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Integrating Comprehension Strategy Instruction Into Literature Study For Primary Students

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INTEGRATING COMPREHENSION STRATEGY
INSTRUCTION INTO LITERATURE STUDY FOR PRIMARY STUDENTS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in Education

Hamline University

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This capstone and the process of creating it is dedicated to my husband, Phil. Thank you for the countless hours that you spent taking our children on long drives to state parks so I could work on my capstone. Without your help, support, and encouragement, I would not have been able to accomplish this project. I am so grateful to have you in my life.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“Nothing is more important than teaching young people to use
and recognize the power of their own minds.”

Harvey & Goudvis, 2013, p. 432

One of the best things about being a primary grade educator is that there is rarely a dull moment. There is always something thought-provoking to discuss with my students. One day in math class, my second graders and I were discussing possible strategies for solving a particularly challenging word problem. After working through one approach, I asked the students if anyone had an alternative strategy. Hands shot up into the air and their eyes seemed to light up. The energy and enthusiasm in the room was palpable and contagious. As we discussed how solving problems using various methods and thinking in different ways can increase our understanding, I could almost see their little cognitive light bulbs flickering and becoming illuminated. We were celebrating the process, the mental work, the power of thinking. It was thrilling.

Just as my math students have recently recognized the power of their own thinking to solve challenging word problems in multiple ways, I want my reading students to experience that same energy and enthusiasm when they employ thinking strategies to help them understand and engage with complex texts. I hope to teach my students the power of making connections, asking questions, creating mental imagery, making inferences, and summarizing to determine importance. I want my readers to see multiple paths to meaning, through thinking, discussing, practicing, and internalizing

strategies used by proficient readers. By emphasizing cognitive strategies, I am ultimately hoping that my students will become metacognitive – able to listen to the voice within their minds, to be aware of their thinking, and to use that thinking to deepen their understanding (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). Hence, my research question is: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In this chapter, I will share how my passion for reading comprehension strategies began, and how that passion has led me to the development of my research question. I will describe the rationale for my research project and my hopes for what this project will accomplish.

My Journey

In 2002, I was living in Taiwan and teaching at a bilingual school, where students learned both Mandarin Chinese and English. I spent six years there, teaching third and fourth grade students reading and math in English. It was a wonderfully life-enlarging experience, and I feel incredibly fortunate to have spent my early teaching years there. During the summers, I was able to return home to Minnesota to see friends and family and attend professional development workshops. During one of those summer courses, I was introduced to the highly-regarded and widely-used manual of literacy instruction, *Guiding Readers and Writers* (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Since my initial teacher training was for high school students, I was unfamiliar with the reading workshop model of teaching literacy. I recall thinking that it sounded like an amazingly rich, authentic way to allow students to discover the magic and joy of reading, but I also knew that it

was a very different approach than the one presented in the basal reading program used at my school.

Although the workshop approach was not something I could implement, I do remember having a “Eureka” moment when learning about specific strategies that I could implement to help my students strengthen their comprehension, increase their enjoyment of reading, and empower them to become active, thoughtful, confident readers. I was incredibly eager to try these strategies and spent the long flight back to Taipei, later that summer, jotting down ideas in my journal. Unfortunately, my principal was not as excited about this new idea, and preferred that I stick with the format of the basal reading program. Even though I was not able to fully execute a comprehensive literacy workshop model, one thing my principal agreed to was that I could focus and expand upon the strategies that were merely mentioned in the basal reading program. I was excited to delve into strategy instruction, and found that an effective way to allow students to practice these strategies was through reading response journals.

Reading Response Journals

In the classroom with my third and fourth graders, I took regular breaks from the basal reading program to discuss the power of thinking while reading, modeling how I paused to check my understanding, make connections, or ask questions. In their response journals, students would write letters to me about what they were reading and thinking, and I would write letters back to them. Students would begin their letters by summarizing a section from a book that they had recently read. Then, they would choose a response prompt from a page that was glued to the inside cover of their journals. The title of this page of prompts was, “Reading is Thinking.” The response prompts were related to

cognitive strategies like activating background knowledge, predicting, questioning, and making connections to deepen understanding and engagement. After students wrote to me about their thoughts, I would respond with a question or two that encouraged them to think a little deeper or pursue a new avenue of thinking. This process of writing letters back and forth was incredibly engaging for my students and inspiring for me as an educator. By focusing on strategies that proficient readers use, they were becoming more confident in their reading skills and discovering the power of their own thinking to aid in their understanding and enjoyment of reading. This experience of guiding my students to explore cognitive strategies while reading, along with the use of reading response journals, was one of the most meaningful teaching experiences that I had during my time overseas.

Back in Minnesota

After spending six years in the Taipei heat, I decided it was time to return home. Back in Minnesota, I enrolled in an additional licensure program to acquire my Elementary teaching license. During one of the licensure courses, I was reminded of the importance of explicit strategy instruction to increase students' comprehension of complex texts. By articulating, modeling, and celebrating the thinking that readers do as they construct meaning from texts, students are empowered to believe in themselves as readers and flourish. I was thrilled to continue the journey of helping students become active, thoughtful readers.

I was introduced to powerful books about reading for understanding like *Strategies that Work* (Harvey and Goudvis, 2000), *Reading with Meaning* (Miller, 2002), and *Mosaic of Thought* (Keene and Zimmerman, 2007). Soon after obtaining my license,

I secured a position as a second grade teacher at a local charter school. At the time, my school was using a combination of guided reading and literature circles, and my second-grade colleagues shared my enthusiasm for implementing instruction in cognitive strategies such as making connections, predicting, questioning, visualizing, summarizing, and inferring. We made posters that proclaimed, “Reading is Thinking!” and began to infuse our literature units with higher-level questions and lessons focused on thinking strategies to enhance understanding and deepen awareness of processes used by proficient readers. Just as we were beginning to see progress and starting to become comfortable using this new language with our students, the administration decided to change the reading curriculum. Our implementation of the strategies was put on hold. I felt quite disappointed that I would not have the chance to fully implement these compelling, research-based strategies to help my students see the positive effects of their own thinking that would lead them to become thoughtful, engaged, proficient readers.

New Reading Curriculum

The administration decided to change the reading curriculum because many of our struggling readers were not gaining the necessary foundational skills that they needed to become fluent readers. They were not getting enough practice with phonics, decoding, and oral reading fluency with our previous guided reading/literature circle model. I was pleased that this problem was being addressed, but I also saw that we were taking real books away from students and replacing them with textbooks full of word lists and reading lessons.

The new core reading program that was chosen by the administration, which we still use today, follows a direct instruction model. In this approach, teachers instruct by

reading from a script and asking students questions related mostly to literal comprehension and the recalling of facts and details. Students follow along, tracking with their fingers, responding to questions in unison, and completing worksheets at the end of each lesson. When my school first began implementing the direct instruction curriculum, along with placing students in reading classes according to their ability, I remember feeling relieved that our struggling readers would now get the regular practice they needed to become proficient. Since then, I have witnessed students gaining solid foundations in decoding, literal comprehension, and fluency. They are now able to read each day from a text that is an appropriate level for them, as opposed to waiting for me to finish meeting with other reading groups before helping them. While there have been definite benefits from the direct instruction approach, there have also been drawbacks.

While our struggling readers have certainly gained essential foundational skills for reading, our students no longer get to experience the thrill of completing a book, responding authentically to rich texts, discussing their thinking with classmates, and truly engaging with each other about characters, events, and themes. With the direct instruction core reading program, there is very little room for explicit teaching of reading strategies, because of the pace of the lessons and the focus on retaining fidelity to the program by completing all the lessons in the proper sequence. Thankfully, since this program was first adopted, we have new administration that has taken a more balanced approach. Our new leaders have been putting more trust in the teachers' professional judgment and allowing for more flexibility when it comes to implementing the core reading program.

The direct instruction reading program does touch upon cognitive strategies such as predicting, visualizing, and making connections, but they are merely mentioned via

codes placed next to each of the questions that the teacher is supposed to ask students during the lesson. The problem is that there are over thirty skills that are referred to, and little to no guidance in the teacher's manual about how to incorporate them into the reading lessons. I am glad the program includes this list of thinking processes used by proficient readers, but I feel these crucial strategies should be highlighted, modeled, and explicitly taught to students in order to increase their understanding and enjoyment of reading. By explicitly teaching students to recognize and use the language of these strategies, teachers can engage, equip, and empower them as readers and thinkers.

It's been four years since my school implemented the direct instruction reading program. Now that we have adopted a direct instruction curriculum for reading in the primary grades, our students are becoming strong decoders, but when it comes to comprehension, the focus is on the literal understanding of who, what, when, where, and how. My students are craving reading real books, discussing meaningful questions, and responding personally to stories. I feel very fortunate that I am able to teach the above-grade level readers because it means that I can teach a combination of direct instruction and literature study. My literature instruction is what continues to fuel my passion for reading and thinking. I believe my students feel the same way. I have been plugging along with the current curriculum and taking delight in seeing my students light up when they see we are taking another break from the direct instruction curriculum to read the next chapter of King Arthur or Robin Hood.

Rationale

When I first began to reflect on ideas for my research, I wanted to find ways to inspire and engage my reading students. I wanted to make changes to the direct

instruction model, but I felt that my literature instruction was more within my locus of control. Although I teach a combination of two-thirds direct instruction and one-third literature, I have recently been given the authority to teach more literature, so I can pursue a 50/50 model. I am excited to revise one of my current literature units by embedding explicit strategy instruction to help students access complex texts and enhance their understanding and enjoyment of stories. I am also hoping that by explicitly instructing students on these thinking strategies during literature, they will be able to apply these skills to their own self-selected reading and to other content areas such as science and history. Cognitive strategies are something I have been passionate about since early-on in my teaching career. I have seen how this emphasis on thinking while reading has the power to engage and motivate students, and I hope to continue this meaningful work for my capstone project.

Another reason I chose to focus on integrating strategy instruction into my literature units is because my principal recently asked all the grade levels to begin examining the Minnesota Academic Standards for English Language Arts K-12 (2010), which are identical to the Common Core State Standards (2010). We were asked to think about areas where our reading instruction aligns and where it does not. Our goal is to start aligning our reading instruction to meet the standards, as well as looking at areas where our reading instruction could be improved. As I began to look at the standards, I was extremely pleased to see the strong emphasis on comprehension. By being more deliberate about teaching reading comprehension skills, I can also better align my instruction to meet the standards.

Similar to the Minnesota Academic Standards (2010), another set of benchmarks that my school is hoping to achieve pertains to assessments linked to data-driven instruction. Since my school is a charter, we have an authorizer who stipulates certain items must be implemented for our contract to continue to be renewed every few years. Recently, our authorizer began requiring that we create criterion-referenced assessments and use data-driven instruction to improve our instruction. After looking at the state standards and the skills emphasized in our direct instruction curriculum, as well as discussing with grade-level colleagues, we have come up with a set of reading skills that we are hoping our second graders will master by the end of the year. Some of the foundational skills related to decoding, fluency, and literal comprehension will be met through the use of direct instruction. Other skills are related to strategy instruction like making connections, generating questions, and determining importance will be met through literature instruction.

The final reason that I feel cognitive strategy instruction is important pertains to the mission of my school. The aim of my school, which is a K-12 classically-focused charter school in a large metropolitan area, is to train students how to think in order that they may take part in the “Great Conversation” (Adler, 1990). In other words, we want our students to be able to recall what they have learned from great thinkers of the past, and to build upon their ideas as they continue to seek the ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness. We strive to teach our students how to think, in hopes that they will be able to become adept thinkers who are able to not only recall important information, but also make connections, craft logical arguments, and express themselves by building upon the foundation of thinkers who have come before them. These are lofty goals; If we desire for

our students to become deep thinkers, we must teach them to recognize the power of their own thinking to deepen and enhance their understanding. In this area, our direct instruction reading curriculum for young students, is lacking. I believe that explicit instruction of cognitive strategies will allow me to better prepare my students to seek truth and build upon the thoughts and ideas of the great thinkers of the past, so they may take part in the “Great Conversation” (Adler, 1990).

My Hopes

I am hoping that, by pursuing my research question, I can get back on track with engaging and inspiring my students to believe in themselves as readers and thinkers, and to recognize the power of their own thinking to increase their understanding and enjoyment of reading. The current literature unit that I hope to redesign has a strong emphasis on vocabulary and literal comprehension. While those are essential elements, my goal is to create a more balanced approach by integrating explicit strategy instruction and giving students many opportunities to connect with and respond to texts in meaningful ways. By embedding strategy instruction into one unit, I plan to do the same for the other two literature units that I teach in the future. I would also like to infuse strategy instruction into the direct instruction reading curriculum in the future, as well into content areas such as history and science.

My hope is that this project will give me insight that I can share with my colleagues about best practices in comprehension instruction. I would like to be able to share my revised unit and created resources with my colleagues to improve our instruction of reading. I know many of my colleagues feel the same way I do about the direct instruction reading program that we use, and I am hoping that by shifting my own

thinking and focus when redesigning my literature unit, I will be able to share some advice on how to make the program more engaging and relevant to students. If I can successfully embed explicit instruction into literature, then the next step is to improve the direct instruction portion by incorporating those same powerful strategies.

Although I desire to help improve reading instruction at my school and be a resource for my colleagues, my ultimate goal is to improve students' understanding, engagement, and enjoyment of reading and to empower them to believe in themselves as readers and thinkers. I want my reading students to experience the same thrill and confidence that my math students did when we discussed the power of our own thinking to help solve challenging word problems. When students recognize the unique ability they each possess to enhance their understanding and enjoyment of reading by thinking deeply and engaging in certain cognitive strategies, amazing things happen.

Conclusion

My journey to implement reading comprehension strategies started years ago and far away. I was living in Taiwan, learning how to teach, and trying to make sense of different worldviews and educational frameworks. Now, back in Minnesota, having spent eight years at my current school, my cherished cognitive strategies are beckoning. After spending some time reflecting on an area that I want to explore for my capstone project, I feel that now is the perfect time to focus on infusing reading strategy instruction into my current literature curriculum. I want to empower and equip my students to become lifelong readers and I believe this project will allow me to do this. Even though this is a daunting process, I am feeling energized to delve back into something so significant and worthwhile.

In Chapter One, I have explained where my passion for reading comprehension strategies arose and why I feel it is so crucial for empowering young readers to think deeply while reading. My journey has led me to my research question: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In Chapter Two, I will provide a literature review that will give an overview of research related to best practices in reading comprehension, specifically explicit strategy instruction. In Chapter Three, I will describe my curriculum revision project. In Chapter Four, I will reflect upon on my capstone journey.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

As a primary grade educator, I have a wide variety of teaching responsibilities. One of the most important aspects of my job is teaching my students how to make sense of what they read. Students that gain the skills to become strategic, self-aware, motivated readers will go far in life. I have personally witnessed the power of explicit comprehension strategy instruction to have a positive impact on how students' construct meaning and identify themselves as readers and thinkers. Hence, my research question is: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In order to investigate this question, I will explore several themes in this chapter. First, I will define reading comprehension and provide a summary of the theoretical and historical perspectives behind our modern understanding of comprehension instruction. Next, I will describe the characteristics of proficient readers, and how that information has influenced instructional practices in recent years. I will then delineate specific strategies that have been found to be most effective for teaching students to become strategic in their reading practices. Finally, I will provide an overview of effective comprehension strategy instruction.

Reading Comprehension

Comprehension was identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) as one of the five foundational components of reading development and reading instruction. Along with comprehension, the other pillars that were heralded as the most important aspects of reading development and instruction were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary. While these aspects of reading are necessary for students to understand what they are reading, some have called for a greater emphasis on comprehension. Taberski (2011) boldly suggests that comprehension is not merely one of the pillars on which reading is built, but it is “the overarching pediment, supported *atop* the pillars” (p. 4). Surely the goal of phonics, fluency, and vocabulary instruction should be the purposeful construction of meaning. Comprehension is paramount.

Reading comprehension has to do with “extracting and constructing meaning from text” (Sweet & Snow, 2002, p. 25). It is both the “seizing” of meaning from the text, from the Latin root *prehens*, as well as the creation of personal meaning from the transaction between the reader, the text, and the activity or context (Brown & Dewitz, 2014, p. 7; Rosenblatt, 1978). Meaning is not only personally constructed, but socially created by discussing thoughts and ideas about reading with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Reading comprehension is a complex process that requires skill, coordination, and motivation (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). In *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1985), a report by the National Academy of Education’s Commission on Education and Public Policy, the act of reading is compared to playing in an orchestra. Proficient readers not only have a complex set of skills, but are able to coordinate those skills to create

something purposeful and meaningful. Reading comprehension is a complex developmental process that involves cognitive, motivational, and social aspects.

Theoretical Framework

Much of what we know about how students comprehend texts comes from the field of psychology. Reading is a developmental process that involves cognition and information-processing. Piaget's (1936) Theory of Cognitive Development reveals that children progress through four stages as they develop and acquire an understanding of themselves and the world around them. They begin in the sensorimotor stage until about two years of age, then progress to the preoperational stage (age 2 to 7), the concrete operational stage (age 7 to 11), and finally the formal operational stage, which begins in adolescence and continues into adulthood. As children grow and mature, they move from the concrete to the abstract. Chall (1983) recognizes the developmental nature of learning in her stages of reading development. She asserts that, when learning to read, children progress from learning foundational skills such as decoding, word recognition, and fluency, to the more complex, deeper understanding of learning new ideas, looking at information from multiple perspectives, synthesizing and evaluating information. These stage theories have influenced modern models of reading comprehension.

Information Processing. Reading also involves processing information. In the early part of the twentieth century, reading instruction was heavily influenced by behavioral psychologists who believed that students would come to comprehension if they could master a set of skills (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991). Students were seen as passive receivers of information, and the meaning was to be found within the text. This view became known as the traditional, or bottom-up view, with the focus on skills

over meaning. In other words, meaning is derived from the processing of individual letters and words (Pressley & Allington, 2015). Around the 1970s, new ideas about the nature of reading came into vogue and people began to see that different readers experience different things when reading the same text. This new cognitive, or top-down view, with the focus on meaning over skills, held that meaning comes from a complex interaction between the readers' worldview and what is found in the text. Top-down processing recognized the unique role the reader plays in constructing understanding by bringing particular backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints to mix with the author's viewpoint and intended meaning.

A Developmental Process. Reading is a cognitive, developmental process that involves the construction of meaning both individually and socially. Readers construct meaning by integrating what they already know, their prior knowledge, with new information. Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, which emphasized the interaction between the text, the reader, and the activity, arose during this time, and validated the importance of the readers' unique perspective along with a more active, interpretive view of reading. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory, described how, by interacting with peers through class discussions, students can construct deeper meaning than if they had just read a text on their own. Vygotsky's view that interactions between children and adults that are critical to cognitive development occur with tasks that are within the child's *zone of proximal development*, tasks that the child can do only with assistance. This perspective led to the embracing of teaching cognitive skills and providing students with appropriate guidance and support in the process.

A Balanced View of Comprehension. Today's models of reading comprehension recognize the developmental nature of reading and that effective instruction requires a balance between traditional theories, which emphasize a bottom-up view of processing focused on basic skills, and cognitive theories, which emphasize a top-down view of processing focused on interpretation and constructing meaning. Reading is a cognitive act that requires the foundational skills of decoding, word recognition, and fluency practice as well as higher-level thinking, connecting, evaluating, and synthesizing. Reading researchers today recognize that it is not a matter of either or, but of both (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013; Pressley & Allington, 2015). Current research on reading emphasizes that strong readers not only use a balance of skills and meaning, but are metacognitive about their reading. In other words, skilled readers are aware of their thinking while reading (Flavell, 1977).

Reading comprehension is a complex, developmental process that involves constructing meaning based on several factors. Aside from individual and social factors, metacognition and motivation also influence how students make meaning when they read (Flavell, 1977; Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). If students are aware of what they are thinking while reading, and can recognize when comprehension breaks down, they are able to apply strategies to help them get back on track. Thus, being metacognitive can increase student motivation because they develop a sense of ownership, confidence, and agency (Johnston, 2004). Reading is a balance of a myriad of cognitive processes and factors. All of these factors have influenced comprehension instruction in the classroom.

Historical Perspective

Just as there have been shifts in our understanding of how children learn and develop, there have also been shifts in reading instruction. Pressley and Allington (2015) suggest that over the past century, these shifts in reading instruction have vacillated between skills emphasis, or bottom-up processing, and meaning emphasis, or top-down processing. Skills emphasis programs hold that teachers must explicitly teach skills such as phonics, decoding, and word recognition and then students will be prepared to do the higher-level thinking about word meanings and comprehension. Proponents of a meaning emphasis approach insist that students should begin constructing meaning and thinking deeply about texts while simultaneously learning the fundamental phonetic and decoding skills. Again, we now recognize the need for both foundational skills as well as higher-level thinking. These shifts, often referred to as pendulum swings, have led to a wide variety of core reading programs that now incorporate a balance of skills and meaning emphasis (Pressley & Allington, 2015).

A Landmark Study. Almost forty years ago, Durkin (1978) published the results of a landmark study, in the field of reading comprehension. After spending hundreds of hours observing reading instruction in classrooms, Durkin noted that what was being hailed as comprehension instruction in elementary classrooms all across the country was really assessment of literal understanding. She studied numerous classrooms that used basal reading programs, now called core reading programs, and found that by asking students questions, and having students complete workbooks pages, teachers were assessing their comprehension, not instructing students how to construct meaning. Since

Durkin's groundbreaking study, much research has been done in the field of reading comprehension.

Focus on Comprehension. In 1981, the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, was the first scientific body to create a mission statement focused on reading comprehension. The mission states that students must have equal access to quality, explicit instruction in basic comprehension strategies in order to increase understanding and improve reading comprehension. The Center for the Study of Reading recognized that, while some students naturally pick up these strategies, many do not. Research in the 70s and 80s by Pressley, Block, Duffy, Gambrell, and others established that comprehension is a strategic process (Block & Duffy, 2008). During this pivotal time, efforts were made to distinguish between skills and strategies, to look at which strategies should be taught, and how teachers should teach them.

Comprehension Strategies. The term *strategies* become prevalent during the 1960s when psychologists interested in how individuals process information recognized that there are certain behaviors that can aid in things like problem solving and memory work (Pressley & Harris, 2008). When used in the context of reading, strategies are intentional cognitive actions undertaken by readers in the initial stages of learning a new skill or at the point of reading difficulty (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

There is often confusion today between the terms *skills* and *strategies*. The term *skills* can be described as automatic processes that require no effort or intention, whereas *strategies* are deliberate mental actions performed by the reader in order to help recall or deepen understanding of the text (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983; Duffy et al., 1987;

Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). The term *strategies* became widespread in the 1990s and is still used today to mean intentional plans that are applied consciously.

Single Strategy Instruction. Some of the earliest research on strategy instruction focused on teaching students to use a single strategy to aid and enhance comprehension. In these studies, children in the treatment group were taught to use a particular strategy during reading, while those in the control group were not. Presley (1976) completed one of the first studies in which third-grade students were taught to use mental imagery, or visualizing, to improve their recall and understanding of a text. Students who were taught this strategy improved more than students in the control group. Several other studies, done in the 1980s, also proved that single strategy instruction can have a positive impact on reading achievement. Other studies focused on single strategies including prior-knowledge activation, text structure, self-questioning, summarizing, and analyzing stories into story grammar components (Dole, Nokes, & Dritis, 2009). Researchers succeeded in identifying several strategies that readers could use before, during, and after reading to help increase understanding and memory of text. These individual strategy instruction studies validated the effectiveness of this approach, and led to important research on teaching students to use multiple strategies to aid comprehension. These single strategy studies showed short-term gains in comprehension, but not long-term (Almasi & Hart, 2011).

Multiple Strategy Instruction. After the initial series of studies involving single strategy instruction, the next movement pertained to multiple strategy instruction. The goal of these new interventions was to teach students how to be strategic by teaching them how to select from and effectively use strategies within a given set (Almasi & Hart,

2011). One of the first studies that showed the power of multiple strategy instruction was called Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar and Brown, 1984). This approach to teaching comprehension involves explicitly teaching students a set of four comprehension strategies, in which students take turns assuming leadership roles in small groups, with the hopes that these strategies will be internalized, and later used by the reading during independent reading. The strategies, which are taught in the context of reading groups, include posing questions, summarizing content, seeking clarification, and making predictions. (Pressley & Allington, 2015; Block & Duffy, 2008). Although this and similar approaches of multiple strategy instruction were effective, some felt that students did not receive enough explicit explanation on how to think their way through text. This led to a movement in the 1980s and 1990s to teach reading comprehension more directly.

Building on the work of Palinscar and Brown (1984), Roehler and Duffy (1984) recommended that strategy instruction should start with direct explanation and modeling of strategies for students. The key to this model was, not only explaining the strategy very clearly, but also showing students, by thinking aloud, what a strategy is and how to use it. Students then have a chance to practice the strategies in context, while the teacher provides additional modeling, explanation, and feedback. This direct explanation approach to strategy instruction has been proven to increase comprehension and has been heavily validated by researchers (Duffy et al., 1987; National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2001; Sweet & Snow, 2002).

Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) developed a similar method that stressed the importance of teaching students the declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of strategy use. In other words, students are taught what the strategy is, how to use it, and

when to use it. Along with direct explanation of these components, Paris, Lipson, and Wixson emphasized the importance of allowing students to see the purpose and value (the why) of using multiple strategies to increase understanding and engagement of text. This approach added to the direct explanation approach by placing greater emphasis on the role of motivation and engagement when training students to become strategic readers.

Based on the work of Palinscar and Brown (1984) and the model developed by Roehler and Duffy (1984), another method of multiple-strategy instruction was created by Pressley, El-Dinary, and Gaskins (1992) called Transactional Strategies Instruction, or TSI. This model recognized the value of direct explanation, but saw a need for a more authentic and integrated approach. The creators of TSI felt that strategy instruction should come about organically, and that teachers should flexibly model the strategies as the need arose in the context of real reading. In response, this new method of TSI was created after identifying the features of classrooms where effective strategy instruction was taking place. Some of those features were:

- Teachers taught a small assortment of strategies
 - Teachers explained what the strategies were and how to use the strategies
 - Teachers modeled when and where to use the strategies
 - Teachers emphasized the importance of thinking and being metacognitive
 - Students practiced the strategies through collaborative discussions
 - Students were encouraged to use strategies flexibly and independently
- (Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002)

The term “transactional” was first used by Rosenblatt (1978) to describe the interactive nature of reading, and how the reader brings experiences and background knowledge to the text to construct meaning. TSI is also transactional because meaning is created via discussion, and that interpretive discussion guides the teacher’s instructional actions (Brown, El-Dinary, & Pressley, 1995). TSI involves more than just direct explanation of strategies, it encompasses the transactional nature of reading, and teachers respond to students’ need for instruction. TSI is a flexible framework in which educators utilize teachable moments during authentic reading experiences to show students the type of strategic thinking and actions in a natural, purposeful environment (Almasi & Hart, 2011). Teachers use direct explanation, but the focus is on strategic thinking and the use of multiple strategies in natural contexts, along with guided practice time in which teachers gradually release responsibility to students. Interpretive discussion is also a key component of TSI.

Building on the research on multiple strategy instruction, there were several studies in the 1990s that showed the effectiveness of teaching students a repertoire of strategies to improve reading comprehension (Collins, 1991; Block, 1993; Baumann & Ivey, 1997). Some of these strategies included predicting, seeking clarification, summarizing, making inferences, evaluating, interpreting, and thinking creatively. Within these studies, strategy instruction increased students’ motivation to read challenging texts, uncover meaning in the text, and respond and elaborate on meaning within the text (Gambrell, Block, and Pressley, 2002).

Proficient Reader Research

Much of what we know about effective comprehension comes from studying what proficient readers do when they read (Duke & Pearson, 2008). To understand how to develop proficient readers, we must understand what skilled reading entails. Studies have been done in which adult, skilled readers were asked to read and regularly stop and explain their actions and thought processes. Pressley and Afflerbach call these explanations “verbal protocols of reading.” Pressley and Afflerbach reviewed more than forty studies of published verbal protocols of reading and constructed a summary of all the cognizant actions and thoughts that can occur during reading. Their comprehensive review of these protocols, or think-alouds, revealed that proficient readers interact on several different levels before, during, and after reading. Their study clearly showed that skilled reading is anything but simple. Rather, it is a dynamic, active, thought-filled process. Below is a condensed list of conscious reading processes found by Pressley and Afflerbach (1995):

Processes Performed by Skilled Readers

Before Reading:

- Have clear purposes for reading
- Overview the text, look for relevant sections, and make a plan for reading
- Start to make connections between the text and prior knowledge, or schema
- Predict the overall idea of the text
- Decide whether to pursue or abandon the text

During Reading:

- Progress from front to back (most of the time)

- Vary the speed of reading from one portion to another
- Skim, skip, reread, pause to ponder, and check their understanding
- Pay more attention to relevant information
- Regularly check, update, revise, and create new predictions
- Draw tentative conclusions and regularly adjust them
- Make conscious and unconscious inferences (about author, character, etc.)
- Fill in information gaps and determine the meaning of unfamiliar words
- Relate ideas in the text to their own lives and background knowledge
- Think about the author's purpose, style, sources, and tone
- Integrate new ideas into the overall storyline
- Think about story elements and text structure (i.e. cause and effect)
- Interpret, paraphrase, and make connections to other stories
- Form sensory images or mental models
- Stop at certain points and summarize the information

After Reading:

- Go back to an article or book and reread interesting or relevant sections of text
- Restate important ideas and paraphrase the big ideas to themselves
- Take notes to help them recall or remember important ideas
- Continue to reflect and think about a text long after the reading act has ended

From this analysis of skilled readers, it is clear that proficient reading involves an enormous variety of cognitive processes that are constantly being adapted, revised, evaluated, and synthesized before, during, and after reading. "Comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that, for good readers, is both

satisfying and productive” (Duke & Pearson, 2008, p. 107). Consistent with this study, the RAND Reading Study group (2001) identified several qualities of proficient readers. Good comprehenders read for a specific purpose, actively monitor and fix comprehension, regularly stop to summarize, and employ strategies to help them retain, categorize, and interpret information.

Characteristics of Skilled Readers

Modern reading researchers generally agree that characteristics of proficient readers are like the traits that an expert in any field possesses (Almasi & Fullerton, 2012). Several models have been developed to explain key characteristics of effective comprehenders and strategy users (Pressley, 1986; Brown & Dewitz, 2014). Skilled readers have an extensive knowledge base that includes past experiences, information about the world, and an awareness of different types of texts and genres. Along with being knowledgeable, skilled readers are also metacognitive, self-regulated, strategic, and motivated to use cognitive strategies to increase their understanding and enjoyment of texts.

Skilled readers access and employ various types of knowledge when they first encounter a text. They bring personal experiences and associations (i.e., prior knowledge) to help them connect new knowledge to existing understanding. They bring world knowledge of certain facts and concepts. Strong readers use their knowledge of word meanings and syntax to help them understand texts (Graves, 2006). They also utilize text structure and genre knowledge to help them comprehend text. Skilled readers not only have an extensive knowledge base about the topic at hand, but they also have an extensive knowledge of what strategies are (declarative knowledge), how to use them

(procedural knowledge), and when to use them (conditional knowledge) (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Knowing when to use strategies has to do with awareness, or metacognition.

Skilled readers are metacognitive; they think about their thinking. This awareness leads proficient readers to recognize when they understand as well as when comprehension begins to break down. Keene and Zimmerman (2007) describe metacognition in a way that students can understand by likening it to listening to the voice in your head as you read. Metacognitive readers can self-regulate because of this awareness. Self-regulating involves having control over learning and thinking. Some teachers refer to this as being “wide-awake” while reading. If something does not make sense, self-regulating readers can plan for how to fix the incongruence. This leads to the next characteristics of effective readers; they recognize when comprehension breaks down, and they take action.

Skilled readers are active and strategic. They possess a wide variety of strategies and know which ones to employ in different situations (Paris et al., 1983). Effective readers think about which strategies would be useful and make a plan to employ those strategies. They are also able to revise and evaluate those plans, if necessary. Proficient readers apply strategies to help them fix incongruences by rereading, reading ahead, using decoding strategies, or collaborating with peers. Being strategic is similar to self-regulating; both imply action on the part of the student. When students are able to see the value of strategy use to aid in comprehension as well as enjoyment of text, they are motivated to use the strategies.

Skilled readers are motivated. Being metacognitive and strategic empowers readers to believe in their own abilities, and this motivates them to read challenging texts and gives them a sense of agency (Johnston, 2004). Students must see the usefulness of strategies if they are to use them, which is why teachers must be explicit about explaining when and why (conditional knowledge) specific strategies are used and how they can deepen understanding and engagement. If students come to see comprehension strategies as worth the investment of thinking about them and using them, they will become habits of mind and students will internalize them and independently employ them during the reading process (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Proficient readers are motivated, engaged, and passionate about reading and thinking.

We know that skilled readers employ a variety of cognitive actions before, during, and after reading to help them process different types of texts. We know that proficient readers have an extensive knowledge base about the topic as well as strategies. Skilled readers are metacognitive, self-regulated, strategic, and motivated. So, this question is, how can this knowledge of what skilled readers do inform educational practices? By understanding what skilled reading entails, we can begin to develop ways to develop proficient readers (Pressley & Allington, 2015).

Effective Reading Comprehension Instruction

By observing the variety of strategic actions and interpretive thinking done by proficient readers, reading researchers have recognized the need for vigorous, intentional teaching practices that equip students for the complex task of constructing meaning as they engage with texts. As stated in the RAND report executive summary, “Robust, thoughtful instruction is the most powerful means of promoting proficient comprehension

and preventing comprehension difficulties” (Snow, 2002, p. xvii). Just as researchers have identified attributes of skilled readers, they have also highlighted certain qualities of instruction that have been proven to lead to increased comprehension.

Small Repertoire

Effective reading comprehension strategy instruction should include presenting a small repertoire, or set, of strategies. As mentioned earlier, researchers now realize that teaching a smaller set of strategies is more beneficial to students’ learning (Block & Duffy, 2008). This recent trend shows that the emphasis has changed from teaching a wide variety of strategies in a superficial manner to teaching a smaller number of strategies more deeply is the more effective instructional path. While the strategies themselves serve an important role, the overall goal is to help students become strategic in their reading (Block & Duffy, 2008; Brown, El-Dinary, & Pressley, 1995).

Research-Based Strategies

From 1978-2000, basal reading programs recommended up to forty-five strategies that should be taught, and some core reading programs still use this many today (Block & Duffy, 2008; Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). We now know of fewer than ten research-based strategies that have been shown to improve comprehension. The National Research Council (NRC, 1998) and the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) recommend similar lists of strategies that have been proven to be effective for improving comprehension. These include summarizing, predicting, inferring, questioning, recognizing text structure, using graphic organizers, and comprehension monitoring. The NRC report concentrated on students in the primary grades, while the NRP focused on the wider range of students from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

The RAND Reading Study Group (RRSG, 2001) confirms many of these same strategies, adding the importance of engaging students in identifying the big idea, or gist of texts, graphically displaying the correlation of those big ideas, as well as elaborative questioning (Pressley & Allington, 2015). Other proven strategies include visualizing, evaluating, and synthesizing. Block and Duffy (2008) have synthesized a small repertoire of strategies that have been researched and validated to be highly successful since 2000 (p. 22). These nine listed strategies stand in contrast to the nearly fifty strategies that have been proposed since the late 1970s (see Appendix A for full list).

1. Predict	Size up a text in advance by looking at titles, text features, sections, pictures, and captions, continuously updating and re-predicting what will occur next in a text.
2. Monitor	Activate many comprehension strategies to decode and derive meaning from words, phrases, sentence, and texts.
3. Question	Stop to reread and initiate comprehension processes when the meaning is unclear.
4. Image	Construct meanings expressed in text by wondering, noticing, and generating mental pictures.
5. Fix-It Strategies	Continue to reflect on the text before, during, and after reading, continuously deciding how to shape the knowledge base for personal use. This includes look-backs and rereads.
6. Infer	Connect ideas in text based on personal experiences, knowledge of other texts, and general world knowledge, making certain that inferences are made quickly so as not to divert attention from the

	actual text but to help the reader better understand it.
7. Summarize and Draw Conclusions	Make sure to include information gained from story grammar or textual features; if students can't make a valid summary of information read to date, this is the signal to go back and reread.
8. Evaluate	Approach a fictional text expecting to (and making certain that student do) note the setting, characters, and story grammar early on, with problems, solutions, and resolutions to occur thereafter.
9. Synthesize	Approach an informational text watching for textual features, accessing features, unique types of information, sequence of details and conclusions, and combining all of these to make meaning.

From Block and Duffy (2008, p. 22)

Sequence of Strategies

Just as there is consensus among reading researchers that a small number of strategies are incredibly powerful and effective at improving comprehension, researchers largely agree, with slight variations, on a recommended sequence of strategy instruction. Harvey and Goudvis (2000), Keene and Zimmerman (2007), McGregor (2007), and Taberski (2011) recommend beginning with teaching students to make connections to prior knowledge and personal experiences, followed closely by questioning and predicting since these are the strategies young readers are most likely to understand first. Harvey and Goudvis recommend teaching visualizing, or creating mental imagery, early on as way to model inferring with pictures before teaching students how to perform this skill with words alone. When choosing strategies to teach, teachers should also consider

which ones are best taught before, during, and after reading (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). For example, making connections to prior knowledge and generating predictions make sense to teach before reading, while monitoring comprehension and inferring are better suited for during reading. Other strategies like summarizing and synthesizing can be done during and after reading.

While strategies should be taught one at a time, they should also be cumulative (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). The goal is for students to use strategies in an integrated manner. Flexible use of a combination of strategies should be encouraged and modeled. Though they may be introduced individually, strategies should be used in combination to match the complex, dynamic nature of reading (NRP, 2000). Teachers must show students how strategies overlap, intersect, and work in conjunction with each other (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). The important thing is not teaching strategies in isolation, but teaching students how to use strategies flexibly in authentic situations. Before students are able to independently use the strategies, teachers must thoroughly define and explain the strategies. Teachers must also make sure to include extensive modeling to show students how to use these effective thinking processes, and why they are worth the investment of time.

Direct Explanation and Teacher Modeling

Effective comprehension strategy instruction should be explicit. Explicit instruction involves clearly explaining the task including the declarative, procedural, and conditional explanations (Paris et al., 1983). In other words, teachers should thoroughly explain what the strategy is, how to perform the strategy, and why and when it is useful. “Direct instruction in comprehension means explaining the steps in a thought process that

gives birth to comprehension” (Gersten & Carnine, 1986, p. 70). Teachers must begin with the declarative knowledge, but should not stop there. Dewitz et al (2009) found that five core reading programs by major publishers provided declarative information, but sorely lacked procedural and conditional explanations. Students must understand how, when, and why to apply the strategies if they are to fully understand and utilize them.

Teaching students how to perform the strategy should involve extensive teacher modeling, often by thinking aloud. By demonstrating each step, students can see how a thinking process can lead to accurate conclusions and interpretations. During the demonstration part of the lesson, teachers think-aloud to show students the thinking process that occur during that strategy application (Davey, 1983). Thinking aloud is the is a crucial teaching tactic because permits us to “let children in on one of the best-kept secrets of human cognition – what we think about as we read” (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007, p. 20). Teacher modeling involves using a common, consistent language for the strategies in which teachers can correct errors and reduce confusion about what is expected and how to fix comprehension errors (Duffy et al., 1987). Along with clear explanations and extensive teacher modeling, effective reading comprehension instruction should move students toward independent use of strategies.

Gradual Release of Responsibility

Effective strategy instruction should follow a gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Since the goal is for students to grasp, practice, and internalize the strategies that are taught, effective instruction should move from a teacher-directed stance to a student-initiated one. Teachers should observe and confer with students to guide them toward independence. When students show that they are ready, the

teacher's support should slowly fade (RRSG, 2001). If students are to internalize and independently use the strategies, they must see them as worthwhile and useful. "As in every domain of learning, motivation is crucial" (Snow, 1998, p. 5).

Student Engagement

As stated earlier, strategies can be defined as deliberate mental actions performed by the reader in order to help recall or deepen understanding of the text (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983; Duffy et al., 1987; Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). The term "deliberate" conveys a sense that the reader is choosing to employ them, and thus, must be motivated to do so (Almasi & Hart, 2011). Effective instruction, therefore, must take motivation into account. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) identified strategy instruction as one of the teacher practices that optimizes engagement in reading. By clearly explaining the goal and purpose for using strategies and by rewarding progress and emphasizing effort (Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002), students will be more likely to mindfully engage with text.

By teaching students specific processes to become more strategic in their reading, students may also develop a greater sense of self-efficacy (Henk & Melnik, 1995). In other words, students may begin to see themselves as stronger readers once they have these tools, and their self-perceptions about reading will improve. The more time teachers spend discussing the usefulness of engaging in certain thinking processes before, during, and after reading, the more invested students will become in using the strategies to deepen their understanding and enjoyment of text. Along with student engagement, another consideration of effective reading comprehension strategy instruction includes a focus on the thinking process.

Emphasis on Thinking

Recently, there has been a shift in emphasis from teaching strategies to helping students become strategic in their thinking. Block and Duffy (2008) suggest turning our attention away from which specific strategies to teach, and focus our attention instead on how to more effectively teach students to engage in strategic processes across grade levels and content areas. Other researchers have questioned whether it is the strategies themselves that have led to increased comprehension in recent studies, or the focus on higher-level thinking, engagement with high quality text, and the inclusion of meaningful discussion that has led to an increase in comprehension (Taylor, Pearson, Garcia, Stahl, & Bauer, 2006).

Taylor, Pearson, Clark, and Walpole (1999) compared reading comprehension instruction in first through third grade and found that classrooms with the highest achievement had teachers who asked more higher-level questions. When teachers create cognitively challenging learning environments and activities, including explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies, they are sending the message to their students that the process of thinking and being metacognitive is valuable. That is a powerful message that can have lasting impact on student engagement and understanding.

Balance of Content and Strategies

Researchers once disagreed about whether it was the processing of words or the development of meaning that was more important for reading development. Today we know that both are necessary for proficient reading (Afflerbach, Cho, Kim, Crassas, & Doyle, 2013; Pressley & Allington, 2015). The same can be said for our modern day understanding of comprehension; there must be a balance of both strategies and content.

Although strategies are important, they must not become the sole purpose of reading. Strategies are a way to uncover and bring to light the often-unconscious acts that proficient readers perform as they read. The goal, though, must remain for students to fully participate in the complex task of interacting and engaging with text to construct meaning. “The optimal balance enables students to learn that strategies are an important means for understanding but are not the main point of reading activities. The main purposes for reading are gaining meaning and knowledge” (Sweet & Snow, 2002, p. 41).

Reading comprehension is an incredibly complex, multifaceted process that takes years to develop. Because of its complexity, many things need to be considered when designing effective strategy instruction. As stated above, effective reading comprehension strategy instruction includes teaching a small number of research-based strategies, starting with those that are easily accessible to young learners. Effective strategy instruction is explicit, involves extensive teacher modeling, and should follow a gradual release of responsibility model. When designing units and lessons, teachers should consider student engagement by including high-quality texts and highlighting the importance of the thinking process. Finally, effective reading comprehension strategy instruction is balanced. While strategies are important, the focus should remain on meaningfully interacting with texts to construct meaning.

Conclusion

Durkin (1978) shocked the nation by revealing how little comprehension instruction was going on in classrooms all around the country. More recently, Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) analyzed the five most widely used commercial core reading programs and found an extreme lack in the research-based methods which leads to self-

regulated reading. It has been nearly twenty years since the findings of the NRC (1998) followed closely by the NRP (2000) and not much has changed. Strategies are being mentioned today in many core reading programs, but explicit instruction in these powerful cognitive strategies is still lacking.

Today's Common Core State Standards (2010) reflect the importance of comprehension instruction and the recognition in the power of focusing on fewer standards and teaching them well. Today's expectations place a much stronger emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. It is clear that explicit instruction in reading comprehension remains a high priority today.

In Chapter Two, I have reviewed the research on reading comprehension and explicit strategy instruction so that I may answer my question: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In Chapter Three, I will utilize my research findings and describe my curriculum redesign project. I will provide an overview of my project by explaining the content, the curriculum design framework, as well as the participants and setting for my curriculum design project.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

“Reading is best taught in the context of meaningful content.”

(Bauer & Wise, 2004, p. 37)

Introduction

As a second grade teacher, the instruction of reading is one of the most important responsibilities of my job. While other subjects like history, science, and math also have incredible value, I recognize that my efforts to help students “extract and construct meaning” from the written word is paramount (Sweet & Snow, 2002, p. 25). My research question is: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the literature related to reading comprehension strategies. From this research, I learned that reading is an incredibly complex process. Skilled readers actively construct meaning, enhance their understanding, and remember important information by engaging in certain procedures before, during, and after reading (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). While some readers employ these strategies intuitively, many do not. Young readers benefit from explicit instruction to guide them toward understanding. Research has shown that there are a small number of powerful strategies that have been proven to increase comprehension (National Research Council, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2001). These same strategies have been shown to increase engagement because of the emphasis on thinking

and effort (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). When students recognize the power of using their own minds to help them construct meaning, it builds confidence which leads to greater engagement and deeper understanding of text (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007).

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of my project by explaining my goals for what it will accomplish as well as my rationale for choosing a curriculum revision project. I will describe how my research from chapter two influenced the creation of my project. I will describe the content and format of my project, including the curriculum design framework I used to redesign my unit plan. Finally, I will describe the intended audience and setting, specifically how strategy instruction fits into the classical mission of my school.

Project Overview

For my capstone project, I redesigned one of the second grade literature units I currently teach. This literature unit is based on *The Tales of King Arthur* (Brooks, 2006). The timeframe for my unit is approximately eight weeks, and I plan to implement this curriculum in the spring of 2018. I intended to create a balance between strategy instruction and meaningful interaction with content. My goal with this project is to empower students and equip them with the tools to become strategic, thoughtful readers. I want my students to recognize and apply strategies before, during, and after reading to enhance their understanding, engagement, and enjoyment of complex texts. Another goal for this project is that it will help me challenge my students to not only become strategic and metacognitive, but also to think about themes within stories, and to make meaningful connections between the text and their own lives.

I chose to embed strategy instruction into a current literature unit instead of creating isolated strategy units because this approach better fits into the reading framework used at my school. It also better aligns to the integrated approach recommended by reading researchers (Pressley, El-Dinary, & Gaskins, 1992; Sweet & Snow, 2002). This integrated approach allows me to model for students how to flexibly use strategies within a single text (Taberski, 2011). Explicit strategy instruction is often recommended to be used within the context of a reading workshop environment, where teachers present a mini-lesson and students have chunks of time each day for independent reading (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Since my school does not use a workshop approach for reading, I decided a revision of a current literature unit would be more appropriate and relevant for my project.

Application of Research Findings

After choosing to pursue the curriculum design project option for my capstone, I knew I wanted my research topic to pertain to reading comprehension strategies, but I was not sure how I would integrate them into the current curriculum. I was also unsure about which specific strategies would be most beneficial to focus on. In the direct instruction reading program my school utilizes, over thirty strategies are listed. Through my research, my intuition was validated in that most core reading programs recommend teaching too many strategies at the detriment of students learning any of them well (Block and Duffy, 2008; Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). I now understand that teaching a small repertoire of powerful strategies, and using consistent language to refer to these mental processes, is more effective than trying to touch upon a wide range of them.

Hence, I decided to focus on integrating a small number of powerful strategies into my current literature instruction.

Aside from focusing on a small repertoire of effective strategies, I also learned from my literature review that while strategies are important, they must not overshadow the content of high-quality, thought-provoking texts and literature. In designing my curriculum, I tried to keep a balance of strategies and meaningful content. Taberski (2011) acknowledges the need for a sensible approach to teaching strategies, as opposed to unrealistic targets of teaching a numerous amount each year. She recommends integrating three to six key reading strategies per year and encouraging students to use them flexibly and independently. Many researchers suggest using a flexible framework to integrate strategy instruction into the teaching of reading (Dowhower, 1999; Pressley, El-Dinary, & Gaskins, 1992). Taberski (2011) and others recommend that teachers not only help students refine their use of individual strategies, but also show students how to apply a variety of strategies within a single text (Duke & Pearson, 2008). For my project, I used this research to help me embed direct instruction of the strategies into a single literature unit to show students the full picture of using strategies throughout the reading process.

Project Description

When I reflect on what I learned from the literature review about which comprehension strategies are most effective at improving understanding of text, a few key strategies stood out. These are strategies that are essential for deeper understanding and engagement with text, as well as appropriate for my group of second grade readers. The strategies I integrated into my revised literature unit were the following:

- Activating and using background knowledge (schema)
- Making connections
- Asking questions and wondering
- Creating mental images (visualizing)
- Drawing inferences (inferring)
- Summarizing to determine importance

While I focused on the six above strategies for my project, I also embedded comprehension monitoring for my students. Taberski (2011) recommends teaching students to be aware of when their reading makes sense and when their understanding starts to break down. As readers, we are constantly employing fix-up strategies like backtracking, rereading, and using context to figure out unknown words. My lesson ideas were influenced by several books – *Strategies that Work* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000), *Comprehension Connections* (McGregor, 2007), and *Comprehension from the Ground Up* (Taberski, 2011).

Because strategies can be abstract for young learners to understand, McGregor (2007) recommends using concrete objects to allow students to see and experience these ideas when first introducing them. For example, before explaining and modeling what inferring is, she suggests compiling a list of objects that might be in someone's purse and asking students to make inferences about the person based on the objects. When introducing the idea of metacognition, she suggests presenting a metaphor of a reading salad. Just as a salad might be made of lettuce and tomatoes, reading can be thought of as a mixture of what is in the text and what the reader is thinking. By using concrete objects to introduce abstract ideas, McGregor suggests that students are better able to grasp and

internalize comprehension strategies. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) also recognize the importance of scaffolding instruction in abstract concepts with real life objects. They refer to these experiences as anchor experiences.

I consulted and included several benchmarks from the Minnesota Academic Standards for English Language Arts K-12 (2010), which were revised to reflect the Common Core State Standards (2010). One of our school goals this year is to begin aligning our curriculum to the standards. This project allowed me to update and refine a curriculum unit by not only embedding strategy instruction, but also aligning it with current educational standards.

Curriculum Design Framework

I used the Understanding by Design (UbD) curriculum framework to answer my research question: *How can I revise a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?* Understanding by Design, sometimes referred to as backward design, encourages educators to identify the end goals and create assessments at the beginning of the unit. After establishing the unit outcomes and writing the assessments, educators design instructional units with those criteria in mind to guide students toward mastery of the skills and content (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). This approach recognizes the importance of both skills (strategies) and big ideas (content). I chose this framework for my curriculum revision project because UbD is widely regarded as a best practice in curriculum design. By beginning with the overall goals and assessment criteria, lessons and learning activities can be developed to meet those goals.

When developing units following this framework, there are three stages of curriculum development. The first stage in the UbD framework is to identify the desired results. During this stage, educational standards should be considered in order to select appropriate results. For this stage, I consulted the Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts K-12 (2010). The standards I used are the following:

- RL.2.1.1.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
- RL.2.1.2.2 Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
- RL.2.1.3.3 Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
- RL.2.1.4.4 Describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.
- RL.2.1.5.5 Describe the overall structure of a story, including describing how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action.
- RF.2.3.1.4 Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Aside from the standards, the other major component of my unit outcomes relates to comprehension strategies. As stated in the introduction to the Minnesota Academic Standards, the standards focus on the end goal, rather than the means. “Thus, the Standards do not mandate such things as a particular writing process or the full range of *metacognitive strategies* that students may need to monitor and direct their thinking and

learning” (2010, p. 6). By incorporating goals that focus on the reading process, I will be better able to ensure my students meet the learning goals outlined in the standards.

Following the UbD process for establishing goals, teachers list not only specific knowledge and skills students should master, but also what students should understand and continue to think about after the unit is complete. These essential questions are woven throughout the unit. For my unit, I focused on questions related to both the content of the story as well as the process of reading. The final component of this first stage in the design process is planning for transfer. In other words, educators must think about what students should be able to do independently as a result of their learning. For my unit, the transfer goal is for students to be able to apply metacognitive strategies independently and flexibly with self-selected texts.

The second stage in the UbD framework is to determine acceptable evidence that students have mastered the knowledge, skills, and understandings. This evidence should reflect the desired results and include both formative and summative assessment. The first assessment piece I designed is a self-reflection on strategy use. The purpose is for students to become aware of their thinking while reading and to look for areas of strength and growth. For each chapter of the story, I designed literature study packets that combine vocabulary, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies, and response questions. The plan for strategy instruction is to practice the strategy within the text, and after reading, give students an opportunity to practice the strategy with a book they have selected independently. The strategy sheets that students complete will be used as formative assessments, along with class discussion and conferring with students. I will use this information to guide my and inform my teaching. Students will complete two

quizzes within the unit, after chapters one and five. They will complete a final test and participate in a seminar discussion related to the essential questions of the unit. Finally, students will complete post-reading reflection on their strategy use.

The final stage in the UbD framework is to plan learning experiences and instruction to match the desired results. When designing these experiences, it is important to keep in mind the unit outcomes and essential questions. Students should know where the unit is going and what is expected. Lessons should hook the students' interest, provide opportunities for students to revise and evaluate their understanding, and be organized in a logical way that sustains their engagement (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). The design template I used to create my unit plan can be found in Appendix B.

When revising my literature unit, I utilized the research findings regarding the features of classrooms where effective strategy instruction was taking place. In those classrooms, teachers taught a small assortment of strategies, and explained what the strategies were and how to use them. Teachers also modeled when and where to use the strategies, and emphasized the importance of thinking and being metacognitive. Finally, students were encouraged to use strategies flexibly and independently (Gambrell, Block, & Pressley, 2002).

I used a direct explanation approach when presenting strategy lessons. Roehler and Duffy (1984) recommended that strategy instruction should start with direct explanation and modeling of strategies for students. The key to this model was, not only explaining the strategy very clearly, but also showing students, by thinking aloud, what a strategy is and how to use it. Students then have a chance to practice the strategies in context, while the teacher provides additional modeling, explanation, and feedback. This

direct explanation approach to strategy instruction has been proven to increase comprehension and has been heavily validated by researchers (Duffy et al., 1987; National Reading Panel, 2000; RAND Reading Study Group, 2001; Sweet & Snow, 2002).

Audience and Setting

I revised my literature unit with my 2017-2018 group of second grade readers as the intended and future audience. We use the Developmental Reading Assessment – Second Edition (DRA2, 2006) to group students according to their reading ability at my school. The DRA2 is a formative reading assessment that measures both oral reading fluency and comprehension. My reading students are above grade level and scored between 32-40 at the end of first grade, which reflects independent reading levels between third and fourth grade. My students are adept at decoding and reading with appropriate fluency, but often lack the tools to help them uncover the layers of meaning found in complex texts. While I designed these units for my current group of second graders, my hope is that they will be utilized by other teachers of reading in the elementary grades.

My school is a public K-12 charter school in a large, metropolitan area. The charter was established by parents and teachers who desired to create a school based on the classical model. The classical model has several defining characteristics. It is systematic in that it follows a progression of learning called the trivium. It is language-intensive, virtues and civic duty are woven throughout all subjects, and it emphasizes the importance of training students how to think deeply.

The classical model follows a progression of learning called the trivium, that is organized around the maturing aptitude of the child's mind. In the trivium, students move through the grammar stage, followed by the logic stage, and finally the rhetoric stage. In the grammar stage, or the elementary years, learning is concrete, knowledge-focused, and includes ample opportunities for memory work. In the logic stage, or middle school years, students learn how to organize knowledge into logical structures, and the focus is on finding relationships and connections among subjects, as well as analyzing arguments. During the rhetoric stage, or high school years, students are encouraged to produce original thoughts and express themselves more freely. Creativity is cultivated in this final stage of the trivium (Bauer & Wise, 2004; Nova Classical Academy Curriculum Committee, 2005).

While the classical model of the trivium is a grade-level sequence, each stage is also meant to be incorporated into individual lessons. The grammar is the foundational part of the lesson where students learn such things as key concepts, facts, and rules. The logic is the coaching part of the lesson, where teachers guide students to find connections and begin thinking more deeply about how subjects and topics relate to each other. Finally, the rhetoric is the final part of the lesson where students are challenged to synthesize, evaluate, and generate original ideas.

Strategy instruction fits into the classical model for a few reasons. First, the trivium design correlates well with the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The direct explanation and modeling is the grammar stage, the guided practice and coaching relates to the logic phase, and the application and transfer of independent strategy use correlates to the rhetoric stage. During the direct explanation

phase, or grammar stage, it is important to use clear, precise language. With explicit instruction in cognitive strategies, students are taught to use academic vocabulary such as summarize, visualize, and make inferences. When students internalize this language, it also empowers them to take pride and responsibility in their learning.

Another reason that strategy instruction fits into the classical model is the dual focus on both skills and content. By using high-quality contemporary and classic texts to engage students, and teaching them strategies to access meaning and remember important information, there is a balanced focus on meaningful content and transferable skills.

Another reason strategy instruction fits into this model is that the goal, in classical education, is to train students how to think and form habits of learning and thinking, just as strategy instruction aims to do.

The final reason that strategy instruction fits into the classical model is because one of the main goals of classical education is to train students how to think in order that they may take part in the “Great Conversation” (Adler, 1990). In other words, we hope our students are able to recall what they have learned from great thinkers of the past, and to build upon their ideas as they continue to seek the ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness. If what we are trying to do is equip our students with the necessary tools to think deeply and interact meaningfully with classic and contemporary texts, we must train them to think by making the implicit explicit – by showing them, modeling for them, and clearly explaining what goes on in the minds of proficient readers. Surely, there is truth, beauty, and goodness in that.

Conclusion

In Chapter Three, I have provided an overview of my curriculum redesign project that I have created to answer my research question: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?* I have considered what I have learned from my literature review regarding the compelling evidence about the power of explicitly teaching a small repertoire of strategies, while keeping a balance on rich content and engaging literature. I have described the curriculum design framework that I will use, and why this framework will allow me to design a useful, worthwhile project. Finally, I have explained the intended audience and setting of my project and described why explicit instruction in comprehension strategies is well-suited for the classical model of education. In Chapter Four, I will reflect upon my capstone journey.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Introduction

“Nothing is more important than teaching young people to use
and recognize the power of their own minds.”

Harvey & Goudvis, 2013, p. 432

When I first began the process of choosing an area of focus for my capstone project, professors and classmates advised me to pursue a topic I was passionate about. I am very grateful for their advice. Helping students see the power of their own thinking to increase engagement, understanding, and enjoyment of reading is of utmost importance to me. I am extremely passionate about this topic, and feel grateful that I have been able to spend the past year with my research question: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?*

In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of my curriculum redesign project. In this chapter, I will highlight important insights gained from the literature review on reading comprehension strategies, and discuss possible challenges and limitations of my project. I will explain my hopes for future projects and how I intend to share my insights with my school community. I will describe possible implications of my project within my school as well as within the educational field. Finally, I will reflect upon what I learned about myself as a researcher, writer, and educator through this capstone process.

Insights Gained from Literature Review

When I initially began gathering information about reading comprehension strategies, I was completely overwhelmed. My topic was enormous and my basement was soon piled high with books and articles related to this area of research. I had to sort through a vast amount of material, but it was fascinating information. I was surprised to learn of Durkin's (1978) groundbreaking study that showed the extreme lack of comprehension instruction that was happening in schools, and the misconception between teaching and assessing reading comprehension. I was even more surprised to learn of a recent study that showed the problem persists today (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). I felt relieved when researchers validated my impression that most core reading programs attempt to present way too many strategies in fragmented ways, instead of focusing on a few key cognitive processes and helping students to practice and internalize them (see Appendix A). I was pleased to see the emphasis on comprehension in the Common Core State Standards (2010) as well as the Minnesota Academic Standards in English Language Arts K-12 (2010).

While researching proficient readers, I was amazed and humbled to read about the myriad of processes that go on within the minds of proficient readers. I began to reflect on my own thinking and how I so often take that thinking for granted. I realized that I must appreciate the incredibly complex act of reading and be cognizant that not all of my students are able to perform these acts intuitively. It is my job as an educator to help bring to light these unconscious acts and help my students become metacognitive. In order to do this, I hope to show my students, step by step, how to make connections,

summarize, create mental images, and draw inferences in order to deepen their understanding and enjoyment of reading.

From my research, I learned many insights about how to most effectively teach reading comprehension strategies. Comprehension strategy instruction is most effective when teachers focus on a small number of research-based thinking processes and present them in a way that makes sense to students (Block & Duffy, 2008). I also learned that effective comprehension strategy instruction starts with direct explanation of what the strategy is, using accurate, consistent language to name these thinking processes. This direct explanation approach involves explicit teaching of not only what and how, but also when and why to use thinking strategies to enhance understanding and enjoyment of texts (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983).

My research brought about a heightened awareness of the importance of engagement and motivation. This is something I often think about as a teacher, but I was pleased to learn of the research base that supports the notion of keeping engagement at the forefront when designing effective reading comprehension strategy instruction (Almasi & Hart, 2011; Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). When teachers explain why these strategies are useful, students see them as valuable and worth the investment of time. We must celebrate the thinking process, and model the joy that comes from connecting to characters, asking engaging questions that lead us deeper into texts, and creating mental images that enhance the experience and make the text come to life. Since the goal is for students to embrace these thinking processes and apply them to their own self-selected reading, student engagement and motivation must be considered and kept at the forefront when educators design instructional units and activities.

Another insight I gained from my literature review was that effective reading comprehension strategy instruction should move gradually from a teacher-directed stance to one that is student-initiated. When students show that they are ready, the teacher should slowly give students an increasing amount of freedom so that they begin to use the strategies flexibly and independently (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; Roehler & Duffy, 1984). The goal of strategy instruction is for students to recognize and listen to their inner voice to help them understand complex texts, and ultimately, be able to apply their learning to new situations. In order for students to internalize the strategies, they must be presented within the context of engaging, high-quality literature.

The final and most important insight I gained from my literature review is that teachers must keep a balance between teaching students to use the strategies and engaging students to think deeply about high-quality literary content. “The optimal balance enables students to learn that strategies are an important means for understanding but are not the main point of reading activities. The main purposes for reading are gaining meaning and knowledge” (Sweet & Snow, 2002, p. 41). Teachers must remember that the objective is not the strategies themselves, but the creation of meaning. As I was working on my curriculum project, I tried to keep all of these characteristics of effective strategy instruction in mind so that I could apply them to my unit plan. Although I feel I was successful at incorporating much of what I learned from my literature review, there were definite challenges.

Challenges and Limitations

Through my research, I learned that reading is a complex, long-term, developmental process. It seems to me that learning how to teach reading comprehension

strategies effectively is also quite a complicated, long-term endeavor (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). One of the biggest challenges I had in redesigning a literature unit was, as mentioned earlier, keeping a balance between the strategies themselves and the content of the literature. While I attempted to create a unit that embedded explicit strategy instruction, I also did not want the strategies to overshadow the content of the stories. By trying to keep this balance, though, I questioned if I was devoting enough time to strategy instruction. I was also unsure about how many strategies to incorporate into my literature unit. In the end, I embedded six strategies that I plan to continue integrating into the other literature units that I teach throughout the year.

Another challenge I had in redesigning my literature unit, was trying to adapt strategy instruction to fit within a literature unit, as opposed to a reading workshop framework. With the reading workshop model, teachers often focus on one strategy for several weeks at a time. While I can see the benefits of this model, it did not really fit into my literature unit and I thought students would benefit more from seeing several strategies used flexibly throughout an entire text. I feel I was still able to utilize some aspects of the workshop approach, by presenting mini-lessons before each chapter, but I also have not tried implementing this yet. I am hopeful it will work, but I am sure I will need to make adjustments after implementing it this spring with my second graders. I was comforted to read that there is no perfect method to teaching comprehension instruction (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). Effective teachers employ eclectic methods in response to students' needs. These teachers are thoughtful, adaptive, and responsive (Block & Duffy, 2008).

The final challenge I had was how to get students to self-initiate strategy use and how to assess that transfer of learning. I ended up creating strategy sheets and embedding instruction in how to use them within the text, and then giving students a chance to use them with self-selected texts. My plan is to confer with students and guide them toward recognizing their thinking while reading independently. While I am hoping that this works, I will most likely need to adjust my approach after I implement my unit this coming spring. Recently, there has been a shift in emphasis from teaching strategies to helping students become strategic. I have come to realize that it is much more difficult to teach students to become strategic in their reading than it is to teach the strategies themselves (Almasi & Hart, 2011; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). Although this is a lofty and somewhat elusive goal, it is definitely worth pursuing.

Though there were definite challenges to integrating comprehension strategy instruction into a current literature unit and keeping a balance of strategies and content, the process of applying what I learned from my research has been incredibly rewarding. I have gained valuable insights through completing my literature review and designing my project and I am enthused to continue to refine my instruction of literature. I also hope to share my findings with colleagues, in order to enhance the overall teaching of reading at my school.

Future Plans

I am eager to share my insights with my grade-level colleagues, fellow reading teachers, and principal. Toward the beginning of my capstone journey, I shared with my topic with many colleagues, hoping that if any of them had any expertise or interest, that they would share their knowledge with me. Many did, but all were excited to hear about

what I learned and told me to keep them posted on the project. I felt energized that so many of my colleagues shared my passion for helping students see the power of their own thinking to enhance understanding with the written word. I have already recommended several books to colleagues about reading comprehension strategies, and hope to do a presentation this spring about specific strategies that are most helpful to embed into reading and literature instruction.

Now that I have redesigned a current literature unit by embedding explicit comprehension strategy instruction, I am keen to begin working on the other two major literature units I teach. I anticipate the students being very engaged when I implement this unit, and I know that will spur me toward improving the other units. I am also hoping to integrate strategy instruction into my teaching of the core reading program. I think this will motivate students to engage more deeply in the stories, which can be dull at times. It is no secret that when teachers are more interested in the material, so are the students. By integrating strategies into the core reading program, I will personally enjoy teaching it more, which will hopefully lead to higher student motivation to engage and interact with the stories.

Aside from improving my instruction of reading and literature, I also hope to be more deliberate about thinking about ways to integrate strategy instruction into other subjects like science and history. By explaining, showing, and celebrating the thinking that proficient readers engage in, I am hoping that students will become strategic and metacognitive about their reading but also their learning in all subject areas. Throughout this process of pondering ways to help my students become more aware of their thinking, I have been reminded of the importance of reflection and metacognition in my own life.

When I slow down and take time to think about my own thinking, things become much clearer and I am able to prioritize. This capstone project has reminded me of the importance of taking time to reflect. One area in which I have spent some time contemplating is possible implications for my capstone project.

Possible Implications

Although I created my unit plan for my own classroom, I am hoping that my research will benefit my school community. One possible implication could be for my school to think about ways to improve and expand our reading curriculum. If my school decides to incorporate explicit strategy instruction, the school would have to train teachers by providing professional development opportunities. The school would also have to invest in books and other resources to expand instructional practices beyond the core reading program. We would also have to build in time for teachers to observe and coach one another, as strategy instruction is a challenging, long-term undertaking (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999). I have several books I would like to suggest that my principal explore and, as I mentioned earlier, I am eager to share my research findings with my colleagues this spring. I anticipate that my project will impact my school in a positive way; perhaps it could even benefit others in the teaching profession.

I am hoping that my research and created materials will benefit the teaching community by showing how one can blend literature study and strategy instruction. Most teaching resource books about strategy instruction recommend that they be taught within the context of a reading workshop model (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Many schools nowadays use a core reading program rather than a workshop model (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009). Some schools just give teachers a list of books that they are instructed to

teach, without much guidance as to how to structure the units. I am hoping my unit will provide some guidance as to how to retain fidelity to a program of stories or literature, while embedding instruction in research-based cognitive practices that are proven to increase comprehension and engagement (Block & Duffy, 2008).

Personal Learnings

This capstone journey has taught me many things about myself as a researcher, writer, and educator. As a researcher, I am certainly an amateur. I have learned that I need to see the big picture before diving into the details. As I mentioned earlier, I was initially overwhelmed with all the sources I found about reading, reading comprehension, proficient readers, and reading instruction. Although I felt inundated with information, I was also comforted by the fact that so many others shared my feeling that teaching students to recognize and utilize their own thinking to help them understand the written word is paramount. Sorting through the literature, reading article after article, there were so many times when I found myself nodding along, feeling that I had truly found a fascinating topic to research. I felt that the reading about reading research was thrilling. The writing was the tough part.

As a writer, I am painstakingly slow. This capstone journey has brought that to the forefront of my attention. It takes me a long time to process my thoughts and an even longer time to synthesize what multiple sources have said and find connections between them. That being said, I am extremely proud of myself for completing this writing challenge. It has given me a greater appreciation and awareness of, not only those who write research papers and articles about educational topics, but also my students and the mental effort I ask them to engage in when writing. When thinking about my capstone

journey, I made a connection to another area of my life. I recently ran my first 10K race, and while that was exhilarating, this has been my marathon.

As an educator, this capstone process and the creation of my project has helped me become better at creating lessons. I am now in the habit of asking myself “What do I want students to be thinking about?” as I design instructional activities. Creating an entire unit following the Understanding by Design format was challenging, but I am grateful for the opportunity it provided me. Creating assessments first that aligned to my established goals and standards allowed me to focus my attention on essential learning. I have already started thinking about redesigning some history and science units using the Understanding by Design format (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011).

This capstone process has reminded me of the importance of celebrating the thinking, the mental work, that I ask my students to engage in. When students leave my classroom, I want them to believe in the power of their own thinking, and to have the habit of listening to their inner voice (Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). I want my students to become strategic, metacognitive readers who are able to use these powerful, cognitive strategies flexibly and independently.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I revisited important insights gained from my literature review on reading comprehension strategies to help me answer my research question: *How can I redesign a current second grade literature unit by integrating explicit comprehension strategy instruction while maintaining a focus on meaningful interaction with text?* I discussed possible challenges and limitations of my project, as well as future plans regarding how I intend to apply my new understanding of best practices in the area of

strategy instruction. I described possible implications of my project within my school as well as within the educational field. Finally, I reflected upon what I learned about myself as a researcher, writer, and educator through this capstone process.

Years ago, early-on in my teaching career, I was inspired when I first learned about the power of explicitly teaching students to think about their thinking while reading. There is something magical about empowering students to listen to their inner voices, to make meaningful connections that allow them to empathize with characters, to ask questions that broaden their worldview, and to make inferences that uncover deeper shades of meaning. For years, I have been looking for a way to incorporate explicit strategy instruction into my teaching of reading, and through the capstone process, I found that opportunity. Though my capstone journey is coming to an end, my passion for helping students “extract and construct meaning” from the written word continues (Sweet & Snow, 2002). There are fewer things more important, as a teacher, than helping students make sense of what they read. Comprehension is paramount.

Appendix A

Recommended Comprehension Strategies to be Taught – Past and Present

Strategies Proposed from 1978 through 2000

1. Setting a purpose
2. Interpreting text structures
3. Being alert to main ideas
4. Knowing the most important ideas attached to author's goal
5. Relating what one reads to prior knowledge
6. Asking questions
7. Drawing conclusions
8. Changing the hypothesis
9. Adding to themes as the meaning of a text unfold
10. Predicting
11. Creating mental imagery
12. Making conscious images that relate to what is read in a text and using one's own
and the prior knowledge presented in that text
13. Identifying the gist
14. Learning to choose which strategy would be helpful
15. Interpreting author's intentions
16. Paraphrasing
17. Pausing to reflect
18. Interpreting and generating insights using fix-up strategies

19. Monitoring while reading
20. Rereading when something isn't clear
21. Evaluating the text as to how well or how poorly it is written
22. Noting whether one should recommend a text to others
23. Consciously constructing a summary
24. Self-regulating one's own comprehension
25. Internalizing text
26. Corroborating text
27. Contextualizing text
28. Being retrospective about text
29. Actively listening
30. Using mnemonics
31. Organizing text
32. Independently engaging one's own metacognition
33. Using study skills while reading
34. Reorganizing text
35. Completing content analyses
36. – 42. Using and being aware of the seven parts of story grammar as aids to
comprehending
43. Constructing self-explanations
44. Elaborating on one's understanding
45. Clarifying meanings

Strategies Researched and Validated to be

Highly Successful Since 2000

1. Predict – Size up a text in advance by looking at titles, text features, sections, pictures, and captions, continuously updating and repredicting what will occur next in a text.
2. Monitor – Activate many comprehension strategies to decode and derive meaning from words, phrases, sentences, and texts.
3. Question – Stop to reread and initiate comprehension processes when the meaning is unclear.
4. Image – Construct meanings expressed in text by wondering, noticing, and generating mental pictures.
5. Look-backs, rereads, and fix-it strategies – Continue to reflect on the text before, during, and after reading, continuously deciding how to shape the knowledge base for personal use.
6. Infer – Connect ideas in text based on personal experiences, knowledge of other texts, and general world knowledge, making certain that inferences are made quickly so as not to divert attention from the actual text but to help the reader better understand it.
7. Find main ideas, summarize, and draw conclusions – Make sure to include information gained from story grammar or textual features; if students can't make a valid summary of information read to date, this is the signal to go back to reread.

8. Evaluate – Approach a fictional text expecting to (and making certain that students do) note the setting, characters, and story grammar early on, with problems, solutions, and resolutions to occur thereafter.
9. Synthesize – Approach an informational text watching for textual features, accessing features, unique types of information, sequence of details and conclusions, and combining all of these to make meaning.

Block & Duffy, 2008, p. 22 (Table 2.1)

Appendix B

Understanding by Design Unit Plan Template

Stage 1 - Desired Results

<p>Established Goals:</p> <p>Transfer Goals: <i>Students will be able to independently use their learning to . . .</i></p>
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Meaning	
<p>Understandings: <i>Students will understand . . .</i></p>	<p>Essential Questions: <i>Students will think about . . .</i></p>

Acquisition	
<p>Knowledge: <i>Students will know. . .</i></p>	<p>Skills: <i>Students will be able to . . .</i></p>

Stage 2 - Assessment Evidence

<p>Formative Assessment:</p>	<p>Summative Assessment:</p>
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Stage 3 - Learning Plan

<p>Learning Activities:</p> <p>Lesson 1:</p> <p>Lesson 2:</p> <p>Lesson 3:</p> <p>Lesson 4:</p> <p>Lesson 5:</p>

Adapted from Wiggins and McTighe, 2011

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