



Deepening Reading Comprehension In the Content Areas

Reading is

- a. thinking guided by print (*Perfetti, 1985*)
- b. a way of acquiring meaning from written text (*Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002*)
- c. the process of extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with the written language (*Sweet & Snow, 2002*)

The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) places high demands on students in vocabulary, reasoning, and inferential skills. One of the challenges of FCAT is cognitive complexity, which requires a student to analyze and synthesize information. In Grade 3, the percentage of FCAT Reading points based on the “high level” of cognitive complexity is 5-15%, but by Grade 10 the level has risen to 25-35%. Clearly, students must acquire essential content knowledge to keep pace with the accelerating verbal knowledge demands of the FCAT. Students must be engaged regularly in deeply thoughtful interactions with print so that critical, inferential, and analytic skills continue to develop.

Preparing children to meet grade level standards in reading comprehension by the end of third grade and helping students to grow in the skills and knowledge required for grade level comprehension after third grade is a job for all teachers, not just reading teachers.

If the objectives of a reading course are to promote long-term retention of information, to motivate students toward further learning, to allow students to apply information in new settings, and to develop students' thinking skills, then new approaches are necessary.

What can content-area teachers do to help improve their students' literacy skills while continuing to focus on their specific curriculum?

The deepening reading comprehension information and recommendations provided in this document are adapted from a presentation, *Instructional Leadership to Improve Reading Achievement*, by Stuart Greenberg, Florida Center for Reading Research, at the 5th Annual Just Read, Florida! Conference in July 2006.

Five teaching strategies follow that provide ways to actively involve students in reading and writing in a content area.

1. Use a Graphic Organizer: Write/Present a Summary

Organize the students into pairs. The first student reads to his partner the information recorded in his graphic organizer for a specific subject area; after receiving feedback from the partner student, the presenting student revises and strengthens the passage; he then reads the passage again to his partner for additional feedback. Each student takes a turn.

- This activity encourages the student to reflect on what he has recorded in his graphic organizer and to better integrate what he is reading with what he is learning. The students work cooperatively, think critically, make intelligent observations and draw conclusions. This activity should help the students to generate ideas and questions, access prior knowledge, assess interests, and develop probing questions and problems.

<http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/graph.htm>

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1grorg.htm>

<http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Tools/Index.htm>

2. Form Collaborative Groups: Generate Questions

Organize the class into groups of 4-6 students. Assign each group text to read. After reading their assigned sections, the groups generate questions about the information they have just read. Each group presents questions to the whole class through a representative, and every student has an opportunity to be the presenter. The teacher assists each group to reflect on the questions they have generated and to refine them if necessary. Periodically, the teacher takes one of the more complex questions and explains the thinking behind the question.

- This activity encourages the students to carefully read the text, to think critically about what was read, and to negotiate with fellow students about what questions should be asked and how they should be presented. The students work cooperatively, make observations, draw conclusions based on evidence, and learn how to discuss and share their findings. When the complex question is presented by the teacher, the students must listen carefully in order to understand what specifically is being asked in the question. The students learn to sharpen their listening skills. In a dialectic mode, students and teacher generate possibilities, raise questions, consider multiple perspectives, and offer various interpretations while alternately evaluating and analyzing the possibilities.

<http://cela.albany.edu/env.pdf>

<http://cela.albany.edu/newslet/spring97/miller.html>

<http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/discussion.htm>

http://www.ohiorc.org/adlit/in_perspective.aspx?id=275&status=0

<http://www.stenhouse.com/shop/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=63&idproduct=9034>

<http://www.stenhouse.com/shop/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=63&idproduct=9080>

3. Support Your Answer: Proof from the Text

When a student responds to a question, the teacher requests that the student support the answer with details from the text. All students have an opportunity to do this on a regular basis.

- This activity encourages the students to carefully read the text, to think critically and to learn how to clearly articulate information they have read. The student works independently, uses critical judgment, and becomes comfortable justifying the answer and presenting the conclusions.

http://www.acu.edu/cte/activelearning/classroom_main.htm

<http://www.stenhouse.com/shop/pc/viewPrd.asp?idcategory=82&idproduct=9148>

4. Offer Literacy Opportunities: Read Often

The students should read actual text regularly, not just notes and outlines taken from the text.

- The text-reading activity exposes the students to the kind of material that will be encountered in FCAT. It involves an active mind thoughtfully responding to information. The student must know what she is reading for, be able to recognize the essential ideas, organize them and relate them to what has gone before.

<http://www.justreadnow.com/strategies/active.htm>

<http://forpd.ucf.edu/strategies/stratsq4r.html>

5. Offer Literacy Opportunities: Write/Rewrite Often

Students should be assigned regularly a written response. The written response doesn't need to be a new one each time. Revising a written response often can be more useful in teaching writing skills than a new assignment each time.

- Regularly assigned writing assignments will help improve grammar and punctuation. During revision, students discover the power of writing as a means of shaping ideas and clarifying meanings rather than just a way of correcting errors or fulfilling a class requirement.

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=971

http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/writingstrategies/Toolbox/Editor_Toolkit.html

<http://www.ttms.org/>

- a. Perfetti, Charles A. *Reading Ability*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- b. Block, C. C., Gambrell, L., & Pressley, M. *Improving Comprehension Instruction: Rethinking Research, Theory, and Classroom Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.
- c. Sweet, A. P. & Snow, C. *Reconceptualizing Reading Comprehension*. In C.C. Block, L. B. Gambrell, & M. Pressley (Eds.) *Improving Comprehension Instruction: Rethinking Research* (pp. 54-79) Newark, DE, International Reading Association, 2002.

Additional Resources

Education Alliance: **Knowledge Loom: Adolescent Literacy in the Content Areas**
<http://knowledgeloom.org/practices3.jsp?location=1&bpinterid=1174&spotlightid=1174>

Education Alliance: **Meeting the Literacy Development Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners through Content-Area Learning**
http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/adlit/adell_litdv2.pdf

Muskingum College: **Learning Strategies Database: Reading Comprehension**
<http://muskingum.edu/%7Ecal/database/general/reading.html>

Prince George's County Public Schools: **Reading Across the Curriculum**
<http://www.pgcps.pg.k12.md.us/~elc/readingacross.html>

Sarasota County Schools: **Reading Strategies that Assist Content Area Reading**
<http://www.sarasota.k12.fl.us/sarasota/interdiscrdg.htm#Expository%20Text>

Teaching that Makes Sense: **The Challenge of Content Area Reading**
http://www.ttms.org/content_area_reading/content_area_reading.htm

Writing Across the Curriculum Clearinghouse: **Language Connections: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum**
http://wac.colostate.edu/books/language_connections/

Professional Development: Florida

Beacon Educator: **Reading Endorsement**
<http://www.beaconeducator.com/programs.asp>

FCRR: **Reading Professional Development**
<http://www.fcrr.org/profDev.htm>

FLaRE: **Professional Development**
http://flare.ucf.edu/FLaRE_Professional_Development.htm

FOR-PD: **Florida Online Reading Professional Development**
<http://forpd.ucf.edu/>

Just Read, Florida!: **Content Area Reading – Professional Development (CAR-PD)**
<http://www.justreadflorida.com/CAR-PD/>

Just Read, Florida!: **Literacy Essentials and Reading Network (LEaRN)**
<http://www.justreadflorida.com/LEaRN/>

Just Read, Florida!: **Reading Endorsement**
<http://www.justreadflorida.com/endorsement/>

PAEC: **Teacher to Teacher eLearning Workshops – English/Language Arts**
http://www.paec.org/teacher2teacher/english_languagearts.html

- Reading in the Content Areas: It's Just Different (Grades 5-10)
- Writing in Content Areas: Understanding Content

Additional Professional Development

Annenberg Media: **Literature and Language Arts Workshops**
<http://www.learner.org/resources/browse.html?discipline=4&grade=0&imageField2.x=5&imageField2.y=9>

WestEd: **Schools Moving Up: Online Events**
<http://www.schoolsmovingup.net/cs/smu/view/tpc/2>