

# Exploring Reading Comprehension Inside and Outside the Classroom

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## Abstract

*Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that all individuals should have. A foundation of reading set in children's early years is integral to proper growth and development. Parents or guardians should spend quality time reading to their children at home prior to children attending school. Teachers should construct language arts programs, utilizing forms of technology, which promote reading and decoding forms of text. Parents or guardians should emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension skills outside the classroom by working with their children at home. Literacy is the fundamental building block to students' development and success in school.*

Reading comprehension is an essential component to schools' language arts programs. It is an important skill that students need to master beginning in the early years, particularly kindergarten and grade 1. Prior to students developing strong reading comprehension skills, other elements of the English language must be known, understood, and mastered. Students must know their alphabet, and understand that each letter has a corresponding sound. They also have to put letter sounds together to read words. When they have achieved letter and sound recognition they can begin to decode and comprehend what they are reading. Research has shown that students who learn to read, and can comprehend text, from an early age will find greater success in language arts programs in their later school years. Parents or guardians should read to their children from an early age, prior to them beginning school. Teachers should emphasize the importance of reading comprehension in classrooms, and encourage students to ask questions while reading. They should also incorporate forms of technology into their literacy programs in order to promote reading and reading comprehension. Parents or guardians should promote literacy and reading comprehension skills outside the classroom by working with their children in the home environment.

Parents or guardians should read to their children from an early age. It is suggested that children be read to right from birth in order to maximize their learning when they begin school (Johnson, 2016). Reading is an essential skill. It is important that children are exposed to language from birth so that they have heard a variety of words spoken to them before they learn to talk. Parents are role models for children. Children will repeat what their parents say and do (Duursma, 2016). When children are learning to speak, they can effectively communicate with others around them because they will have receptive language from listening and watching their parents read to them. Children can also develop an imagination when parents read books to them. Stimulating an imagination enables children to develop language and listening skills. Language skills are "the building blocks of development" (Johnson, 2016, para. 5) and have a host of benefits for children. Having a strong foundation of language skills leads to "brain development tied to mental imagery" (Johnson, 2016, para. 6). When children become critical thinkers, they will have strong reading comprehension skills. It is important that children are read to from birth so that they develop effective literacy habits as they grow older and move through their years of school.

Although language and reading are everywhere in today's world, and go far beyond the classroom walls, they begin in the early years at home. It is an essential skill that all children and adults need to succeed in life. In order for children to become effective readers, they should be read to from an early age. Children who have parental involvement and support in their development of reading skills are more likely to "have better phonological awareness" (Carreteiro, Justo, & Figueira, 2015, p. 910). Students will be more likely to perform better on reading tasks and activities. The English language can be difficult to master. There are many

components students need, such as alphabet and sound recognition and word identification, before they can begin reading and developing reading comprehension skills. The earlier students are exposed to language, the more success they will find when they begin school. Students who are read to at home will already be familiar with aspects of the language, and can begin developing their reading comprehension skills at an early age.

Teachers should emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension in school classrooms. Students in their early years of school, such as kindergarten, should be exposed to reading through a variety of age-appropriate language activities. Reading activities that can be implemented in elementary school classrooms include silent reading, Daily 5 (read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, work on writing, and word work), read-alouds, and home reading programs. In literacy activities such as read-alouds, teachers can have students engage in “dialogical reading” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). This is a task wherein teachers “use specific techniques while sharing a book” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). For example, a technique used is facilitating a student to “become the narrator of the story” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). These techniques help students develop their reading comprehension skills because they can question what they are reading, and learn to make connections between the text and their world. It is important to give students a variety of opportunities to develop their reading skills both inside and outside the classroom. Reading, writing, and listening activities can be completed in school where students read various forms of text and decode meaning from it. These activities can be completed in a variety of ways, including small-group, whole-group, and individual instruction (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2016). The method by which the teacher delivers the activities is dependent upon individual students and their learning styles. Students can use the information they have been given to comprehend what they are reading. It is critical that teachers promote reading in the classroom and provide students with numerous opportunities to engage in it so that they can develop their reading comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension can be a difficult task for young students, especially those in kindergarten. In their first year of school, they are learning the components of the English language, how to read, and how to reflect on what they have read. One demanding task of reading comprehension that requires cognitive thinking is summarizing (Chlapana, 2016). Many students may struggle with it. It is important that teachers focus on tasks such as summarizing and teach students a variety of strategies so that they become effective readers and critical thinkers. It is also imperative that students practise reading and develop strong reading comprehension skills outside the classroom. Teachers can implement a home reading program. Students choose books according to their appropriate reading level, read them at home, and answer questions about their books. Administering language activities in the beginning months of kindergarten “did add significantly to the prediction of reading comprehension at the end of third grade” (Catts, Nielsen, Bridges, & Liu, 2016, p. 462). Students can explore language, and more specifically, reading, activities when they first enter school contributes to their success in reading comprehension when they reach the later grades. Students need to develop effective strategies. It is important that teachers emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension in the early years of school because these skills can be challenging for some students.

Additional opportunities for reading and reading comprehension can be given to students by using various forms of technology. Teachers have access to computers, iPads and other tablets, and SMARTBoards in schools that can encourage students to read and make sense of what they are reading. Students can listen to books on a computer or tablet, which benefits oral learners who prefer hearing a story that is read to them. When an interactive storybook (ISB) intervention was administered to students in kindergarten classrooms, students “showed a steeper growth in expressive vocabulary” (van Druuten-Frietman, Strating, Denessen, & Verhoeven, 2016, p. 224). Expressive vocabulary is an essential component for reading comprehension. Students need to understand what they have read and explain the content by using appropriate, related vocabulary. With the prevalence of technology in today’s schools,

students will be engaged in their learning, and can use these forms of technology to develop their reading and reading comprehension skills.

Other computer-based literacy programs can be used in classrooms as a means of intervention to help students build effective literacy and reading comprehension skills. Students can be assessed in a number of ways, and early intervention is best. The earlier an intervention takes place in a students' time at school, the more success they will have in reading and reading comprehension in their later schooling years (O'Callaghan, McIvor, McVeigh, & Rushe, 2016). By administering tests such as these in kindergarten, teachers can identify students' strengths and weaknesses in language arts. They can use the information obtained to develop and implement appropriate intervention programs that will improve students' reading and reading comprehension skills.

Teachers should promote basic reading and reading comprehension skills in all of their students, and use a variety of resources to ensure that all students learn at their own pace. Each student brings a different background and learning style into the classroom. The ability to read text and decode it becomes increasingly difficult for students when English is not their first language. Reading and decoding text is a challenging task for EAL (English as an Additional Language) students. Teachers need to teach to all backgrounds and learning styles in their classrooms, and try to close the gap in oral language skills between EAL children and children whose first language is English. In today's schools, "EAL children continue to lag behind in their English oral language skills" (Bowyer-Crane, Fricke, Schaefer, Lerya, & Hulme, 2016, p. 783). EAL students often struggle with reading comprehension because they lack the basic language skills to decode and understand text. A variety of supports exist in schools that teachers can use to support all students, including EAL learners. These include resource teachers, other classroom teachers, and educational assistants. Teachers can also use particular resources and programs that break down the components of the English language. These include leveled reading programs that can begin as early as kindergarten. Going back to the basic building blocks enables EAL students to understand the alphabet and corresponding letter sounds, and recognize and read common sight words found in text form. Once they have a solid foundation of the English language, they can begin to read and comprehend what it is they are reading. It is important that teachers teach to all of their students so that each individual improves his or her basic reading and reading comprehension skills.

Parents should promote literacy and encourage their children to read at home. In order to maximize their children's learning potential, they need to ensure that their children are read to at home. Students learn and build upon their prior learning by forming habits. It is important that they work on their reading and reading comprehension skills by consistently working on related tasks and activities. Teachers can promote reading at home by "building partnerships with families" (Hindin, Steiner, & Dougherty, 2016, p. 11). They can encourage families to become involved in their children's learning at home by creating individualized plans that are appropriate for each student's level. Open communication with parents or guardians is important. Teachers can arrange regular face-to-face meetings with parents so that both the teacher and parent can openly discuss the students' learning progress in literacy and reading. The meetings also enable the parents to address any questions or concerns they may have. Literacy is important for parents to promote and encourage at home.

Parental involvement at home is dependent upon the parents' own literacy skills, ability to communicate, and reading abilities. A parent's level of education will determine how successfully he or she can help his or her child in their learning. Communication is important, and the way in which parents converse with their children "has direct influences on their children's emergent oral language development" (Taylor, Greenberg, & Terry, 2016, p. 11). Parents should frequently communicate with their children as often as they can. The more children are spoken to, the more opportunities they are given to develop their oral language skills. It is also important that there is quality interaction between parents and their children. Conversation should have meaning so that children can broaden their vocabularies (Taylor et

al., 2016). Some parents may also lack the basic literacy skills to communicate effectively with their children. It becomes difficult for these individuals, such as parents of EAL children, to support their children properly if they struggle with language themselves. EAL students are likely to come from home environments wherein the parents themselves are learning and developing their language skills. If the parents can not provide the appropriate reading and reading comprehension support, then the children can not grow their literacy skills. Parents should promote literacy at home, and encourage students to develop their reading and reading comprehension skills.

Basic reading and reading comprehension skills are critical to have both inside and outside the classroom. All students, regardless of their background and learning style, need to know how to read, and how to decode and understand various forms of text. It is important that children are read to from an early age. They should be read to right from birth. When they are exposed to language from early on in their life, they will be more likely to succeed in literacy activities, in particular reading comprehension tasks, as they move through their school years. It is also important that classroom teachers encourage students to read as much as possible. They should emphasize the important of developing effective reading and reading comprehension skills. Parents or guardians should also be involved in their child's literacy development. It is essential that they promote a home environment that encourages children to engage in reading. They should also frequently find time to communicate with their children so that they can expand their vocabularies and develop their oral language skills. Literacy and reading comprehension skills are important to succeed in society so that children will grow up to become literate adults who effectively communicate with others.

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### **About the Author**

*After completing her B.Ed. in Ontario, Kayla Waugh relocated to Thompson, Manitoba, where she began to understand the constructs and impact of Indigenous education on the classroom dynamic. Kayla began her M.Ed. in curriculum and pedagogy in September 2016. Outside the classroom, she enjoys spending time with her rescue cat, friends, yoga, and crocheting.*