

Strengthening Instruction in Reading Comprehension: The Big Ideas along with a few smaller ones



Rhode Island Reading First Institute, April, 2008

What should comprehension instruction be instruction of? - Mike Pressley

1. Teach decoding skills
2. Encourage the development of sight words
3. Teach students to use semantic context cues to evaluate whether decodings are accurate

The most efficient way to make an “accurate first attempt” at the identity of a new word is:

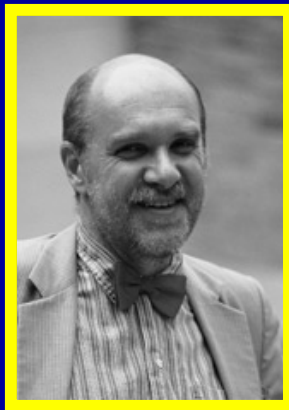
First, do phonemic analysis and try an approximate pronunciation

Then, close in on the exact right word by finding one containing the right sounds, that also makes sense in the sentence.

(chapter 10, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children
(2000))

What should comprehension instruction be instruction of? - Mike Pressley

1. Teach decoding skills
2. Encourage the development of sight words
3. Teach students to use semantic context cues to evaluate whether decodings are accurate
4. Teach vocabulary meanings
5. Encourage extensive reading
6. Teach self-regulated use of comprehension strategies



Pressley, M. (2000). What should comprehension instruction be the instruction of? In M.L. Kamil, P.B. Mosenthal, P.D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (vol. III, pp. 545–561). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

The Many Strands that are Woven into Skilled Reading

(Scarborough, 2001)

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

VERBAL REASONING

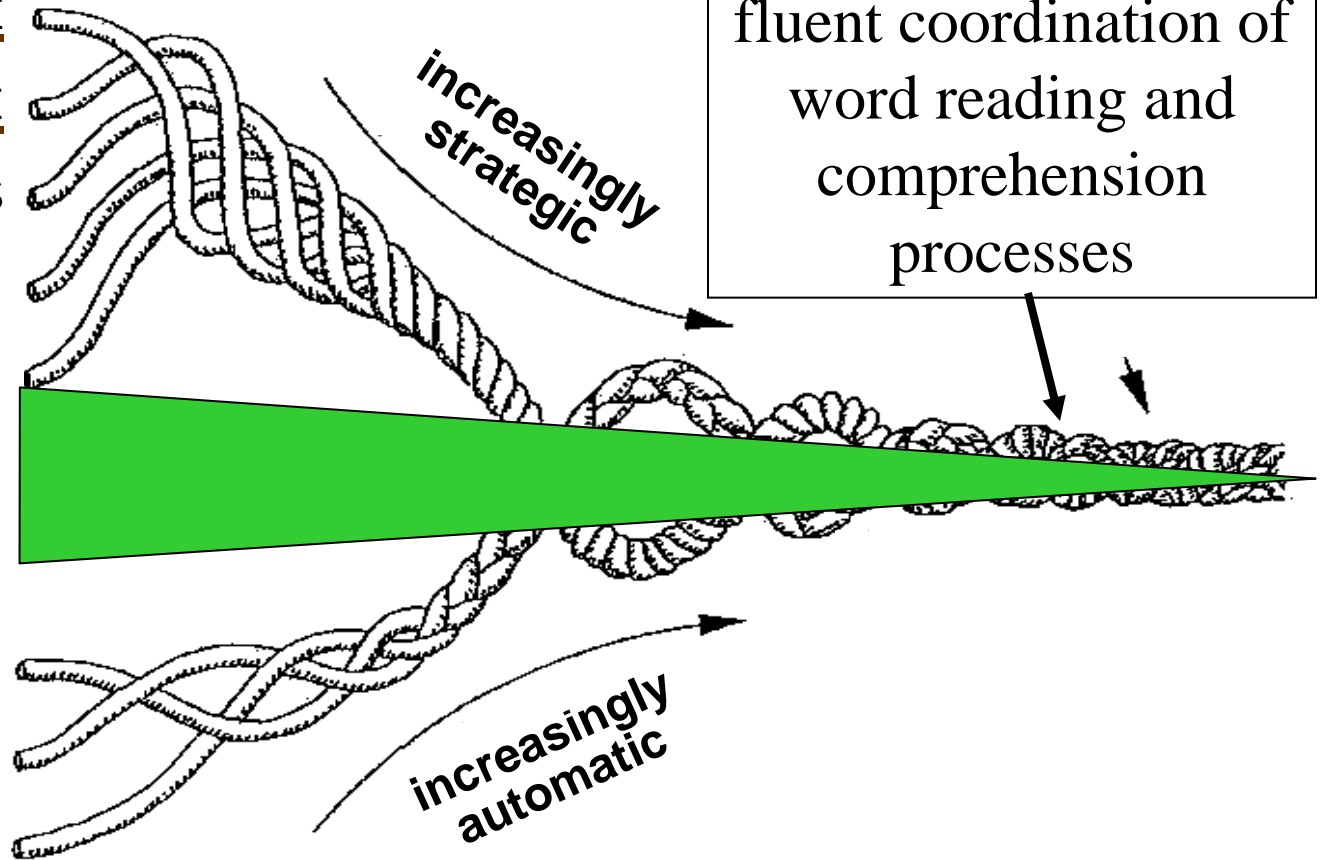
LITERACY KNOWLEDGE

WORD RECOGNITION

PHON. AWARENESS

DECODING (and SPELLING)

SIGHT RECOGNITION



Reading is a multifaceted skill, gradually acquired over years of instruction and practice.

Definitions of Reading Comprehension

“intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader.” Durkin (1993)

“the construction of the meaning of a written text through a reciprocal interchange of ideas between the reader and the message in a particular text.” Harris & Hodges, 1995

meaning arises from the active, deliberate thinking processes readers engage in as they read.

Definitions of Reading Comprehension

Said concisely:

“reading comprehension is thinking guided by print”

Perfetti 1995

Said not so concisely but more completely:

“the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. It consists of three elements: the reader, the text, and the activity or purpose for reading”

Rand Reading Study Group, 2002

Summary: a research-based view of reading comprehension

Reading comprehension involves active mental effort to construct meaning

Good readers use prior knowledge, information in text, and thinking/reasoning processes to construct new knowledge and understanding



Evidence for instruction in comprehension strategies comes from three sources:

1. Proficient readers monitor their comprehension more actively and effectively than less proficient readers
2. Proficient readers are more likely to use a variety of active cognitive strategies to enhance their comprehension and repair it when it breaks down

What Good Readers Do When They Read:

“What they found was that good readers achieve comprehension because they are able to use certain procedures — labeled comprehension strategies by the researchers—to relate ideas in a text to what they already know; to keep track of how well they are understanding what they read; and, when understanding breaks down, to identify what is causing the problem and how to overcome it.” (Lehr & Osborne, 2006)

Evidence for instruction in comprehension strategies comes from three sources:

1. Proficient readers monitor their comprehension more actively and effectively than less proficient readers
2. Proficient readers are more likely to use a variety of active cognitive strategies to enhance their comprehension and repair it when it breaks down
3. Explicit instruction along with supported, scaffolded practice in the use of comprehension strategies produces improvements in reading comprehension in both younger and older students

From the Report of the National Reading Panel:

“The idea behind explicit instruction of text comprehension is that comprehension can be improved by teaching students to use specific cognitive strategies or to reason strategically when they encounter barriers to comprehension when reading.” (NRP, 2000, p. 4-39).

“Reading instruction is effective in stimulating student comprehension abilities to the extent that it stimulates students to process texts as good readers do.” (Pressley, 2000, p. 545)

An important cautionary note from a leading comprehension researcher

The most powerful demonstrations of the impact of comprehension strategies instruction have come from studies that have deeply taught a small repertoire of comprehension strategies over time

We should not assume that effective comprehension strategy instruction involves teaching all the strategies on some list (The NRP's or other)

Pressley, M. (2006). What the future of reading research could be. Presented at meetings of the International Reading Association. April, 2006.

Another note about strategy instruction from a recent discussion titled “The usefulness of brief instruction in comprehension strategies” Willingham, 2006

Teaching reading comprehension strategies to students is one way that we teach them that the main purpose of reading is to understand the author’s message.

In order to generate useful questions, make summaries, check the accuracy of predictions, create story maps, students must actively think about the meaning of text

Students can learn comprehension strategies relatively quickly, but it is extended practice over time in reading for meaning that actually improves general comprehension. Comprehension strategies help to remind students that the goal of reading is making sense of text

An extended research example of effective comprehension instruction: *Transactional Strategies Instruction* with struggling second grade readers

“Transactional strategies instruction involves direct explanations and teacher modeling of strategies, followed by guided practice of strategies

Teacher assistance is provided on an as-needed basis (i.e. strategy instruction is “scaffolded”)

There are lively interpretive discussions of texts, with students encouraged to interpret and respond to text as they are exposed to diverse reactions to text by their classmates

The transactional strategies instructional approach succeeds in stimulating dialogues in which strategic processes are used as interpretive vehicles, with consistently high engagement by all group members.” (Pressley, 2000)

“The strategies are used as a vehicle for coordinating dialogue about text. Thus, a great deal of discussion of text content occurs as teachers interact with students, reacting to students' use of strategies and prompting additional strategic processing.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The students:

All students began second grade reading below grade level. Were from schools serving predominantly “working class” families – all spoke English

The teachers:

5 experienced TSI teachers – 3-6 years experience
5 other “excellent” teachers nominated by principals and district reading staff – who taught more traditionally

Experimental control:

Quasi-experiment with non random assignment, but students were well matched on pretest reading comprehension and student demographics.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The instruction:

Took place across the entire school year

Done in both whole group and small group

Strategies taught:

Adjust reading to purposes and to text characteristics

Use background knowledge to make predictions

Generate questions and interpretations while reading

Visualize ideas and events

Summarize periodically

Attend selectively to most important information

Strategies for dealing with difficult words

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Interviews about the use of strategies during reading:

What do good readers do? What makes someone a good reader?

What things do you do before you start to read a story?

What do you think about before you read a story?

What do you do when you come to a word you do not know?

What do you do when you read something that does not make sense?

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Interviews about the use of strategies during reading:

TSI students identified more strategies, and mentioned them more consistently:

Uniquely reported: visualizing, looking back, verifying predictions, thinking aloud, summarizing, setting a goal, or browsing

Both groups reported: predicting, using text or picture clues to clarify confusions, making connections between text and their background knowledge and experiences, asking someone for help, skipping over confusing parts, and rereading

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Performance on stories taught during two lessons that had been monitored for instructional activities, and that showed clear differences between TSI and non TSI classes.

TSI students interjected interpretive comments in their story recall more than students in the other groups (comments that provided a reason for something that happened in the story)

On literal recall of important idea units, the groups differed on one of the stories, but not on the other one.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Students were also asked to read a fable, and during the reading, stopped and asked what they were thinking.

TSI students consistently responded with more strategy based responses

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

(The student read the page about the dog rushing out of the house with the piece of meat. The student then started to talk before the researcher asked an initial probe.)

S: I think my prediction is coming out right, (verifying)

R: Why do you say that?

S: Cuz, cuz I see a bridge over there and water, (using picture clues)

R: Uh huh....

S: And he ran out of the house without anybody seeing him. Like I said before

R: Okay, so you think your prediction is right and you're using, you were pointing to the pictures.

S: Yep.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Students were also asked to read a fable, and during the reading, stopped and asked what they were thinking.

TSI students consistently responded with more strategy based responses

The non strategic responses of the TSI students also showed consistently more integration of personal information and response to the story elements, than simply reporting what was going in the text.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

Text based response

R: Okay, what are you thinking?

S: The dog stole something.

R: Uh huh . . . tell me more.

S: He knocked over the table.

R: He knocked over, talk nice and loud . . . he knocked things off the table . . . okay.

S: Yeah, and nothing really else.

R: Okay. And what do you think about what the dog did?

S: What do you mean?

R: What do you think about what the dog did?

S: He stole something.

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

The outcomes:

A more interpretive, personal response

R: What are you thinking about what's happening on this page?

S: Sort of bad because I see that was part of their dinner, but they would not have all the uhm, protein.

R: Okay

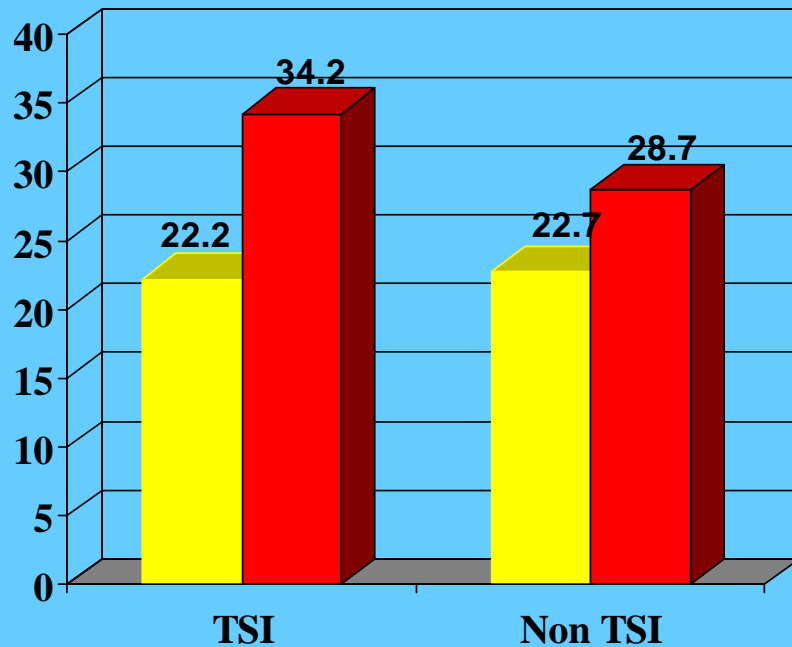
S: The dog ate all t h a t

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

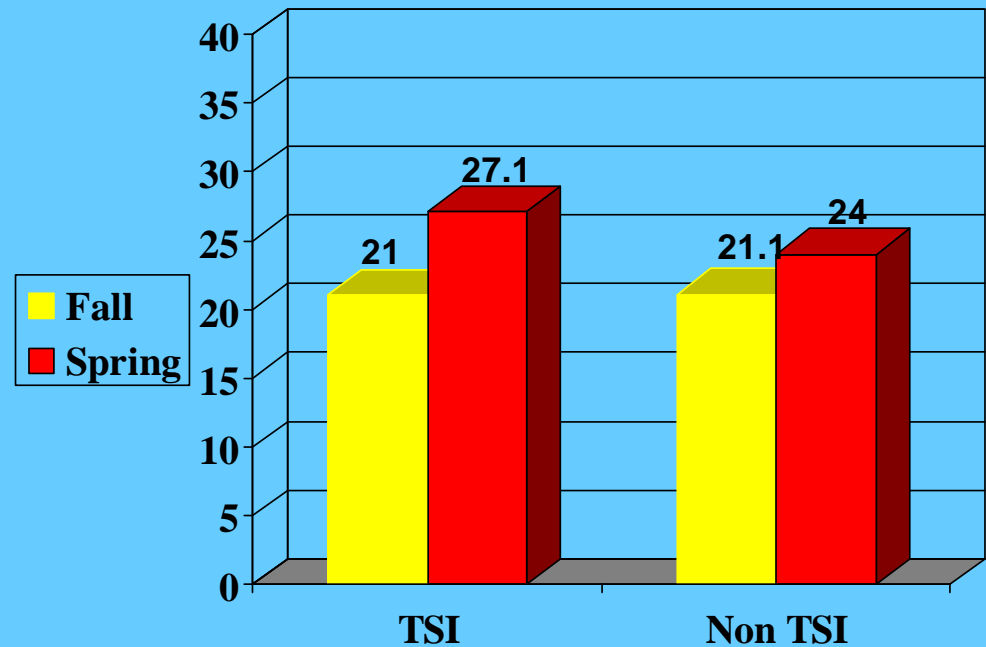
The outcomes:

Stanford Achievement Test

Reported raw scores on Comprehension and Word Skills test for fall (form J) and spring (form K)



Passage Comprehension



Word Skills

The Study (Brown, Pressley, et. al. (1996))

Comments from the discussion:

TSI had both positive short-term and long-term benefits

Short term:

Students acquired more information from stories read

Developed richer, more personalized interpretations

The inference: TSI students learn more from their daily reading group lessons than control students

Long Term

TSI students showed greater awareness of strategies

TSI students used strategies more actively during reading

TSI students showed greater gains on standardized test

The inference: A year of TSI instruction improved the reading skills of the 2nd grade students more than did alternative high quality instruction.

How can we curricularize high quality instruction in the self-regulated use of comprehension strategies?

The concept of “balanced” comprehension instruction. Both explicit instruction and modeling, and lots of time for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text. (Duke & Pearson, 2002)

Critical Elements

1. An explicit description of the strategy and when and how it should be used.
2. Teacher and/or student modeling of the strategy in action
3. Collaborative use of the strategy in action to construct meaning of text.
4. Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility – scaffolding by the teacher
5. Independent use of the strategy

How can we curricularize high quality instruction in the self-regulated use of comprehension strategies?

The larger classroom context (desirable elements)

1. Lots of time spent actually reading
2. Experience reading real text for real reasons – have a purpose for the reading-engagement
3. Experience reading the range of genres that we wish students to comprehend
4. An environment rich in vocabulary and concept development through reading, experience, and, above all, discussion of words and their meanings
5. Lots of time spent writing texts for others to comprehend
6. An environment rich in high-quality talk about text

(From Duke & Pearson, 2002)

How can we curricularize high quality instruction in the self-regulated use of comprehension strategies?

Other teaching considerations

1. Using well-suited texts

2. Concern with student motivation

3. Ongoing assessment

Can the child ask a meaningful question about a passage just read?

Does the child's story recall include information organized by story grammar?

Can the child summarize a paragraph briefly?

Questions or Discussion

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