

Preface

One of the main goals of teachers of reading is to help students learn to comprehend text. In these days post-NRP (National Reading Panel Report 2000), most of us are well aware of the importance of teaching readers to be strategic. We have learned that good readers apply a variety of processes to make sense out of print. We know that students who succeed in comprehending text are actively involved in the reading processes—processes that require the ability to make predictions, to confirm or disaffirm those predictions, to ask questions, to infer and visualize, and to monitor understanding as they read. We know that skilled readers have schemata for particular topics, text structures, metacognitive activities, and forms of language, and they draw on those schemata as they read. These readers use prior knowledge interactively with new information in the text. They apply a variety of strategies simultaneously to facilitate comprehension. Reading comprehension is clearly not the mastery of isolated skills or the verbatim reproduction of information as it appears on the page.

Many of us constantly look for new ways to help our students with such important comprehension processes as predicting, visualizing, making inferences, monitoring, synthesizing, and summarizing. Through studying professional texts and attending staff development sessions, teachers familiarize themselves with strategies and materials to teach these processes to students across the grades. Most of us have favorites—strategies we like to teach and strategies we know work well for our students. But we are always looking for more good ideas. The purpose of this book is to add to the teacher's repertoire of strategies and perhaps to provide a new focus on tried and true favorites.

Volumes of research have attempted to identify which strategies skilled readers use most often. When we examine these studies as a whole, we find a group of *meta-strategies* that emerge as being key for understanding as we read. Although the research literature discusses many other strategies, these seven appear to have the greatest support. Today these meta-strategies have a major impact on how reading comprehension is being taught in the United States:

- *Making connections* (finding ties within the text, to another text, from known information to new information, to your life, to the world)
- *Monitoring reading for meaning* (sometimes called *clarifying*; knowing what's not making sense and applying "fix-up" strategies as necessary)

- *Determining important information* (identifying the story line in narrative texts and main ideas in expository texts; distinguishing main ideas from details)
- *Visualizing* (creating images in your mind; “seeing the story” in your mind’s eye)
- *Asking questions* (generating questions from the text, the author, yourself)
- *Making inferences* (predicting, wondering, assessing what is going on)
- *Summarizing and synthesizing* (applying new knowledge to what is known and generating new ideas)

In the National Reading Panel Report, comprehension strategies are defined as “specific procedures that guide students to become aware of how well they are comprehending as they attempt to read” (NRP, pp. 4–40). For example, students may be taught to generate questions about the text as they read—usually of the *why, what, how, when, or where* variety. By generating and trying to answer these questions, the reader processes the text more actively (NRP, pp. 4–40). The value of the cognitive meta-strategies for comprehension instruction is that they provide a way for teachers to break through students’ passivity and involve them in their own learning. Another important value of cognitive strategies in comprehension instruction is their “usefulness in the development of instructional procedures” (NRP, pp. 4–40).

The value of a book like this one is just what the NRP describes: It provides teachers with a toolkit of learning strategies that are designed to actively engage students in comprehension processes and that were developed as specific instructional procedures with clearly delineated steps for implementation. The strategies are arranged alphabetically for easy reference. Grade-level recommendations for the use of each instructional strategy are offered. Goals for each strategy are outlined under the heading “Why Do We Use It?” with reference to many of the big seven metacognitive meta-strategies. Directions on how to implement the instructional strategy are provided in a similar clear, coherent format throughout the book. Graphics and examples are provided to illustrate the strategies. Finally, the book includes references and additional information to help teachers modify and expand the use of the strategies in their own classrooms.

This text is a reflection of my ongoing efforts to assist preservice and inservice teachers in their efforts to teach students effectively in the busy world of real-life schools. Many people have provided input and support in the development of this book. I am indebted to the children, teachers, and administrators I have worked with in Seattle and San Francisco communities over the last thirty-five years. They have helped me to understand and refine my beliefs about effective reading instruction. In particular, I want to thank the graduate students in my reading courses at the University of San Francisco. Their questions and insights constantly press me into lifelong learning and reflection. Many of them generously shared ideas and materials for this book, and I am most grateful to them: Stephanie Abramowitz, Caryn Barry, China Byon, Stephanie Chin, Jenn Jurcy, Lindsay Kahn, Christine Labagh, Eliza Lurie, Brooke Nylen,

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● REFERENCE

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.