



Text Comprehension

Reading Recovery®
Council of North America

www.readingrecovery.org

The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000a; 2000b; 2001) identified five essential components of reading instruction. One of those components was text comprehension instruction. Attention is given to this component in every Reading Recovery lesson.

Text Comprehension Instruction from *Put Reading First*

Definition: “Comprehension is the reason for reading. If readers can read the words but do not understand what they are reading, they are not really reading.” (p. 48)

- “Good readers are purposeful. Good readers have a purpose for reading.” (p. 48)
- “Good readers are active. Good readers think actively as they read. To make sense of what they read, good readers engage in a complicated process. [They use] their experiences and knowledge of the world, their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, and their knowledge of reading strategies.” (p. 48)
- “Text comprehension can be improved by instruction that helps readers use specific comprehension strategies:” (p. 49)
- Monitoring comprehension: being aware of what they do and do not understand and using appropriate “fix-up” strategies to solve problems in comprehension
- Using graphic and semantic organizers
- Answering questions about the text
- Generating questions about the text
- Recognizing story structure
- Summarizing: identifying main themes and central ideas while eliminating unnecessary and redundant information
- Making use of prior knowledge: drawing on prior knowledge and experience to help with understanding
- Using mental imagery (pp. 49–56)
- “Teachers should emphasize text comprehension from the beginning, rather than waiting until students have mastered the basics of reading.” (p. 55)

Text Comprehension in Reading Recovery Lessons

“I define reading as a message-getting, problem-solving activity which increases in power and flexibility the more it is practiced. My definition states that within the directional constraints of the printer’s cue, language and visual perception responses are purposefully directed by the reader in some integrated way to the problem of extracting meaning from cues in a text, in sequence, so that the reader brings a maximum of understanding to the author’s message.” (Clay, 1991, p. 6)

Teaching for meaning in Reading Recovery starts with the first lesson. Children learn that understanding is the ultimate goal of reading. As they gain phonemic awareness, phonics and decoding skills, fluency, and vocabulary, the teacher supports children’s active use of these abilities while simultaneously making sense of what is read.

Examples of Instructional Procedures

Reading Recovery teachers give careful attention to children's development of the following processes:

- Monitoring their own reading, being aware of what they do and do not understand
- Using information in text to gain meaning (e.g., letter sequences, word sequences)
- Using prior knowledge to support meaning
- Taking the initiative to self-correct when the text does not make sense
- Discovering new things within the text
- Asking their own questions about the text
- Building concepts about how books and stories work

Ways in which Reading Recovery teachers support the development of these processes in young children include the following teaching moves:

- Selecting texts that will support the child's present knowledge and skills
- Selecting a variety of texts and text types to promote the flexible use of the child's knowledge in new situations
- Introducing texts by activating prior knowledge about the story and building experiences needed to enhance understanding
- Emphasizing what the child already knows that will help in solving words and interpreting the story
- Building connections during and after reading to support understanding
- Having meaningful conversations about the text
- Holding the child accountable for meaning during oral reading through such prompts as "Did that make sense?"
- Examining records of oral reading behavior for evidence of meaning-making and adjust teaching objectives accordingly
- Teaching for comprehension when children are writing as well as when they are reading. The reciprocal nature of the two processes will be mutually supportive.

Because Reading Recovery teachers work with children who are demonstrating unique difficulties, approaches to comprehension instruction must be appropriate for each individual. Teachers must be knowledgeable and flexible in supporting comprehension in young readers and writers.

References

- Clay, M. M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000a). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000b). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups* (NIH Publication No. 00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, DHHS (2001). *Put reading first: Helping your child learn to read*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.