleties, recognizing that strategy use is more than a series of clever lessons with engaging texts. It is a coordinated cognitive act.



The work Anne and her students were doing was unraveling the mental ball of activity a reader creates during reading and identifying each strand to study its purpose.

5. Anne believes that familiarity with children's and young adult literature is necessary to make wise book selections for teaching specific strategies. Anne regularly chooses to read children's literature to help her stay current in the field. She once told me,

Oh! I feel awful saying this, but I am guilty of not always choosing books for my pleasure. I tend to pick books that I think my [students] would like . . . The only thing that I choose for myself for personal pleasure aren't novels so much as instructional--I do a lot of art-type work. So, that's why with novels and fictional stories I stick to kids' [books].

While it is not my intention to recommend that teachers looking to fortify their reading strategy instruction forsake all their adult reading pursuits, it is important to recognize the commitment Anne has made to books for young people. She considers this genre as important to her instructional effectiveness as professional resources describing best practice.

Even more important than her knowledge of children's literature is the *way* Anne reads it. When she reads a young adult novel, for instance, she reads like a teacher of reading, making mental notes about the potential of a book for use in a future strategy lesson.

The picture of Anne that is emerging is one of a teacher who reads regularly in a variety of genres, is aware of the processes that support her comprehension, and is opportunistic, that is, she looks for ways to make her reading work for her instructionally.

6. Anne believes that successful teaching and learning is grounded in a personal relationship between the teacher and her students. Anne is interested in her students' lives and she uses her knowledge of them to guide personal and academic interactions. She also shares personal stories to help her students learn about her as a whole person, not just a teacher.

Lysaker (2000) has described a relational theory that aptly describes the affective characteristics of Anne's classroom. The five components of this theory, ritual, physical closeness, shared objects, shared meaning making, and celebration, according to Lysaker, contribute to an environment that supports learning, particularly the risk-taking involved in genuine academic pursuits. Anne's classroom is reflective of relational theory's important principles. From the way she designs predictable, but flexible reading lessons, to the activities her students participate in to support and build meaning, to the festivities that mark important milestones, such as a reading buddy tea party where Anne's older readers shared their strategic lessons with younger peers, Anne's approach embraces the idea that reading teachers "need to focus on what children do within relationships as they work with text" (Lysaker, p. 481).

7. Anne believes that everyone in a classroom, including the teacher, is a learner. I remember the day Anne demonstrated this belief. She had just finished sharing a strategy lesson about visualization with her students. As she read aloud from a text on the seashore, she shared with her students what she was seeing in her mind as she read. At one point, she told them that she had never seen a barnacle so she was having trouble imagining what the creature looked like. She explained that she planned to look on-line after school to find a good picture of a barnacle to help her visualize it.

After class, I asked her if she ever felt uncomfortable admitting to her students that she did not know something. After all, I said, aren't teachers supposed to know it all? Anne's answer was provocative.

I tell them I'm not Einstein, and even Einstein probably had trouble reading at some point in his life, that it's a very human thing and you hopefully continue reading all of your life, right down to the day before you cross that line. That I want to learn, that I like to learn new things, and if I'm having trouble reading it may be because it's something that's unfamiliar to me. It might be something that I don't like.





I might not be focused. I might not be using my skills, and that's a big one. So I can say to the kids, "Okay. So I'm going to sit down and read this a little bit more, re-read," (which is a great thing for the kids to see me do), "and ask myself some questions and see if I can answer them." So it's fine. I think the kids know that I make lots of mistakes. I don't know everything.

Anne's explanation of how she rationalizes being vulnerable with her students is revealing. It suggests an important condition in the strategy teaching approach that is not often considered in research reporting its effectiveness, that is, the kind of intellectual relationships a teacher encourages in the classroom. If strategy teaching is a social-constructivist enterprise, grounded in the apprenticeship model, then the ability of learners in this partnership to tolerate ambiguity is key. Anne was candid when she made her reading behavior visible to her students. Had she been unwilling to appear vulnerable in front of the class, much of the power of the method would have been lost. In fact, I doubt she would have been successful at all.

8. *Finally, Anne believes that the accurate assessment of reading progress happens with a variety of evaluation tools.* She uses student talk, their body language, their written responses, and their reading project designs, as well as standardized measures to evaluate both attitudes and achievement in reading. In one interview, Anne described her ideal assessment.

I think there should be a way for the child to respond to all the comprehension skills. If he's read a piece, he should be able to draw a picture of what he saw as he read. He should be able to make some connection to what he read. He should be able to infer, there should be open-ended questions that ask him how he feels . . . And I'd also want [my readers] to tell me their feelings toward reading. What kind of books they've read, what kind of books they'd like to read, what they like to write. I think that's a piece of it. Maybe who their favorite authors are. I'd also like to know what kind of reading goes on at home. Do their parents read? What kinds of books and materials are around the house? Opinions about reading are important. How they use reading. I want to know if they understand that you have to read to live. You know, can you read a prescription bottle? Can you read the directions on the back of a recipe or can you read how to fix a box of macaroni and cheese? That's all reading and I want to know if they understand that that's all reading.

Anne's description of a comprehensive assessment of student reading achievement suggests that evaluation should be formative (on-going), not summative (occurring once, usually at the end of "learning"), and as individualized as possible. This orientation is further evidence of Anne's belief that reading must be taught and not assigned.

## Conclusion

Anne Barker is a successful reading strategies teacher. How did I make this determination? Through interviews and observations I documented the way Anne studied the literature on reading strategies, the way she made instructional decisions, the way she developed a facility for delivering sophisticated reading lessons, and the way she reflected on her practice and continually refined her approach. I also documented her students' enthusiasm for learning about reading strategies, their rapid adoption of strategic language, and their willingness to talk and write about their reading processes with Anne and among their peers. While I did not measure students' reading achievement data, I believe the qualitative data I gathered are compelling. Anne's story, like any case study, is not generalizable in the positivist sense. It does, however, suggest possibilities. Cziko (1992), in an article describing the evaluation of successful bilingual education programs, offers an argument that I adopt when considering the lessons Anne's teaching offers. He writes, "Research can never tell conclusively what will work in all



situations . . . but it can provide illustrative cases--examples of what works" (cited in Wollman-Bonilla, 2002, p.321). Anne's experience provides a beginning to the consideration of how a successful reading strategies teacher makes instructional decisions and employs them with her students.

In the literature on reading comprehension instruction there are sure to be many more articles describing theories and practices developed to support students' reading achievement. What I hope researchers and educators will also consider are the demands placed on teachers who choose to adopt comprehension strategy instruction. As Anne Barker's case suggests, just knowing the *what*, *when* and *how* of strategy teaching is not enough. Teachers need to know *why*, too, and they need to compare this theory to their own beliefs about effective reading instruction. Teaching reading strategies requires familiarity with social-constructivist principles, as well as knowledge of assessment, children's literature, and personal reading habits. Closer examination of the threads that contribute to solid reading instruction shows how complex the discipline is. We should not underestimate the importance of long-term, inquiry-based professional development as an avenue for exploring teacher learning, and for supporting teachers in their attempts at instructional innovation.

At the end of our research partnership, Anne sent me an e-mail that documents her own satisfaction with (but not the conclusion of) her instructional progress. She wrote, "You said I put a lot of pressure on myself [to teach reading well]. I think I do. . . I really don't have a life outside this building! I don't know that I'm a professional, yet, but I feel as if I'm getting better. You know, I'm getting better."

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