Teach the Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers

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To improve students' reading comprehension, teachers should introduce the seven cognitive strategies of effective readers: activating, inferring, monitoring-clarifying, questioning, searching-selecting, summarizing, and visualizing-organizing. This article includes definitions of the seven strategies and a lesson-plan template for teaching each one.

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To assume that one can simply have students memorize and routinely execute a set of strategies is to misconceive the nature of strategic processing or executive control. Such rote applications of these procedures represents, in essence, a true oxymoron-non-strategic strategic processing.

— Alexander and Murphy (1998, p. 33)

If the struggling readers in your content classroom routinely miss the point when "reading" content text, consider teaching them one or more of the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers. **Cognitive strategies are the mental processes used by skilled readers to extract and construct meaning from text and to create knowledge structures in long-term memory**. When these strategies are directly taught to and modeled for struggling readers, their comprehension and retention improve.

Struggling students often mistakenly believe they are reading when they are actually engaged in what researchers call *mindless reading* (Schooler, Reichle, & Halpern, 2004), zoning out while staring at the printed page. The opposite of mindless reading is the processing of text by highly effective readers using cognitive strategies. These strategies are described in a fascinating qualitative study that asked expert readers to think aloud regarding what was happening in their minds while they were reading. The lengthy scripts recording these spoken thoughts (i.e., think-alouds) are called *verbal protocols* (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). These protocols were categorized and analyzed by researchers to answer specific questions, such as, What is the influence of prior knowledge on expert readers' strategies as they determine the main idea of a text? (Afflerbach, 1990b).

The protocols provide accurate "snapshots" and even "videos" of the ever-changing mental landscape that expert readers construct during reading. Researchers have concluded that reading is "constructively responsive-that is, good readers are always changing their processing in response to the text they are reading" (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995, p. 2).

Instructional Aid 1.1 defines the seven cognitive strategies of highly effective readers, and Instructional Aid 1.2 provides a lesson plan template for teaching a cognitive strategy.

Instructional aids

Instructional Aid 1.1: Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers	
Strategy	**Definition**
Activating Schema / Connect	"Priming the cognitive pump" in order to recall relevant prior knowledge and experiences from long-term memory in order to extract and construct meaning from text
Inferring	Bringing together what is spoken (written) in the text, what is unspoken (unwritten) in the text, and what is already known by the reader in order to extract and construct meaning from the text
Monitoring-Clarifying	Thinking about how and what one is reading, both during and after the act of reading, for purposes of determining if one is comprehending the text combined with the ability to clarify and fix up any mix-ups
Questioning	Engaging in learning dialogues with text (authors), peers, and teachers through self-questioning, question generation, and question answering
Searching-Selecting (Determining importance)	Searching a variety of sources in order to select appropriate information to answer questions, define words and terms, clarify misunderstandings, solve problems, or gather information
Summarizing/ Synthesizing	Restating the meaning of text in one's own words — different words from those used in the original text
Visualizing-Organizing	Constructing a mental image or graphic organizer for the purpose of extracting and constructing meaning from the text

Instructional Aid 1.2: A Lesson Template for Teaching Cognitive Strategies

Steps	Teacher Script
1. Provide direct instruction regarding the cognitive strategy	
a. Define and explain the strategy	
b. Explain the purpose the strategy serves during reading	
c. Describe the critical attributes of the strategy	
d. Provide concrete examples/non-examples of the strategy	
2. Model the strategy by thinking aloud	
3. Facilitate guided practice with students	

Instructional Aid 1.3: A Lesson Template for Teaching Summarizing

Lesson Template for Teaching Cognitive Strategies	Lesson Plan for Teaching Summarizing
1. Provide direct instruction regarding the cognitive strategy	
a. Define and explain the strategy.	Summarizing is restating in your own words the meaning of what you have read--using different words from those used in the original text--either in written form or a graphic representation (picture of graphic organizer).
b. Explain the purpose the strategy serves during reading	Summarizing enables a reader to determine what is most important to remember once the reading is completed. Many things we read have only one or two bid ideas, and it's important to identify them and restate them for purposed of retention.
c. Describe the critical attributes of the strategy.	A summary has the following characteristics. It: –Is short –Is to the point, containing the big idea of the text –Omits trivial information and collapses lists into a word or phrase –Is not a retelling or a "photocopy" of the text

d. Provide concrete examples/non-examples of the strategy.	Examples of good summaries might include the one-sentence book summaries from The New York Times Bestsellers List, an obituary of a famous person, or a report of a basketball or football game that captures the highlights. The mistakes that students commonly make when writing summaries can be more readily avoided by showing students excellent non-examples (e.g., a paragraph that is too long, has far too many details, or is a complete retelling of the text rather than a statement of the main idea.
2. Model the strategy by thinking aloud.	Thinking aloud is a metacognitive activity in which teachers reflect on their behaviors, thoughts, and attitudes regarding what they have read and then speak their thoughts aloud for students. Choose a section of relatively easy text from your discipline and think aloud as you read it, and then also think aloud about how you would go about summarizing it — then do it.
3. Facilitate guided practice with students.	Using easy-to-read content text, read aloud and generate a summary together with the whole class. Using easy-to-read content text, ask students to read with partners and create a summary together. One students are writing good summaries as partners, assign text and expect students to read it and generate summaries independently.

References

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